CHAPTER I

Introduction
The Metatheater of Blackness

Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity charts the literary and artistic representations of black people in ancient Greece. Delving into primary sources ranging from the fifth century BCE to the fourth century CE, I unearth numerous performances of blackness from ancient Greek literature and art. Ancient authors and artists create characters, contemporary scholars analyze these personae, and readers and viewers bring their own preoccupations to the fore. Running alongside this inquiry of portrayals of black people, a deep probing of race’s precarious grip on skin color uncovers the silences, suppression, and misappropriation of blackness within modern studies of Greek antiquity. Shaped foundationally by performance studies and critical race theory, this project maps out an archaeology of blackness that rejects simplistic conﬂations. Altogether, this anti-racist study promotes a contextualized, critical approach to representations of black people in Greek antiquity.

1.1 Prologue: An Educational Revolution

In their 1968 memo, “On the Abolition of the English Department,” lecturers Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (then known as James Ngũgĩ), Henry Owuor-Anyumba, and Taban lo Liyong spearheaded an educational revolution at the University of Nairobi. Eager to sweep out the vestiges of British colonialism from the university’s English department, Ngũgĩ, Owuor-Anyumba, and Liyong proposed renaming their department “The Department of African Literature and Languages” and suggested

1 Throughout the book, I make deliberate use of orthography and modifiers to differentiate between ancient and modern peoples and places, between colors and descriptors of socially constructed groups, and I assign specific connotations to certain key terms. I discuss my rationale for these choices in the second section of this introductory chapter, but I encourage the reader to consult the Note on Nomenclature and Table P.1, above, before reading this chapter and subsequent chapters.
a revised curriculum that emphasized the centrality of Africa via the study of its oral and written literature, art, and drama. Building on this manifesto for literary emancipation, Ngũgĩ later drew attention to the immense significance of the written language in his collection of essays *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1987). Here, the Kenyan scholar bid farewell to the English language as his literary medium and vowed to write all future works in Swahili and his native Gĩkũyũ. Instead of espousing colonial languages on the African continent, Ngũgĩ urged fellow African writers to develop literature in their mother tongues.

This intentional erasure of Africa from the twentieth-century Kenyan curriculum serves as a reminder that unchallenged biases can lead to academic colonialism. Writing from a different context, I nonetheless heed Ngũgĩ’s appeal for a plurality of voices in the literary archive. His determined efforts to democratize the reading experience embolden me to prioritize representations of black people within the purview of ancient material. Moreover, Ngũgĩ’s insistence that language connotes power compels me to interrogate both the written word and the dynamic power plays that undergird it.

Snapshots from Ngũgĩ’s career underline the real-life stakes of literary liberation. After Kenya gained independence from Britain in 1963, Ngũgĩ worked with Kenyan farmers at the Kamĩrũthũ Community Educational and Cultural Centre to create plays that examined unchecked political control in their country. Soon after the 1977 performance of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*, 1997), a play that recounts a crumbling love affair between a poor woman and the son of her wealthy landlord, Kenyan government officials arrested Ngũgĩ. Following his release from prison and protracted exile, he returned to Nairobi and survived a violent assault. These glimpses into Ngũgĩ’s life lay bare the challenging position in which writers find themselves. They cannot divorce

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2 Ngũgĩ (1973: 145–50). Ngũgĩ’s linguistic emancipation extends to his name; by 1972, he had replaced his colonial name “James” with his Gĩkũyũ name “Ngũgĩ.” Taking cues from Africanist scholars, I refer to this writer as “Ngũgĩ” throughout the book.

3 Some of Ngũgĩ’s contemporaries suggested that his linguistic choice privileged the Gĩkũyũ people over other ethnic groups in Kenya (discussed in Appiah [1992: 4, 199 n. 29]; and Sicherman [1990: 34]). Mukoma wa Ngũgĩ (2018) highlights the importance of African languages in African literature (which I discuss further in Section 6.2); Warner (2019: 27–29) traces the ways that African, specifically Senegalese, writers “restage the literary” realm in response to linguistic schisms.

4 Although Ngũgĩ’s decolonizing efforts inspire my investigation of ancient Greek literature and art, I refrain from applying the language of decolonization to this inquiry because such an act would strip the methodology of its context for the sake of an inclusive, yet superficial, metaphor (Tuck and Yang [2012]). As for the language of the “archive,” Hartman’s (2008: 2) expansive definition of the archive as “an asterisk in the grand narrative of history” guides my use of this term.
themselves from their historical present. There can be rich synergy in self-aware, collaborative literary initiatives, as evidenced in Ngũgĩ’s work at the University of Nairobi and the Kamirũthũ Centre, but there are costly consequences associated with revolutionary undertakings.\(^5\)

Classicists are not exempt from such visceral reactions to their work. For instance, Donna Zuckerberg and Sarah Bond have received praise for calling to task racist ideologies masquerading as relics of Greco-Roman antiquity.\(^6\) They also have both spoken publicly about the death threats they have received following the publication of their articles about White supremacist receptions of Roman imperial history and polychromy on ancient Greek sculptures, respectively. Such vitriol reminds invested parties that much work remains to be done. The immense task of rehabilitating the academic terrain requires a vast community of thinkers who are willing to apply precision and historical depth to the subjects of their research.\(^7\) I align my study with this trend in the hopes that my contextualized account of ancient formulations of blackness and their modern reception will encourage others to undertake similar research in the future.

### 1.2 Performances of Blackness

Throughout my contextualized account of blackness in Greek antiquity, I recognize that the twenty-first century is undeniably implicated in any iteration of “performances of blackness,” a phrase that discloses my theoretical underpinnings. That is, I enlist the help of critical race theorists and performance studies scholars, both of whom continually interrogate categories of skin color and performance. From the 1950s onward, critical race theory has functioned as a complex methodology that breaks down polarizing categories. This relatively recent constellation of theories unsettles the prevailing argument that modern race is a form of objective science.\(^8\) Committed to deconstructing rigid power dynamics, critical race theorists...
embark on a two-pronged project: to analyze the broad scope of modern race and scrutinize the unstable valence of skin color. Theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields have generated incisive theorizations of Blackness that refute simplistic analyses of Black people.9 As I discuss in later chapters, their sophisticated conceptualizations of Blackness speak to a wide range of audiences beyond their own time period and field of expertise (medicine, law, sociology, and history, respectively). Performance studies, which emerged in the 1960s in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and theater studies, draws the writer, performer, and audience together into a tripartite relationship. Performance studies transforms literary and visual constructs into performers who manipulate their words and appearance to expose substantial challenges that they face. Despite performers’ roles as fictional characters, their shrewd performativity grants them agency within circumscribed confines. Meanwhile, in terms of pragmatics, the term “performative,” developed by the linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin in 1962,10 helps to articulate the agential force of performers’ semiotics (i.e. words, dress, and nonverbal gestures) as they wield different types of “language” to circumvent adverse situations.

Nestled within the realm of performance studies, the metatheater is another useful tool with which I parse performances of blackness. Coined by Lionel Abel, the metatheater is a self-referential form of drama that incorporates various instances of reflexive theatricality.11 On a base level of theatrical engagement, playwrights create characters, characters enact performances, and performances attract viewers. Operating beyond these parameters, the metatheater recasts dramatists and the drama in which they participate as performers who warrant investigation. In other words, the metatheater houses characters who are aware of their own performances (“drama within drama”) and offers a bird’s-eye view of the dramatic performance itself (“drama about drama”).12 A horizontal mode of inquiry applies to all parties involved in these metatheatrical productions. In this vein, I treat each genre discussed in subsequent chapters as a stage on which

9 See Fanon (1952), Crenshaw (1993), and Fields and Fields (2014).
10 See Austin (2016).
12 Quotations are from Ringer (1998: 7). Abel (1963, 2003) interprets the latter form of reflexive theatricality (“drama about drama”) as a manifestation of the playwright’s disillusion with mimicry; he also distinguishes between the metatheater, which deals with the imaginary world, and tragedy, which deals with the real world. Dustagheer and Newman (2018) present a helpful survey of the metatheater; Taplin (1977) and Dobrov (2003) offer metatheatrical approaches to ancient Athenian tragedy.
performances of blackness take place. Art history, tragedy, historiography, satire, and the novel morph into sites of production.

