

“Black Warrior Dynasts”: Afrocentricity and the New World [eng rev]

By

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The Olmec civilization with its colossal basalt heads and massive earthenworks has always attracted pseudoscientific diffusionist claims. A traffic policeman would have been needed to keep the waves of Libyans, Phoenicians, Romans, Carthaginians, Shang Chinese, Polynesians, Mandingos, Irish monks, Mande speakers, Egyptians, Nubians, and aliens from outer space from crashing into each other on their way to the Gulf of Mexico. Ivan Van Sertima's claims of Egypto/Nubian influence on the Olmecs, and thus on subsequent Mesoamerican and New World civilizations, have almost achieved the status of dogma. They are widely taught, not only in Afrocentrically oriented schools, but also in many “multicultural” curricula and cultural sensitivity classes. Olmec heads are prominently displayed in African American History Museums, appear in murals on the African American heritage, and in exhibits for Black History month. Van Sertima's book, They Came Before Columbus, first printed in 1976, has had 21 editions, and is, typographical errors and all, still in print. Van Sertima has repeated his claims, with minor variations, in non-peer reviewed outlets a number of times since then (1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1994, 1995, 1998). However, in contrast to the acknowledged Viking presence in Newfoundland around A.D. 1044 (Ingstad 1964, 1969; Davies 1979:229-30), no authentic artifact of African origin has been found in a controlled archaeological excavation.

Van Sertima's books and articles make a multitude of claims which would require volumes to refute in detail. To deal with adequately with a single paragraph of an undocumented and unreferenced claim takes weeks of work and many pages of text. Clearly there is not enough space here to do a point by point discussion. More detailed, though not exhaustive, rebuttals are Ortiz de Montellano, Barbour, and Haslip Viera (1997), Haslip Viera, Ortiz de Montellano, and Barbour (1997) and Ortiz de Montellano (1995). This chapter will sketch out Van Sertima's principal claims, point out the flaws in a few, and look at the methods and strategies he uses so that readers will be able to compare them with those used by other Afrocentrics.

Why are these ideas so attractive to African-Americans? Racism and decades of Eurocentric dominance of school curricula and the media have taken their toll on the self-esteem of African-Americans. I have great sympathy for efforts to improve this self-esteem and to correct the imbalance in coverage of world history. Unfortunately, Afrocentrics feel a need to assert that their ancestors were, not only equal, but actually superior to Europeans and other ethnic groups. Afrocentrics have taken obsolete racist European notions of history and anthropology and turned them upside down. According to many Afrocentrists, all of the world's early civilizations: ancient Egypt, ancient Mesopotamia, India, China, Europe and those in the New World were created or inspired by racially “black” peoples.(1) Van Sertima claims not to be an Afrocentric, but his claims for African influence everywhere (Van Sertima, ed. 1985,

1989, 1991, 1992, and Van Sertima and Rashidi, eds. 1988 among other works) belie his protestations.

Van Sertima postulates two principal contacts between Africa and the New World-- approximately 650 B.C. and A.D. 1311.

### 1. Egypto/Nubians

According to Van Sertima's original proposal (1976: 123-138), the Nubian rulers of ancient Egypt (25th dynasty)(2) organized an expedition to obtain various commodities, including iron, from sources on the Atlantic coast of North Africa, Europe and the British isles during the late 8th or early 7th century B.C. The vessel would have had a mixed crew of Nubian troops in command, a Phoenician navigator, a couple of Hittites, Egyptian sailors, and a number of negroid Egyptian women (Van Sertima 1976: 137-138). This expedition sailed from the Nile Delta, across the Mediterranean, and down the Atlantic coast of North Africa, where it became caught in some current or storm that sent it across the Atlantic to an eventual landing on the Gulf Coast of Mexico where it came into contact with the receptive, but inferior, Olmecs. At this point, the Olmecs presumably accepted the leaders of the Nubian/Egyptian expedition as their rulers ("black warrior dynasts"), and these individuals, in turn, created, inspired or influenced the creation of the Olmec civilization, which influenced Monte Alban, Teotihuacan, the Maya, and all the other Mesoamerican civilizations that followed (Van Sertima 1976: 261, 264, 267-69).

According to Van Sertima, the Nubians became the models for the famous colossal stone heads which the Olmecs produced in the years that followed the alleged contact. The Nubians also provided the impetus for the building of pyramids and ceremonial centers, and introduced a number of technological innovations and practices (mummification, cire-perdue metallurgy, the symbolic use of purple murex dye, weaving, etc.) which influenced Mesoamerican religion, mythology, customs and even the Mesoamerican calendar. Van Sertima also claims that Egyptians influenced South American cultures by introducing the vertical loom to Peru (1976: 167), mummification (1976: 158-160), and burial practices (1976: 200) among others. Exactly when and how these contacts with civilizations on the Pacific coast of South America came about is never spelled out.

### 2. Bambara/Mandingo A.D. 1310-1311

On the sole basis of a hearsay report written in the 14th Century (al-'Umari 1927), Van Sertima (1976: 37-107, 1998: 1-28) claims that these "Black Africans" introduced mythological and religious beliefs about Quetzalcoatl and other Aztec gods and particularly those associated with the Aztec long-distance traders, the pochteca, to the New World.(3) Al-'Umari (1927: 74-75) was told by Mansa Musa that his predecessor, Abu-Bakari II, the Mandingo ruler of Mali, had set out from some unspecified location on the western coast of his dominions with 2000 vessels on an expedition with 2000 vessels to find a "river in the sea" and had never been seen again.(4)

Given the limited space available there is little need for an extensive discussion of this claim. Even if this voyage had taken place, it was much too late to have much influence on Aztec civilization because the Aztecs are the final chapter of a 3000 year old basic cultural tradition in Mesoamerica.

Examples of traits supposedly brought over in A.D. 1300 can be found in Mesoamerican cultures ancestral to the Aztecs before the supposed African trip. Claims about influence on the Aztecs are much more difficult to sustain than those about the Olmecs, because we have a large amount of textual and historical information about Aztec culture. The interconnectedness, context, and historical development of Aztec religion, mythology, and iconography are easily demonstrated. Our discussion will focus on some of Van Sertima's claims dating from periods when diffusion might have actually influenced Mesoamerican culture. An exception is a claim for the existence of an artifact proving New World contact with Africa.

#### guanín

Van Sertima (1995; 1998:3-4) claims that Columbus described an African artifact in the journals of his 3rd voyage.(5)

Columbus wanted to find out what the Indians of Española had told him, that there had come from the south and the southeast, Negro people, who brought those spear points made of a metal which they call guanin, of which he had sent samples to the king and queen for assay which [sic] was found to have 32 parts- 18 of gold, 6 of silver, and 8 of copper (Thacher 1903-1904: vol. 2, 380).(6)

Van Sertima continues, "The proportion of gold, silver, and copper alloys were found to be identical with spears being forged at that time in African Guinea. Apart from the eyewitness testimony of the Native Americans, here is incontestable metallurgical evidence from Europeans themselves (their meticulous assays establishing the identical proportions of metal alloys in the spears found in the Caribbean and the spears made in Guinea) (Van Sertima 1998: 3)."

Even though our primary focus is on the Olmec period, we need to briefly deal with Van Sertima's claims that guanín is an artifact. Van Sertima presents the claim of identity between African and New World alloy spears as if it were a continuing paraphrase of the quote from Columbus. In fact, neither Thacher, Las Casas, Columbus nor anyone else says anything about African gold spears, their analysis, or their identity with the gold alloy from the New World.(7) Van Sertima asserts this identity with no evidence whatsoever. This complete lack of evidence disposes of his claim, but we will discuss the matter briefly. Copper/gold and copper/gold/silver alloys are not distinguished from each other and are referred to generically as tumbaga.(8) Guanín is a word in Arawak, the language of the inhabitants of Hispaniola, not Mandingo and was, therefore, not imported. Rivet and Arsandaux (1946: 60 ff.) show that in many Arawakan languages words like guanín or guani and words resembling karakoli, in Carib languages, designate tumbaga alloys. In his discussion of this issue, Van Sertima relies on the Afrocentric hyperdiffusionist Harold Lawrence, not on Columbus and the early chroniclers. Lawrence (1987) claims that "Mandinga traders" from West Africa made "several" voyages to the Americas after 1300 and established colonies in Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Venezuela, and the island of St. Vincent. In any case alloys in Africa were not the same as Columbus' guanín. Lawrence, Van Sertima's

source, cites Bosman (1967) for the composition of gold alloy objects (though not spear heads). For comparison, Moche tumbagas are also provided (Lechtman 1988). The composition is given in percentages to facilitate comparison.