Situated at the intersection of critical race theory and performance studies, Black performance studies informs my analysis of performances of blackness. The early genealogy of this interdiscipline dates to the mid-nineteenth century, and its formal introduction into the academy occurred in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{13} Sometimes deemed performance historians, scholars of Black performance studies examine the movement and expressive culture of Black people, and they develop creative tools with which to animate Black performances that occur in a variety of settings.\textsuperscript{14} Despite the wide range of their source material, Black performance scholars converge on what E. Patrick Johnson deems “the material, intellectual, and aesthetic matrix that is black performance.”\textsuperscript{15}

Along with their expansive take on performers, scholars of Black performance studies rework the timeline and location of performances. For example, Tavia Nyong’o conceptualizes performative hybridity as an untamed, time-bending trope that speaks to both the future and the past.\textsuperscript{16} Nyong’o’s temporal malleability is especially relevant to my twenty-first-century inquiry of representations of blackness in Greek antiquity. Furthermore, Nyong’o’s inclusion of genres not traditionally associated with performance, such as historiography, in the domain of performance speaks to my theorization of genres as metatheatrical stages on which performances of blackness occur. Relatedly, I also build on Saidiya Hartman’s analysis of quotidian performances enacted by enslaved Black people in the antebellum American south. Hartman traces an arc from

\textsuperscript{13} This date corresponds to academic publications by the Black Public Sphere Collective (1995) and Dent (1998). Nonetheless, M. Gaines (2017) and Nyong’o (2019) expand on Black artistic production from the 1960s onward. Even still, earlier theorists of Black performances include Henry “Box” Brown (b. 1815; discussed in Brooks [2006: 66–130]), Pauline Hopkins (1859–1930), and Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960; discussed in Hurston [1998] and DeFranz and Gonzalez [2014: 2–3]). When listing people’s life span, I provide only a birthdate for cases where there is no death date available from a reliable source.

\textsuperscript{14} Johnson (2006) and Colbert (2015) offer critical overviews of Black performance studies (which Colbert delineates as “African American Performance”). See also Brody (1998); the contributions in Phelan and Lane (1998); the contributions in Elam and Krasner (2001); Johnson (2003); Moten (2003); and Brown (2008). For a few examples of Black performance studies in practice: Brody (2008) treats seemingly minute gestures, such as the choice of punctuation, as performance pieces that trouble notions of stability; Young (2010: 7–12, 165–66) unearths meaningful dialogue buried underneath Black performers’ silence; see also Benston (2000) and Fleetwood (2011: 33–70). These examples reflect only some of the current trajectories in the ever-growing realm of Black performance studies.

\textsuperscript{15} Johnson (2006: 449). The lowercase “black” reflects Johnson’s capitalization practices, not my own.

\textsuperscript{16} Nyong’o (2009).
“scenes of subjection” into scenes of resistance, inspecting the ways in which Black subjects successfully transform small-scale acts such as work slowdowns and unlicensed travel into scenes that are part of the larger stagecraft of slavery. In the process, Hartman defamiliarizes expectations about what a typical theatrical performance looks like. For instance, she converts the inhumane site of the auction block into a scene from the “theater of the marketplace” where unwilling actors encounter a willing audience.17 In this constrained context, enslaved people’s refusal to bare their teeth or dance on command exposes the limitations of their self-authorizing performances. Hartman later elaborates that “what unites these varied tactics [of resistance] is the effort to redress the condition of the enslaved, restore the disrupted affiliations of the socially dead, challenge the authority and dominion of the slaveholder, and alleviate the pained state of the captive body.”18 Although a vast historical distance separates Hartman’s source material from my own, her supple theorization of performances that redress, restore, challenge, and alleviate reimagines the scope of performance at the intersection of modern race and power.

Daphne Brooks offers another useful blueprint for excavating performances of blackness. Focusing on Black people’s stage presence in the late nineteenth century, Brooks reworks the confines of performance to highlight linguistic and corporeal acts of dissent that occur among Black people who occupy seemingly marginal roles. She documents the phenomenon whereby, in spite of the strict social boundaries that govern their lives, they rupture the veil of Blackness under the guise of performance.19 That is, their performative interventions destabilize presumed notions of inferiority based on skin color. Coupled with her investigative lens, Brooks’s trope of dramatic interference informs my present inquiry of performers who upend audiences’ expectations.

Equally convincing is Brooks’s acknowledgment that there can be no singular, correct interpretation, as writers’ intentions collide with those of performers, readers, and spectators. These multiple points of contact lead to numerous discoveries. Brooks’s admission of her own position as spectator is especially liberating in its disavowal of authority.20 Indeed, attempts to completely restore the “original” interplay between performers and their audience are futile, whether for performances of Blackness in the nineteenth century or for performances of blackness in Greco-Roman antiquity. Brooks’s self-reflexive body of theory works well alongside

Classical reception theory to underline the many audiences who engage with ancient source material, including characters within the world of ancient Greek literature and art, their audiences, and twenty-first-century readers. As Lorna Hardwick and Emily Greenwood assert, even frail connections between the ancient and modern worlds can lead to substantial discoveries. In other words, a confrontation between contemporary observations and ancient representations results in a vibrant metatheatrical performance. Taking cues from Nyong’o, Hartman, and Brooks, I include a variety of performers and performances in this investigation. My subjects of inquiry include characters written for the theatrical stage, characters in literary texts, and characters who interact with viewers in the sphere of visual and material culture.

A well-known example illustrates ongoing permutations of performances in relation to skin color. In 2002, a recent graduate of Howard University sued her alma mater on charges of discrimination. After losing the case, she built her career around advocating for the Black community: her artwork focused on Black people, she taught in the Africana Studies Program at Eastern Washington University, and she became the president of the Spokane chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Her bronze-toned skin and curly hair suggested that she had Black ancestors. Further, in a 2015 interview with KXLY 4 (a local news station in Spokane, Washington), she encouraged this link by stating that her son and father were Black. Later that year, however, the truth began to tumble out once her birth parents revealed that their daughter, was White: Rachel Anne Doležal had accused Howard University of discriminating against her because she was White, among other reasons; she had started wearing artificial hair and cosmetically darkening her skin in 2009; her “son” was her adopted brother; and her “father” was a close friend. Despite these revelations, Doležal continued to identify as Black. In 2017,
she legally changed her name to Nkechi Amare Diallo and published a memoir, *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World*, on the cover of which she appears with bronze-toned skin, an Afro, and a colorful beaded necklace.

Even though Doležal’s externally derived skin color, hairstyle, and accessories imply a performative aspect to her self-presentation, she has insisted that Blackness is not a costume to be worn or discarded. Instead, she has described her Blackness as a previously hidden part of herself that she intends to lay bare.  