	gold	copper	silver
Columbus-guanin	56%	25%	19%
Guinea	50%	25%	25%
Guinea	65%	17.2%	17.2%
Mochica	31%	60%	10%
Moche	68%	13%	19%
Moche	67%	11%	22%

The proportions of this ternary alloy vary so widely that a particular composition is not an identifying marker.<sup>(9)</sup> Columbus found natives trading all kinds of objects (not just spear points) made from guanin in the whole region of Central America and Venezuela (Morison 1942: 265, 589). This was to be expected, because copper/gold and copper/silver/gold alloys were first made by the Moche culture of Peru about A.D. 100 (Lechtman, Erlij, and Barry 1982) and eventually diffused through the New World reaching Western Mexico about A.D. 1200 (Hosler 1994: 127). There is no need to posit diffusion of this alloy to the circum-Caribbean region from Africa because gold/copper/silver alloys were being made in neighboring South America 1400 years before Columbus' journey.

#### Botanical claims

Van Sertima makes a number of claims about human interchange of plants between Africa and the New World (cotton, bananas, jack bean, and maize). Here we will only discuss cotton and jack bean.

1. Van Sertima claims that Africans in the fourth millennium B.C. brought Gossipium herbaceum, the African diploid (AA) ancestor of the tetraploid (AADD) New World cottons (G. hirsutum and G. barbadense) to the New World enabling the hybridization to occur (Van Sertima 1976:190; 1992b; 1998:142). Even though this claim can be refuted by the fact that domesticated New World cotton has been found archaeologically earlier than any domesticated African cotton (Haslip-Viera, Ortiz de Montellano and Barbour 1997), there is much more compelling evidence. As shown by DNA analysis, the hybridization of diploid African cottons and diploid New World cottons took place 1 to 2 million years ago before the emergence of modern humans (Wendel 1989, Percy and Wendel 1990, Wendel and Albert 1992).

2. Van Sertima (1976:205-207, 1988:132 ) claims that African fisherman brought the jack bean to the New World because: "Red seeds from Africa (canavalia [sic] virosa) hybridized around 4000 B.C. with white seeds (canavalia [sic] plagiosperma). These "mottled" seeds, when carried into the Amazon lowland, a habitat like that of the ancestral red seeds of Africa (c.[sic] virosa), gave rise through repeated backcrossing to brown seeds (c.[sic] piperi) (Schwerin 1970:22)."<sup>(10)</sup> Although Van Sertima asserts this claim with great authority, he relies exclusively on Schwerin and presents no independent evidence for

it. Schwerin, however, did no independent original research, cites no botanical data supporting his claims, and admits that what he proposes is merely a hypothesis: "This paper presents a hypothesis... Critics will note that there are numerous points which cannot yet be verified by firm data. The hypothesis is offered, however, as a stimulus to further scientific research. Obviously it will stand or fall on the basis of future genetic, botanical, ethnographic, and specially archaeological findings. This paper may be taken as an invitation to those best qualified to pursue such research.... (Schwerin 1970:23)." Schwerin's sole botanical source of information on *Canavalia* is Sauer (1964), who says nothing whatever about hybridization of these species all of which are diploid with 22 chromosomes. Sauer (1964: 110) states that the four cultivated species of *Canavalia* were domesticated independently in pre-historic times, and provides no support whatever to Schwerin's hypothesis. A computerized literature search found no applicable further data on *Canavalia*, and Van Sertima provides none.