Conversely, her self-avowed unveiling runs counter to her adoption of artifices of Blackness, such as curly hair and brown skin. Regardless of her best efforts to fortify her status as a Black person, the uproar following the discovery of her lineage exposed the inescapable intersubjectivity of Blackness. In other words, socially constructed ways of seeing Blackness greatly affected her acceptance into the Black community. If skin color were the sole determinant of Blackness, Doležal’s bronze-toned skin would have granted her swift entry. But the lack of a universally agreed-upon arbiter of Blackness made Doležal’s assertion of Blackness difficult to accept in the public sphere. She muddled this already murky territory by combining visual markers with a variety of nonvisual elements, such as her public comments about negative interactions with police officers and her remarks about being a mother to Black men. Alisha Gaines separates Doležal’s intentions from her actions by referring to Doležal’s self-identification as an instance of “empathetic racial impersonation.” This phrase simultaneously underscores Doležal’s yearning to understand perspectives outside of her own and the false consciousness that she has achieved. Indeed, Doležal has been adamant about her love for Black people, but the idea that there is a fixed criterion for becoming “Black,” and that she has met this criterion, overlooks the complexities of reality. By reducing Blackness to particular tropes, Doležal has risked essentializing a historically fraught category for the sake of her project of self-discovery. At the same time, her malleable performance of Blackness highlights the unsteady platform on which Blackness stands. Those who decry her claims of Blackness solely because of her White parentage also

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25 “It [identifying as Black] felt less like I was adopting a new identity and more like I was unveiling one that had been there all along” (Doležal, 2017: 90–91; see also the documentary, *The Rachel Divide* [2018], dir. Laura Brownson).

subscribe to an essentialist fallacy – namely, their reliance on genealogy to determine Blackness privileges the laws of hypodescent, known as the “one drop rule” because it assigns the label “Black” to anyone with at least one Black ancestor. Doležal’s story of chosen exile raises pressing questions of definition for any historical inquiry that examines the nexus of color and social categorization. In addition, the aftermath of her transformation reveals potential consequences awaiting those whose identification with Blackness lacks a historically informed analysis of its contours. Although the Black–White constraint has no valuable application in ancient Greece, ancient writers and artists employ skin color and other visual markers in curious ways that speak poignantly to their own contexts as well as to the twenty-first century. Therefore, as I begin this bidirectional inquiry into blackness in ancient Greek literature and art, careful handling of pertinent vocabulary is vital. In Section 1.3 of this chapter, my explication of geographical and chromatic terms reflects my own efforts to expose the relay between ancient and present contexts. My self-reflexive endeavor contributes to the democratizing force of this study; as scholars who inhabit a world in which we see through the prism of modern race, none of us are exempt from scrutiny. In Section 1.4, I interrogate the privileged status of two White scholars, Martin Bernal and Grace Hadsley Beardsley, alongside their scholarship about blackness in antiquity. Section 1.5 alerts readers to what lies ahead in the remaining chapters.

27 Dating to the seventeenth century, the laws of hypodescent stated that no matter how diverse one’s parentage, any Black parentage or ancestry determined one’s categorization and that of his/her descendants. This drastically codified the assignation of Blackness and remains a powerful marker of social categorization in the twenty-first century.

28 Wald (2000); Hobbs (2014). This overview of Doležal’s story serves as merely one example of passing in America. Other examples of White people who passed as Black include Clarence King (b. 1842; discussed in Sandweiss [2009]), Ray Sprigle (1949), Grace Halsell (1969), Jessica Krug, and C. V. Vitolo-Haddad (both discussed in Flaherty [2020]). Despite this list, recorded instances of Black people passing as White outnumber those of White people passing as Black, presumably due to the social and financial benefits associated with membership in the White community. A notable example of this phenomenon includes Belle da Costa Greene (1883–1950), the daughter of Richard Theodore Greener, the first Black member of the American Philological Association (currently named the Society for Classical Studies), who identified as a White woman of Portuguese ancestry. Passing was also a popular phenomenon in apartheid-era South Africa; Michael Chapman’s “Concrete Poem: The Chameleon Dance” highlights its ever-changing classifications (1986: 198).

29 The Black–White binary refers to the categorization of people as either “Black” or “White.” Even those who do not identify with either group are labeled as members of one or the other. In addition to creating social division, this binary model corral all “non-White” people (a nebulous category in and of itself) into an amorphous group of “Black” people.
In terms of geography, the borders of the Greek world were in flux from the fifth century BCE to the fourth century CE. Demarcations between regions were especially variable as hegemony in the Mediterranean region shifted from Athens to Rome. Although some Greek-speaking cities adopted an aggregative Greek identity during the Greco-Persian wars and later received the generic label of “Greece” after the battle of Corinth (146 BCE), “Greece” did not always reflect the geographic or political realities of individual cities.\(^{30}\) Cognizant of the porous topography and extensive temporal scope of “Greece,” I use “Greece” as an umbrella term that refers to a general location as well as specific Greek-speaking cities, such as Argos (Chapter 3) and Athens (Chapter 5).

Notwithstanding the complicated mapping of Greece, the temptation to fossilize historically specific labels persists in contemporary scholarship. For instance, many scholars assign the name of a modern country, Ethiopia, to an ancient region. The conflation between the only African country to successfully defend its sovereignty in the nineteenth century and a classical civilization whose popularity increased alongside nineteenth-century American Egyptomania is misleading, but not surprising.\(^{31}\) To contextualize Ethiopia in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century: Liberia was the only other independent nation (under the auspices of the American Colonization Society) on the African continent, and many uprisings against European colonizers were underway, such as those led by Bambatha kaMancinza in South Africa, Henrik Witbooi in German South West Africa (present-day Namibia), Samory Touré of the Wassoulou empire (Guinea, Sierra Leone, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire), Kinjikitile Ngwale in German East Africa (Tanzania), and John Chilembwe in Nyasaland (Malawi). Roughly concurrent with Ethiopia’s victory against Italy in the Battle of Adwa (1896), Africans and African Americans adopted an iteration of the country’s name (“Ethiopianism”) during their quest for religious and political freedom.\(^{32}\)

The term “Africa” has its own historical trajectory as well. In this book, I use “Africa” to refer to the modern continent (see Figure 1.1). This decision stems from the fact that extant Greek texts refer to the land


\(^{31}\) On Egyptomania, see Trafton (2004); Moyer (2011) helpfully frames interactions between Greece and Egypt as transactional, rather than protocolonial. I discuss my capitalization practices relating to “classics” and “Classics” below (p. 13).

\(^{32}\) On Ethiopianism, see Nurhussein (2019: 1–20).
mass south of Greece as “Libya,” not “Africa.” The etymology of “Africa” suggests that Romans renamed the region they acquired from Carthage after the Aouriga, a group of people native to this region. A fragment from Ennius’s satires (239–169 BCE) provides the earliest recorded instance of “Africa” in Latin literature: *testes sunt . . . quos gerit Africa terra politos* (“there are elegant witnesses whom the African earth bears,” *Saturae* 3.16). Subsequent iterations of “Africa” in Latin literature split Africa into *Africa Vetus* (“Old Africa”) and *Africa Nova* (“New Africa”).

As part of my ongoing opposition to anachronistic vocabulary, I denote the ancient region spanning two countries, the southern region of modern

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Egypt and the northern region of Sudan, as “Aithiopia” (transliterated from the ancient Greek Aithiopia), and I describe the modern country located in the Horn of Africa as “Ethiopia.”

Opting to integrate thematic distinctions into my lexicon, I refer to “Aithiopia” as an ethereal land and “Nubia” as a historical region that is in contact with Greece and Rome. My definitions mirror those of modernity, in that literary scholars use the term “Aithiopia,” while historians and museum curators generally prefer “Nubia,” etymologically linked to the Old Nubian napi and Middle Egyptian nbw (“gold”). Due to the inconsistent labeling practices associated with “Kush,” this label does not appear in my study.

Extending from the Nile Delta to the First Cataract, the ancient country of Egypt is another part of this landscape. In fact, the question of Egyptian blackness has often initiated discussions about skin color in Greek antiquity. Debates about Cleopatra VII’s skin color, for example, have spurred people to sift through ancient sources with renewed energy.

Uncertainty about the precise identity of Cleopatra’s paternal grandmother and a retrojection of hypodescent laws into the first century BCE have complicated the terrain. To be sure, representations of black Egyptians traverse many genres in Greek antiquity. For this reason, I include Egypt in this study. But I do so with the proviso that the tendency to focus solely on black Egyptians in any inquiry of black skin color risks distorting the picture because it overlooks the literary and artistic presence of black people in locations south of Egypt. Moreover, an emphasis on

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35 Selden (2013: 328); O’Connor (1993: 37–41); Burstein (1995: 127); Raue (2019). The use of “Kush” as a temporal marker ranges from the eleventh century BCE to the mid-fourth century CE (as used by Eide, Hägg, Pierce, and Török [1994]), the eighth century BCE to the fifth century CE (as used by Török, 1997), and the third century BCE to the second century CE (as used by Morkot [1991]). Geographically, some scholars treat “Kush” as synonymous with Upper Nubia (as used by Buzon [2011: 21]; Faraji [2016: 223]). Even though I refer to “Nubia” as an ancient region, it is important to note that descendants of Nubians currently inhabit modern Egypt and Sudan, among other places (Emberling and Williams [2020: 2–3]). Sidestepping questions of nomenclature, Egyptologist Vanessa Davies created the Nile Valley Collective (https://nilevalleycollective.org/), an interdisciplinary group of scholars who promote the contextualized study of ancient civilizations along the Nile Valley.
36 I distinguish between “Egypt,” an ancient country, and “modern Egypt,” a contemporary nation. As detailed in Table P.1, I also make this distinction for India.
37 Debates about black Egyptians appear in scholarship on Greco-Roman antiquity (Lefkowitz [1997: 34–52]; Hailey [1993]; McCoskey [2004]), Afrocentric research (Rogers [1946]; Clarke [1988]), and archaeology (Bard [1996]).
38 Examples include Herodotus, Histories 2.57, 104; Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta, Adespota F 161 (Snell, Kannicht, and Radt, 1971–2004; quoted in Vasunia [2001: 48]); the water jar (hydria) reproduced in Figure 1.2. With the student and nonspecialist reader in mind, I spell out the authors and titles of the ancient texts at first mention in text or notes and use the standard abbreviations of the Oxford Classical Dictionary thereafter. See the List of Abbreviations provided in the frontmatter.
Egypt alone risks reinforcing contemporary hierarchies that situate modern Egypt in Africa but not of Africa. This prepositional shift highlights the tension between objective geography and subjective inclusion. By pulling Egypt out as the single exemplar of a powerful country south of the Mediterranean, scholars inevitably promote the current, problematic assessment of northern Africa as separate from and superior to the rest of the continent.

As a visual corrective to isolationist renderings of Egypt, Fred Wilson’s 1993 *Grey Area (Brown Version)* graces this book’s cover. This installation features five plaster copies of the famous bust of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti. Sculpted around 1340 BCE, the original limestone bust depicts a woman with light brown skin wearing a tall, flat-topped blue hat and elaborate neckwear. Wilson’s effigies differ from their ancient referent solely in terms of color palette. The color of each monochromatic head resembles the spectrum of human skin tones, ranging from off-white to dark brown. Through his creative rendering of Nefertiti, Wilson questions the impulse to lighten the skin color of Egyptians, and he reframes the parameters of beauty as it relates to skin color. In one fell swoop, he rebuffs modern attempts to colonize Egypt without overlooking the historical context of his subject matter.

As reflected in my linguistic and geographic choices, I remain convinced that language can contribute to an overhaul of Greece and Rome’s monopoly of antiquity. Its revolutionary potential governs my approach to the following terminology: “Greek antiquity” and “Greco-Roman antiquity.” I use these terms throughout the book to denote a time period that spans from the eighth century BCE to the fourth century CE. These terms diminish the monopoly that Classicists inadvertently reinforce when they consider the unmarked phrases “ancient world” and “antiquity” as synonyms for Greco-Roman antiquity. For my purposes, “ancient world” and “antiquity” are broad terms that refer to past communities whose geography need not correspond to only one region of the world. In addition, I treat the uppercase “Classics” as shorthand for “the worlds of Greece and

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39 I use this language after W. E. B. Du Bois who, upon reflection on his graduate school years, states that he was “in Harvard, but not of it” (quoted in Provenzo [2002: 36]). See also Kamugisha (2003).

40 I note a few examples of these geographic manipulations: ethnologist C. G. Seligman (1930: 96–156) attributed all of Egypt’s cultural developments to the Hamites, whom he describes as “Caucasians,” and Egyptologist Flinders Petrie proposed a theory of an influential “New Race” that entered Egypt during the Old or Middle Kingdom (see Challis [2013: 167–8]). The location of Egyptian objects in the British Museum also contributes to this lopsided history, which I discuss in Section 2.4.

41 Excavated from Amarna (Egypt), Nefertiti’s bust is currently a part of the Egyptian Museum in Berlin’s collection: Reid (2015: 87–93).
Rome in antiquity,” and “Classicist” as a synonym for “the person who studies Greco-Roman antiquity.” Rather than fossilize “Classics” or prop it up as an exemplar of the past, this capitalization of “Classics” aims to decenter the Greco-Roman monopoly of antiquity.42 By marking “Classics” as a (problematic) stand-in for ancient Greece and Rome, this orthographic practice enables the lowercase “classics” to encompass societies including and beyond the Mediterranean region.

I have thought carefully about the orthography of blackness I use in this book. I have adopted a referential practice in which I shift between “black” and “Black.” Lowercase “black” denotes people with black skin and phenotypic features including full lips, curly hair, and a broad nose in ancient Greek literature and art, while uppercase “Black” refers to a modern, socially constructed group of people whose melanin is merely one of its distinguishing traits.43 Due to the numerous Greek terms employed to categorize black people, a transliterated label is not a suitable alternative. Color-based vocabulary varies, such as melangchimos ("black," Supp. 719), melangchrōs ("black-skinned," Hdt. 2.104), kuaneō, and aithaleō ("blazing" and "dark," Dionys. Per. 22, 1111). Some of these terms share etymological roots via the Greek adjective melas, while others have their own derivational history. Geography-based markers are also slippery, in that writers describe black Egyptians (Hdt. 2.57), Aithiopians (Hdt. 3.101), Indians who live near Aithiopians (Supp. 285), and Colchians (Hdt. 2.104; Pyth. 4.212). Adding to this convoluted matrix, chromatic markers did not always correspond to phenotypic features. Some colors became personal nicknames that were passed down to descendants even when physical characteristics no longer applied.44 Therefore, I define “black people” as an inclusive term for geographically diffuse peoples with black skin, as they are rendered in ancient Greek literature and art.

Despite my best efforts to sharpen my vocabulary, this visual application of “black” inevitably lends comparison to current politics surrounding skin color. Undeniable similarities linking “black” people and “Black” people aside, “Black” is not a direct referent for “black.” Marked differences warn against the elision of the two, such as the near-universal phenomenon of assuming commonalities among Black people that does not directly map onto Greek antiquity. Even more, the structural inequalities that Black people face are specific to their historical context. Philosophers of modern

42 Greenwood (2010: 12–13).
43 Haslanger (2012: 7) and Crenshaw (1993: 1244 n. 6) influence my capitalization practices.
race have attempted to identify the particular register of Blackness in the twenty-first century. As Charles Mills wryly observes, “the conceptual and theoretical cataracts on the white eye” prevent the Black experience from being philosophically visible. That is, one cannot enjoy an unencumbered view of Blackness without an invasive operation of the “white eye.” If left untreated, the eye’s “theoretical cataracts” will build up and eventually obscure Blackness altogether. The process of erasure operates differently for representations of black people in Greek antiquity. Contemporary audiences examine representations of black people through a modern lens that threatens to cloud their vision.

In an effort to provide a clear-eyed outlook, my manipulation of “black” and “Black” keeps the particular historical context of each term in view at all times.

Productive, albeit unanswerable, questions arise from a confrontation between the terms “black” and “Black”: when does the objective color “black” become conflated with the polarizing marker “Black”? What is the process by which attributing visual significance to a group transforms into labeling a group based on this marker? Attempts to pinpoint this shift fall short, as there was no sudden transition. The process required time, ruthlessly creative minds, and malleable power dynamics. In their quest to justify the violence they meted out to fellow humans, European enslavers generated socially constructed categories which gave “Black” an abstract, yet stringent, chromatic valence. The emergence of anti-Black racism, developed in European countries, propelled this shift. Centuries later, their designated categories still resonate. In his analysis of various labels used to describe people of African descent, such as “colored,” “Negro,” “Afro American,” and “African American,” Robert B. Stepto envisions each designation as part of a metaphorical family tree whose branches connote specific time periods. He warns readers of the pitfalls that

45 Mills (1998: xvi). See Morrison (1993); Jacobson (1998); Boxill (2004); the contributions in the inaugural issue explored by the Racial Imaginary Institute (2017); the contributions in Taylor, Alcoff, and Anderson (2018); and Glasgow et al. (2019).