### Mummification

Van Sertima (1976: 156-162, 1995: 86-87) claims that the Egyptians brought mummification to the New World. His sources for this are the discredited hyper-diffusionist authors of the early 20th century, whom he quotes third hand from Mackenzie (1923). All of his citations (except for those that refer to Palenque, below) ultimately derive from Grafton Elliot Smith or his disciple W. J. Perry (see note 1). Elliot Smith believed that the 'Heliolithic' culture had first spread to Asia and from there to the New World. The diffusion of mummification from Egypt to the rest of the world was central to Smith's thesis. The Smith-Perry thesis, particularly the role of mummification, was thoroughly demolished in 1928 by Roland B. Dixon's The Building of Cultures (Wauchope 1962: 21-25; Davies 1979: 159-160).

Van Sertima's (1976: 157) attempt to update this outmoded hypothesis is equally fallacious. Citing no original sources, he claims that:

We have indisputable proof of Mexican mummification... one of the best examples is the mummified figure in the sarcophagus at Palenque. Three features of this Palenque burial indicate an Egyptian influence. The jade mask on the face of the dead, the fact of mummification itself, and the flared base of the sarcophagus... Egyptians made sarcophagi with a flared base to enable them to stand it up because their burials were vertical... The Mexicans, like the Nubians, buried in a horizontal position, yet at Palenque the flared base is retained, although it serves no function. The retention of such a non-functional element... is among the clearest indications of an influence. A borrowed artifact often goes through an initial period of "slavish imitation" before it is restructured to suit local needs (Van Sertima 1976: 157).

Van Sertima is wrong on all counts. Any basic text on the Maya, none of which are cited, states that the sarcophagus contained a skeleton, not a mummy (Thompson 1954: 77-80). Anyone can verify this by looking at the photograph of Pacal's (11) skeleton in the sarcophagus (Morley, Brainerd and Sharer 1983: 125, fig. 4.22, the photograph has been published in this text since 1956). Looking at this, or any other picture of the open sarcophagus, it is clear that the "flared base" is, in fact, a broadening of the

interior of the slab rather than the bottom of the sarcophagus, and is not a "slavish imitation" of an Egyptian prototype. In this, as in many other cases, Van Sertima asserts influences over enormous periods of time. For this claim to be true, it would have required the Mesoamericans to "slavishly imitate" the Egyptians from 1200 B.C. until A.D. 683 (almost 1800 years) without any evidence of any intervening cultures transmitting these traits. It should also be noted that jade death masks were never used by the ancient Egyptians in their funerary practices. Finally, because in diffusion theory, traits diffuse from the place of earliest use to the later users, perhaps mummification came from Chile (in a reed boat?) to Egypt, rather than the reverse. The oldest mummies in the world are those associated with the Chinchorro culture of Chile (Arriaza 1995). The oldest artificial mummy there is dated 5050 B.C. +/- 255 yr (Arriaza 1995:43). This is more than two thousand years earlier than Egypt, which began artificial preservation of corpses in the Old Kingdom (c. 2686-2181 B.C.) (Davis 1993).(12)

### Colossal heads

The massive basalt Olmec heads, even though carved hundreds of years before the supposed arrival of Egypto/Nubians as pointed out in note 2, make Van Sertima's thesis appealing for African Americans. An African American, given a cursory frontal view of an Olmec head, sees a black stone with thick lips and a flat nose and immediately thinks, "it looks like me." Van Sertima (1976: 23-24, 1995: 72-74), like most Afrocentrists, takes advantage of the ambiguity of terms like "African," "Black," or "Negroid." Most Americans think of "Africans" or "blacks" in terms of stereotypical sub-Saharan West Africans, and these are the images conjured up by Van Sertima's use of these terms.(13) The crucial point to remember, however, is that Van Sertima is not claiming that the models for the Olmec heads were the tropical, West African, genetic ancestors of African Americans, but Egyptians. These populations are very different and do not look alike.(14) Nose shape is particularly inappropriate as a racial marker because the shape of the nose evolves primarily as a function of climatic factors such as ambient temperature and moisture content of the air. One of the functions of the nose is to moisten the air before it goes to the lungs. In areas where the air is very dry, such as deserts, a larger mucous area is required to moisten inspired air; this necessitates a long and narrow nose (Molnar 1983: 71-73). Both the Olmecs and the genetic West African ancestors of African-Americans have wide, flat noses because they both lived in wet tropical areas. Nubians and Egyptians have longer, higher noses, because they have lived in a desert. Egyptians resemble neither West Africans nor Olmecs, and did not pose as models for the colossal heads.(15) The Olmec heads were images of native Olmec rulers, and people living in the area today could have posed for them (see illustrations in Haslip-Viera, Ortiz de Montellano, and Barbour 1997).