46 Examples of this clouded vision include the treatment of the “Apollo of the Belvedere” statue as an epitome of White beauty (refuted by Bond [2017]) and the intense denunciation of chromatic diversity in Roman antiquity following the BBC’s cartoon of a black soldier from Roman Britain (dispelled by Beard, as discussed in Zhang [2017]).

47 Heng (2018). Whitaker (2019) argues that the mirage-like notion of “black” as morally deficient and “white” as morally sufficient can be traced to the European and English Middle Ages; the contributions in Albin et al. (2019) encourage audiences to resist the weaponized nostalgia that has fallen under the banner of the “Middle Ages.” See also scholars who examine the presence of Black people in the early modern European period, such as Hall (1995) and Habib (2007) for England; Cohen (1980) for France; the contributions in Hering Torres, Martínez, and Nirenberg (2012) for the Spanish Atlantic world; and the contributions in Bethencourt and Pearce (2012) for Portugal and lusophone countries.
can come with alterations in nomenclature. Stepto’s observation prompts me to probe the modern label “Black.” The racist coupling of “Black” and inferiority is a problematic reality in the twenty-first century, but readers retain the freedom to question the relevance of such vocabulary within a wider historical scope. In our era, scholars have reclaimed and adapted the term “Black.”

Christina Sharpe’s practice of anagrammatical blackness is especially helpful in outlining my nomenclature. Her ability to “anarrange” (arrange anew) terminology inspires my imposition of new meaning onto historically trenchant vocabulary. As part of my anagrammatical project, I wade through the recent past – that is, the debris of “Blackness” in the wake of the twenty-first century – in order to access the deep past, that is, the plurality of “blackness” in the world of Greek antiquity. Simply put, I assert that “black” people are in dialogue with, but not a replica of, “Black” people.

1.3.1 Uncoupling Blackness from Race and Racism

“Race,” a term that modernity has conflated with skin color, requires similarly rigorous evaluation. As early as the 1940s, scholars opted to use “ethnicity” rather than “race” as the primary determinant of group membership. In Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race, Ashley Montagu bristles against the “tyranny of race” because of the emotional responses it engenders. He prefers the socially dynamic label of “ethnic group” due to its noncommittal and flexible status. Bridget M. Thomas echoes Montagu’s assertion that “ethnicity” is more suitable

48 “Each change that defines a generation may well cut off that group from what has come before” (Stepto [1991: xiii]). Keita (2000: 27) also challenges the conflation of “‘Africa’ = ‘colored’ = ‘Negro’ = ‘black.’”

49 The négritude movement marked a pivotal rehabilitation of Blackness in the twentieth century. Articulated by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Aimé Césaire, négritude explored the unity and rich complexity of Black identity. Premised on the inherent value in Blackness, négritude spoke back to the hostile rendering of Blackness on the part of racist societies. On the debts of the négritude movement to earlier attempts to reclaim the term nègre, see Miller (1998: 33–41). On women’s pivotal role in the négritude movement, see Sharpley-Whiting (2002) and Joseph-Gabriel (2020).


51 Examples include Hall (1997); Smith (2003); the contributions in Mclnerney (2014) (in particular, those by McInerney, Munson, Siapkas, Luraghi, and Papadodima); and Figueira and Soares (2020).

52 Montagu (1997: 521–30). In the 1951 revision of the 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race, Montagu and his fellow authors removed any mention of “ethnicity” and repeatedly used “race,” even as they discussed their failed attempts to find another word to adequately replace the contentious term (UNESCO [1969a, 1969b]). In the most recent UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (1978), “race” and “ethnic group” each appear numerous times.
than “race.” Thomas links “ethnicity” to its implied etymological prede- 
cdent, the ancient Greek noun *ethnos*, thereby belying the deeper complex-
ities of *ethnos* for the sake of general legibility. Furthermore, Thomas’s 
and Montagu’s shared desire to sidestep the power differential embedded 
into “race” renders words unruly time bombs that require detonation 
rather than time capsules in need of constant upgrading. Calling to task 
both those who liken race to skin color and those who dismiss the term 
outright, Denise McCoskey demands that scholars consider other criteria 
for the charged term “race.” In her salient assessment, she explains:

Although scholars in other fields have insisted on the status of race as an 
an organizing principle whose precise contours change over time, Classicists 
have continued to reduce the broader concept of race to its narrow modern 
“biological” form, one that holds skin color as its primary sign. Recognizing 
rightly that ancient Greeks and Romans did not base identities on skin 
color, Classicists have not asked instead whether racial identities were based 
on other criteria, but have instead dismissed the term “race” altogether.

Indeed, it is only through breaking down and rebuilding categories that 
scholars can write responsible, historically specific studies. For this investi-
gation of Greek antiquity, I propose a definition of the mechanism we 
dee “race” as an outward-facing category of evaluation. During the act of 
racial formation, to use Omi and Winant’s language, people label others as 
a way to bolster their own self-importance. In turn, these subjective 
 classifications lead to the establishment of unequal power paradigms. 
This open-ended definition of race subsumes seemingly disparate content 
signifiers of race, including visual and non-visual elements in the sphere of 
culture (dress, religion, language, etc.), under a single entity. This grouping 
of seemingly fixed and variable features reinforces my general claim that 
race is a slippery phenomenon in ancient Greek literature and art.

54 Jones (1996) traces the various meanings of *ethnos* in Herodotus’s *Histories*.
55 McCoskey (2003: 104–05); see also McCoskey (2012: 27–34). Beyond Classics, historians explore 
 factors that shape the construction of modern race (Kidd [2006]), and sociologists emphasize the 
changing parameters of modern race (Dixon and Telles [2017]).
56 I use the concept of “racial formation” after Omi and Winant (1994). My inclination to broaden 
“race” beyond chromatic markers builds on a forthcoming analysis by Rebecca Kennedy of race as 
a system of institutionalized inequality “based on imaginary and moving signifiers for human 
difference” and Heng’s (2018: 3, 27) treatment of race as “a structural relationship for the articulation 
and management of human differences.” See also Murray (2021). My thanks to Rebecca Kennedy 
for sharing a draft of her chapter “Race and the Athenian Metic Re-visioned” to appear in *Identities 
in Antiquity*, edited by Vicky Manolopoulou, Joseph Skinner, and Christina Tsouparopoulou 
(Routledge).
Broadly conceived, my reframing of “race” is not solely reducible to skin color, and at times it has little connection to skin color. Instead, my iteration of “race” replaces restrictive ideologies with polyvalent possibilities. Multiple axes of difference are far more determinative of someone’s race than skin color alone, which itself is rarely the most important or consistent marker of race in Greek literature and art. Although it may initially seem disorienting to rework the definition of race within a book whose thematic issue is black skin color, my semantic shift pushes back against the limiting treatment of race as nothing more than chromatic appearance. In other words, “race” encompasses a number of factors that mark groups of people as distinct from each other, and skin color is but one part of a larger mechanism of hierarchical difference in an expansive system of race.

A final caveat on “race”: due to my insistence that the study of race in Greek antiquity is inescapably dialogic and diachronic, it follows that the conception of race with which I work here is inevitably contingent on the view of the present and thus a work in progress. My current recasting of “race” is the product of my own wrestling with this term for the purposes of Greek antiquity. This is not an admission of negligence or defeat. Rather, this frank disclosure serves to point out the importance of continual reflection and wide-ranging viewpoints. It is my hope that readers will assume the role of conversation partners in the ongoing projects of revising race within and beyond Greek antiquity.

In tandem with the intersubjective status of race, “identity” is a product of social relations. Unlike “race,” which is prone to interpretation without the input of the racialized person, “identity” refers to people’s self-ascribed conceptualization of themselves. People articulate their own identities with varying levels of consultation from others. Together, “race” and “identity” reveal the mixture of social projections and self-declared moments of assertion at play during performances of blackness. More capacious than our current vocabulary, these intentionally overlapping terms usher readers

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57 Some nineteenth-century scientists manipulated a non-chromatic approach to modern race to the detriment of their field; among them was Samuel Morton, who defended his biased view of Black people’s inferiority based on the size of their crania: see Selden (1998: 191–95).
58 Swain (1996: 10); Appiah (2018). The voluminous literature on Greek identity includes Hall (1997), who pairs it with ethnicity; the contributions in Whitmarsh (2010) which probe its local permutations; and Hartog (1988) and Hall (1989), who assert that a binary model governs its construction in Greek history and tragedy, respectively. In relation to Roman identity, Dench (2005) offers a chronological examination; others examine geographic permutations in the west (Revell [2016]; Johnston [2017]), east (Woolf [1994]; Andrade [2013]), north (Mullen [2013]), and south (Mattingly [2011]) of the Roman empire.
into a world in which assigned and chosen categories collide as characters struggle to equate their conception of themselves with others’ views of them.

Etymologically linked to race, “racism” calls for careful attention. Fields and Fields helpfully define racism as a social practice of applying a double standard, “the missing step between someone’s physical appearance and an invidious outcome.”59 They treat modern race, part of a brutally convenient doctrine that assigns fixed traits to groups of people, as the principal unit of racism, but they wisely caution against conflating “race” and “racism.” Instead, Fields and Fields coin the term “racecraft” to refer to the way in which racism produces modern race as its object of knowledge. Racecraft highlights the presence of racism while simultaneously obscuring the agents of racist acts.60 Fields and Fields’s methodology is instructive in teasing apart Benjamin Isaac’s repackaging of racism into “proto-racism,” a term that Isaac developed to describe a fixed model of discrimination in Greco-Roman antiquity. In The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity (2004), Isaac’s use of proto-racism alongside his assertion that ancient Greeks and Romans viewed all black people as fixedly marginal reproduces anachronistic assumptions about the perceived marginality of people based on skin color. Moreover, his insistence that black people had minimal impact on Greco-Roman antiquity overlooks significant interactions between Greece/Rome and Nubia, evidenced in Ptolemy II’s campaign to capture Nubian elephants and the discovery of Roman remains in Meroe, the capital of Nubia spanning the period c. 300 BCE–300 CE.61 On a visual note, the art used for the cover of Isaac’s book eerily evokes racecraft’s contortions of the Black male body (see Figure 1.2). The image features a large, naked, muscular dark brown man strangling and trampling on light brown men. The coding of dark brown skin as innately threatening has no historical roots in the sixth century BCE.62

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60 Beyond the academy, racecraft is seared into the public’s consciousness, as is evidenced in national coverage on the criminalization of Blackness: “Driving while Black” (LaFraniere and Lehren [2015]), “Napping while Black” (Caron [2018]), and “Jogging while Black” (Puttermann and Minsberg [2020]), all of which can be subsumed into the ontological category “Living while Black” (Henderson and Jefferson-Jones [2020]).

61 Isaac (2004: 33, 49–50); conversely, see Samuels (2015: 730). I prefer to use terms such as “discrimination” or “prejudice” to describe violent opinions based on ancient Greek notions of fundamental difference because they do not invoke contemporary color-based rhetoric. Burstein (2008a) and Casson (1993: 249 n. 6) discuss Ptolemy II’s elephant campaign; Török (1989–90) and Doxey, Freed, and Berman (2018: 152) examine Roman remains in Meroe.

62 Irwin (1974); Sassi (2001: 1–33); Eaverly (2013); Olya (2021). I discuss “brown” as a color marker below (p. 33). To complicate matters further, the color palette has been altered on Isaac’s cover; the
Only a viewer with specialized knowledge of Attic vase paintings understands this image as a reference to Hercules fighting against Egyptian priests whose king, Busiris, has ordered them to sacrifice the demigod. Those unfamiliar with the water jar (*hydria*) on which this image is based may miss this allusion and instead assume a link between the central figure’s dark color and a propensity for violence.63

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63 Productive reviews of Isaac (2004) include those by Lambert (2005), Haley (2005), and McCoskey (2006). Isaac admits that “Greek vases do not always make an effort to render skin color realistically, as may be seen” (2004, figure 1). Haley responds: “it is clear that the vase painter had enough contact with people of African descent to render them realistically and not as caricatures” (2005: 453). In
While the concept of racism, developed in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade, has no direct ancient equivalent, Isaac’s erasure of black people coupled with a jarring visual complement is a questionable interpretative move. The superficial nod to chromatic diversity on his book cover may lead to better sales, but such a depiction belies the scant engagement with skin color within the book’s pages. This cover mirrors an underlying tension in Classics between what the field is doing versus what the field markets itself as doing. In essence, Isaac’s avoidance of a loaded topic demonstrates the simultaneous hypervisibility of black skin color in the twenty-first century and oversight of the complex representations of black people in ancient Greece.

### 1.4 Privileged Perspectives

Dissenting from dismissive views of black people, I propose a two-way approach to blackness that situates black people in their particular context without ignoring the conceptual filter of Blackness. This bidirectional methodology is attentive to the interference of modern projections, not to mention the potential risk of circularity in examining a phenomenon under an oft-used term. In this vein, an inspection of a few twentieth-century thinkers illustrates the ways that anachronistic biases about contemporary Blackness can seep into scholarship about representations of blackness in Greek antiquity.

Reiterating ideas previously espoused by Black scholars, Martin Bernal caused a great stir in the academy with the publication of his three-volume *Black Athena* (1987, 1991, 2006). Bernal elucidated two main models of

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64 McCoskey (2006: 251–52). See also the image of a bust of Socrates wearing a Malcolm X cap on the cover of Lefkowitz’s (1992) earliest review of Bernal’s *Black Athena*. Lefkowitz (2008: 38) has stated that she was not consulted about this cover design and learned about it only when she received a hard copy of her article.

65 There was nineteenth-century interest in this topic as well, such as Löwenherz’s (1861) study of black people in ancient Greek art.

Greek history: the “Ancient Model,” which suggested that Egypt and Phoenicia were the progenitors of ancient Greek civilization; and the nineteenth-century “Aryan Model,” which denied Egyptian and disputed Phoenician influence in ancient Greece. Toggling between material from the ancient and modern worlds, Bernal also called the field of Classics to task for ignoring the racist ideologies that informed nineteenth-century conceptions of the discipline. Although Bernal’s general argument about Egypt’s considerable impact on ancient Greece and his criticism of nineteenth-century prejudices are persuasive in their own right, Bernal’s publications are not relevant to this book, for a few reasons. First, Bernal was not the first scholar to recognize that people from Greek cities interacted with those living along the Nile Delta. Decades before Bernal penned his thesis, Black writers had taken a keen interest in the representation of black people in Greco-Roman antiquity. Bernal’s status as a White, Cambridge-educated professor based at Cornell University perhaps influenced the amount of serious engagement that Classicists afforded to his work over that of his Black predecessors. Bernal himself mused on his privileges:

Certainly, if a Black [sic] were to say what I am now putting in my books, their reception would be very different. They would be assumed to be one-sided and partisan, pushing a Black nationalist line, and therefore dismissed. My ideas are still so outrageous that I am convinced that if I, as their proposer, did not have all the cards stacked in my favor, I would not have enjoyed even a first hearing. However, being not only white, male, middle-aged, and middle-class but also British in America has given me a tone of universality and authority that is completely spurious. But it’s there! So I must thank my lucky stars, rather than any talent that I may possess for having got this far, even if this is as far as I go.