### Methodology

An alternate approach, for checking Van Sertima's numerous claims, is to look generally at his sources and his methods. He takes most of his claims and evidence from Wiener (1920-22). His descriptions of myths, customs, and iconography are copied from the writings of late 19th and early 20th

century authors, such as Donald Mackenzie (1923), and Grafton Elliot-Smith (1915, 1916, 1923). Van Sertima relies to a great extent on outdated sources, particularly when dealing with Mesoamerica.(16) There is little up-to-date material from recognized authorities on Mesoamerica, who have actually conducted archaeological or primary text research. Information comes from secondary, or even tertiary sources rather than from primary sources about the Mayas and the Aztecs such as the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950-1982), the works of Diego Durán or Bishop Diego de Landa who are crucial to an accurate understanding of these cultures. We do not find any reference to Nahuatl dictionaries (eg. Molina 1944 [1571], Simeón 1885) or to Mande dictionaries (Delafosse 1929, 1955), nor do we see any reference to recognized authorities in Mesoamerican, Egyptian or West African linguistics. Van Sertima usually obtains his information 2nd, 3rd or even 4th hand from amateurs, dilettantes and early 20th century writers, such as Wiener and Mackenzie. These authors could be excused because the Florentine Codex, and the works of Durán, Molina and de Landa were still unpublished. Wiener and Mackenzie also wrote at a time when no absolute dates were available for the existing archeological sites and when the temporal sequence of cultures in the Americas was only vaguely or poorly understood. The Olmec sites at La Venta, San Lorenzo and Tres Zapotes had not yet been discovered, and nothing was known about the Olmec culture. As a consequence, writers such as Wiener and Mackenzie used the Mayas and the Aztecs, not the Olmecs, in their arguments about presumed contacts with the Old World. However, by 1976, and certainly by 1998, a wealth of research had been done in Mesoamerican archeology and culture. It is therefore quite astonishing for Van Sertima and his supporters to ignore recent evidence and pretend that works written in the 1920's are still relevant and authoritative in the 1990's.(17)

Van Sertima's arguments show a complete disregard for temporal sequences. He claims cultural influences between cultures that are hundreds or thousands of years apart, such as Pacal's the "Nubian" style burial discussed above. Similarly, Van Sertima (1995: 79-80) claims that Egyptian use of Tyrian purple influenced the use of purple by Mixtec nobles in the 15th Century A.D. but no examples of uses in cultures in the intervening period such as the Maya. This kind of argument was erroneous, but perhaps understandable, in the 1920's before absolute dating with radiocarbon, but it is indefensible in the 1970's or in 1990's.

Another technique in common with other Afrocentrics such as Cheik Anta Diop, who tried to show a genetic connection between Wolof and Egyptian, is the use of simple word comparisons. Given the laws of probability and the limited number of human phonemes, random words that are similar can be found in any two languages. Wiener's erroneous methodology in this was pointed out by Dixon (1920: 179), "Etymology is a fascinating but precarious pastime, and if we select one of a series of variants, assume a certain amount of misspelling or misreading together with phonetic equivalences for which there is no proof, we may achieve almost anything." Modern historical and comparative linguistics are quite sophisticated and systematic (see Baldi 1991; Trask 1996). Van Sertima makes no use of them. Responding to criticism, Van Sertima (1992b: 53) has acknowledged that Wiener's