Notwithstanding Bernal’s positionality, his quest to lessen “European cultural arrogance,” as he deems it, stands in stark contrast to his brief mentions of non-Egyptian civilizations situated along the Nile Valley. His decision to spotlight Egypt implies that nineteenth-century European arrogance was limited to Egypt when in fact, European bigotry spread far

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67 Bernal (1987: 437) preferred to align himself with Black intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Ali Mazrui, and George James rather than those he deemed “the academic orthodoxy”; Bernal’s religious identity as a Jewish man also informed his critique of the Aryan model. For a sample of scholarship in direct response to Bernal’s publications, see Levine (1989); Lefkowitz and Rogers (1996); Berlinerblau (1999); Adler (2016: 113–72).

68 Bernal received a fair amount of criticism that refuted his archaeological and linguistic evidence, such as that of Morris (1996) and Jasanoff and Nussbaum (1996).

69 See note 66 above.


beyond this region. His brief mentions of “Ethiopia,” a label he uses to describe the region south of Egypt, reifies this geographic bias.\textsuperscript{72} That is, Bernal’s fulsome survey of Greece alongside his sparse discussion of “Ethiopia” promotes a world map that positions Egypt closer to its northern neighbors and further away from civilizations along the Nile Valley.

Bernal’s deployment of ancient Greek literature as a source of historical facts poses additional challenges. For instance, Bernal concludes that Aeschylus’s portrayal of Danaus in the \textit{Suppliants} reflects Aeschylus’s belief that Danaus was a Hyksos ruler who colonized Argos in the second millennium BCE.\textsuperscript{73} This conflation of a fictional character and a historical event encourages readers to disregard context for the sake of cohesion. As a final critique, Bernal’s proposed models assign a discriminatory undertone to the Aryan Model and an idyllic one to the Ancient Model. His binary distinctions oversimplify the uneven tropes of power that govern both of these models.\textsuperscript{74} Subsequently, recent publications have moved beyond the debates surrounding “Black Athena” to trace the overlapping relationships between Egypt, Nubia, Greece, and Rome.\textsuperscript{75}

Predating Bernal’s publications, renewed interest in representations of black people in Greco-Roman antiquity led to publications by Classicists Grace Maynard Hadley Beardsley (b. 1896), Frank Snowden, Jr. (1911–2007), and Lloyd Thompson (1932–97). Based at Goucher College, Howard University, and the University of Ibadan (Nigeria), respectively, these scholars contributed to academic discourse about representations of black people in Greco-Roman antiquity. As Black Classicists, Snowden and Thompson were both keenly aware of the high stakes associated with their research, and they constantly fought against contemporary attempts to colonize Greco-Roman antiquity.\textsuperscript{76} Part of this fight included shared criticism against the work of their White predecessor, Beardsley. Under the

\textsuperscript{72} Bernal refers to “Ethiopia” five times, focusing on its linguistic, specifically Semitic, features (1987: 11, 56–57, 344, 353, 431).

\textsuperscript{73} Bernal (1987: 88–98).

\textsuperscript{74} See Mudimbe (1994: 95), as a comment attributed to McCoskey, and E. Hall (2002), who cautions against substituting one faulty model (Aryan Model) for another (Ancient Model). Edith Hall (2002: 149) helpfully reframes the binary framework with the following questions: “who on earth did Greeks think they were? Why did they think it? And what is it about the late twentieth century which renders the issue so important to us?”

\textsuperscript{75} Such as: Byron (2002); Török (2009); contributions in Orrells, Bhamra, and Roynon (2011); McCoskey (2012); Hatke (2013); Vasunia (2016); Ashby (2020); contributions in Moyer, Lecznar, and Morse (2020).


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supervision of David Moore Robinson, an archaeologist who edited the series in which her book was published, Beardsley wrote a dissertation that eventually became *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization: A Study of the Ethiopian Type* (1929).  

Relying on 1920s terminology, she argued that Negroes occupied a servile position beneath Caucasians, her nomenclature for their Greek counterparts.  

Throughout her discussion of “tribal dances” and “grotesque depictions” of black people in Greco-Roman antiquity, Beardsley reinforced anachronistic, negative stereotypes. Conversely, Snowden vehemently defended Greco-Roman antiquity from any claims of prejudice against black people with an extensive analysis of ancient Greek and Latin sources. As a Black scholar in twentieth-century America, he recognized the cultural importance denied to members of his community, and he exonerated ancient representations of black people from the negative prejudices that Black people were forced to endure. Resisting Snowden’s outright rejection of a chromatic hierarchy, Lloyd Thompson concluded that Romans had diverse views of black people. Despite their ideological divergence, Thompson echoed Snowden’s disapproval of Beardsley’s prejudicial attitude. In his censure of Beardsley’s language, Thompson explains, “many of her observations offer crude revelations of a mental and intellectual enslavement to the norms and assumptions of her own society.”

Among her Classicist peers, Beardsley’s work received many positive reviews. But her tendentious descriptions did not go completely unnoticed.

Blyden (1832–1912), and William Sanders Scarborough (1852–1926). See Scarborough’s autobiog-raphy (2005), scholarly writing (2006), and Greek textbook (2018) for unparalleled insight into the career of the first professional Black Classicist in the United States. Ronnick (2016) lists some of the earliest known Black female Classicists, such as Anna Julia Cooper (c. 1858–1964) and Helen Maria Chesnutt (1880–1969).

Fraser (1929: 426) suggests that Robinson chose Beardsley’s research topic for her. Despite Robinson’s unscrupulous advising practices, brought to light decades later, Robinson supported Beardsley’s career (Kaiser [2015]); Robinson’s support was perhaps due to his own academic interest in representations of black people in Greco-Roman antiquity.

In 1929, Black people also used the term “Negro” self-referentially.  

Thompson (1993: 25–26). Other critiques of Beardsley: “Beardsley told us far more about her own America of the 1920s than she did about Rome when she put forward the silly view that the Roman practice of decorating ordinary household objects and personal trinkets with depictions of blacks is clear evidence of a contemptuous attitude towards blacks as a ‘race’” (Thompson [1993: 21–22]), and “Beardsley’s pseudo-sociological forays . . . are hardly more than effusions (however unconscious) of the American racism of her own milieu” (Thompson [1993: 21]); see also Snowden (1947: 288–90 with n. 120). Surprisingly, Mudimbe (1994: 25) offers a favorable view of Beardsley.

Generally positive reviews include those by Fraser (1929); Mylonas (1929); Chapouthier (1930); Dugas (1930); and Verhoogen (1932). Among the slightly critical reviews, Myres (1930: 513) bemoans the limitations of Beardsley’s study (“unfortunately Dr Beardsley does not carry the study of negroid types far enough to throw any light on the sources”); and Smith (1930: 511) remarks on Beardsley’s
by a wider circle of Black academics. In October 1929, the *Journal of Negro History* published a book review that criticized her assumptions. The reviewer, William M. Brewer, encouraged Beardsley to concentrate on literary and material evidence in her scholarship, rather than personal beliefs. He accused her of tainting her research with discrimination and ended with the following insight:

> When one observes that this work is the production of one of our accredited universities [Johns Hopkins] noted for scientific investigation he must wonder how a book so meretricious should receive the approval of that institution. This may be due to the fact that in America, we have paid such a little attention to ancient Africa and know such a little about it that almost any unscientific production may impress us as valuable.82

Brewer’s review involves a critique of modern race-thinking interposing itself in a book about Greco-Roman antiquity. This public reckoning of Beardsley’s uncritical scholarship continually prompts me to sort through the ways that contemporary ideology can masquerade as history.

### 1.5 Overview of Chapters

Illustrative rather than exhaustive, this book unearths sophisticated tropes of blackness spanning from the fifth century BCE to the fourth century CE. I explore how writers and artists create a world in which performers rework blackness alongside claims of foreignness and Greekness. In the following chapters, black skin color appears among other determinants of race (outward-facing categories of evaluation) as Argive Greeks, royal Aithiopians, curious Scythians, and athletic Athenians participate in heterogeneous performances of blackness. Together, the sustained accounts that I offer in the following five chapters highlight the wide range of performances in Greek antiquity. I conclude each chapter with a contemporary comparandum that generates new avenues of connection between the Black archive and the ancient Greek tradition. My thematic scope may be jarring for any readers expecting a chronological guide to blackness. This interdisciplinary premise, however, is well equipped to

“almost irresponsible hunt after replicas” and the “occasional jarring phrase and some awkward passages.”

82 Brewer (1929: 333–34). Black scholars J. A. Rogers and W. E. B. Du Bois also commented on Beardsley’s study: Rogers (1967: 79–82) used Beardsley’s research to buttress his argument that black people existed in Greco-Roman antiquity, and Du Bois referred to Beardsley’s book as a “stupid combination of scholarship and race prejudice” (uncited quotation in Keita [2000: 50 n. 22]).
illuminate performances of blackness that speak back to the discipline’s myopia regarding skin color.\textsuperscript{83} Due to my desire to untangle blackness from the virulent narrative of anti-Black racism, I devote considerable attention to black Aithiopians.\textsuperscript{84} I limit my discussion of black Indians, highlighting their literary presence only in relation to their western neighbors in Aithiopia. This brevity does not discount the significance of India in Greco-Roman antiquity. Instead, this choice to focus on Aithiopia emphasizes the different stakes for ancient subjects when they are mapped onto twenty-first century topography. In other words, the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism in the twenty-first century compels me to foreground representations of black people whose geographic location maps onto the (modern) African continent. That being said, the performative framework laid out in the following chapters provides a useful starting point for those interested in representations of other black people in Greco-Roman antiquity.\textsuperscript{85}

Chapter 2, “Masks of Blackness: Reading the Iconography of Black People in Ancient Greece,” analyzes visual paradigms of blackness in Greek antiquity as they appear on fifth-century BCE janiform cups that depict black and brown faces on opposite sides. Lopsided projections are all the more pronounced when dealing with visual constructs of black skin color in Greek antiquity. Disputing the uncomfortable ease with which some art historians presume a fixed connection between black people and bumbling inferiority, I argue that black faces are part of a repertoire of sympotic performance. Similar to theatrical masks, faces on janiform cups enable drinkers in the symposium to adopt new identities. Ensuing discourse about the chromatics on janiform cups leads to a broader inspection of museums’ display of the iconography of black people in ancient Greek art. An extended examination of museum displays reveals the temporal clash that can occur when modern audiences view the iconography of black people in Greek antiquity. In particular, a visit to the British Museum lays bare the institution’s troubling tendency to privilege ancient Egypt as a powerful nation at the expense of Nubia.

\textsuperscript{83} Good sourcebooks already exist, such as those by Mveng (1972); Schneider (2004); Kennedy, Roy, and Goldman (2013); and Grundmann (2019).


\textsuperscript{85} For readers interested in black Indians, see the sophist Philostratus’s \textit{Life of Apollonius of Tyana} and the poet Nonnus’s \textit{Dionysiaca}. Parker (2008), Seaford (2016), Cobb (2018), and Stoneman (2019) discuss encounters between India, Greece, and Rome; Vasunia (2013) analyzes the role of Classics in modern India.
Chapter 3, “Masks of Difference in Aeschylus’s Suppliants,” examines the role of black skin color in this tragedy (c. 463 BCE) which details the story of Danaus’s fifty black daughters, referred to as the Danaids, who flee from Egypt to Argos to escape a forced marriage to their Egyptian cousins. Their knowledge of Greek religious rites convinces Pelasgus, the ruler of Argos, that they are distant kin even though their black skin seemingly denies their identity as Argive Greeks. This chapter asserts that the Danaids are sophisticated performers who successfully diminish the relevance of their physical alterity and declare their hybrid identity as Egyptians and Argive Greeks. They emerge as supple and subtle ethnographers of the Argives to whom they are making a supplication. Conversely, their Argive audience – the intradramatic spectators of the Danaids’ alterity – proves to be less able to comprehend their hybridized Argive Greek identity. An exploration of political resonances, particularly in relation to Athenian metics, draws Aeschylus’s fifth-century audience away from the distant mythical realm and toward their own political reality. Altogether, the drama speaks to the complicated exteriority of race and identity in one Athenian tragedy.

In line with the previous chapter’s refashioning of foreignness, Chapter 4, “Beyond Blackness: Reorienting Greek Geography,” delves into the historical portrayal of Greece’s distant neighbor, Aithiopia. Herodotus’s iteration of Aithiopia simultaneously looks back to Homer’s utopian Aithiopia and positions it as a historical allegory that critiques Athenian imperial aggression (Hdt. 3.17–26). Through the Aithiopian king’s comments to Egyptian spies, Herodotus undermines any fixed, negative assumptions about Aithiopians that may lurk in the minds of his fifth-century readership. Moreover, Herodotus labels people as Aithiopians based on their height, longevity, and skin color, thereby complicating a facile rendering of black people’s external categorization (i.e. their race). A reciprocal ethnography of Scythians further exposes the instability of race as two Scythian men, Anacharsis and Scyles, wear Greek clothes and maintain their Scythian identity (Hdt. 4.76–80). Their untimely demise reveals the dangers that Hellenocentric Scythians face once they return to their xenophobic homeland.

The fluctuation between Scythians and Greeks reverberates in Chapter 5, “From Greek Scythians to Black Greeks: A Spectrum of Foreignness in Lucian’s Satires.” In this chapter, I explore Lucian’s (c. second century CE) complex model of difference that relies unevenly on skin color, attire, and language. Lucian’s trio of Scythian satires features characters who rework the relationship between race (external categorization) and
identity within their specific contexts. The categories of “Greek” and “foreigner” become muddled as Greeks and Scythians share their impressions about black people in their midst: Greeks conflate blackness with Aithiopians or liken it to their own appearance with ease, while one Scythian man marvels at the sight of black Athenian athletes. These varied observations lead to a collective questioning of blackness in relation to Greek identity under the guise of humor.

Chapter 6, “Black Disguises in an Aithiopian Novel,” continues to upend the limiting Greek–foreigner binary model. Heliodorus’s novel *Aithiopika* (c. fourth century CE) traces the peripatetic journey of Charicleia, an Aithiopian princess rejected at birth because of the dissonance between her white skin and her parents’ black skin. In this novel, which is the earliest extant example in the Greek language of a plot in which black skin constitutes cultural privilege, skin color is a volatile element: Charicleia exploits color as a disguise (Heliod. *Aith.* 6.11.3), her companion Theagenes uses skin color as a marker of trustworthiness (7.7.6–7), and a prophecy destabilizes both perspectives (2.35.5). Throughout the novel, Heliodorus wields skin color as a negotiable ethnographic tool that does not necessarily correspond to identity. This flexibility underscores Charicleia’s own fluidity between several performative categories. She can be a beggar and a princess, a docile woman and the leader of her entourage, the daughter of a Greek man and an Aithiopian man. Readers are forced to be patient as Heliodorus masterfully exploits time to create a gap between what his characters know and what his readers have already grasped. In addition, this chapter situates Meroe, Charicleia’s homeland and place of ultimate arrival, as a vibrant historical site in the classical world.

The Conclusion, “(Re)placing Blackness in Greek Antiquity,” reiterates the invisible ontologies that haunt current assessments of black skin. A final look at the poetry of Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks offers suggestive models for revamping polarizing approaches to Greek antiquity in the twenty-first century. Prefiguring Ngugi’s pioneering liberation work discussed at the start of this chapter, Hughes transforms insults into subversive jabs in “The Black Clown,” and Brooks untangles preconceived misconceptions from the root in “To Those of My Sisters Who Kept Their Naturals.”

86 I also discuss invisible ontologies in Section 2.1. Haunting can lead to “that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (Gordon [2008: 8]).