“linguistics” were “very poor,” but he continues to use Wiener’s word comparisons as evidence, for example: to prove the pre-Columbian presence of bananas in South America, the African origin of guanín, and the influence of the 1311 expedition from Mali on Aztec pochteca (long distance traders). An example combining both temporal and linguistic errors is Van Sertima’s attempt to show a connection between Middle Egyptian (1200-700 B.C.) and the language of the ancient Olmecs, (which is poorly understood), by using words that were spoken by Nahuatl speakers in A.D. 1500 (a difference of 2700 years!). Van Sertima (1992b: 45, 1995:82) claims that the Egyptians and the Aztecs both had a sacred bark and that it had the same name sibak in Egyptian and cipac in Nahuatl. What makes this claim even more amusing is that sibak is not the name for the sacred bark in Egyptian, it is wrt (weret), dpt ntr (depet neter) (Faulkner 1962), and the word cipac does not exist in Nahuatl (for more details and examples see Ortiz de Montellano, Haslip-Viera, and Barbour 1997).

Van Sertima also relies on a number of other hyper-diffusionists for support, but omits the part of their thesis that does not support the Afrocentric view. For example, Van Sertima (1995: 91-95, 1998:155) says that Barry Fell has identified an inscription in Libyan script in the Virgin Islands. He neglects to mention that Fell, a notorious crank, has also claimed that Polynesians discovered America and has found Carthaginian, Basque, Norse, Ogam, Roman, Palmyrian, Iberian, Moroccan, Arabic, Celtic, Minoan, and Punic presences in the New World (see cites in Sorenson and Raish 1996: vol. 2, 295-305); see Feder 1999: 111-119). Van Sertima (1995: 77-79, 1998: 89-94) makes much of Alexander Von Wuthenau’s collection of unprovenienced terracotta figurines, which supposedly portray the presence of diverse negroid types in Mexico. He does not mention Von Wuthenau’s other claims that there was an ancient connection between the Olmecs and the Japanese, and a strong Asian presence in pre-Columbian America which included Chinese with pigtailed (1985: 80, 86-87, 92, 93). Von Wuthenau also claims that the Mayan ruling class and the ruling elites of Mesoamerica in general were Caucasians from the Classical period onwards (1985: 174-178).

African Americans are predisposed to accept Van Sertima’s message. The colossal Olmec heads seem self-evident proof of an black African presence, there is a yearning for documenting that their ancestors to have done great things, and Afrocentrists have convinced many African Americans that the Egyptians looked like them. Van Sertima writes in an easy accessible style for a popular audience. This predisposition, and the fact that Van Sertima does not publish in academic presses or peer reviewed venues, means that he is used to writing for the consumption of “true believers” and has a readership unaccustomed to checking sources. The anthropological and archeological establishment has largely ignored or summarily dismissed his claims, allowing his ideas to diffuse unchecked through the African American community (our 1997 papers were the first extended critique of these claims). It is clear that Van Sertima’s claims cannot withstand close scrutiny. Given the doubtful and obsolete sources used, the unreliability of Van Sertima’s quotations, the dubious methodology employed, and the numerous unsupported assertions, readers of Van Sertima’s works should apply the principle of caveat emptor.



## POSTSCRIPT (2001)

### Notes

- (1) This is a revised version of the old "Heliolithic Hypothesis" which was so popular among racist scholars in Western society during the late 19th and early 20th century. In essence, the Heliolithics believed that civilization arose only once, in a "white" ancient Egypt and diffused from there to the other parts of the world. The Heliolithics also believed that the "non Caucasian" peoples of the world were incapable of creating their own "advanced civilizations" because of their biological inferiority (Smith 1915, 1923, 1929; Perry 1923, 1937; Massey 1907; Churchward 1913, 1921). Appiah (1994) points out that, in taking this approach, Afrocentrics mimic Eurocentric racialism and prejudice against those cultures below the Sahara that have no writing. Culture and biology are conflated, but in a reversal of the 19th Century, the biologically superior people are now defined as "black" (Ortiz de Montellano 1993).
- (2) An interesting progression has occurred. In 1976, the great Afrocentric push to declare Egyptians generally to be "Black," Negroid" and/or resembling West Africans had not yet taken hold. Van Sertima's objective was to prove that "Black Africans" had influenced the Olmecs. Thus it was necessary that "Blacks" be in command of these expeditions rather than participate as slaves or mercenaries. He therefore proposed the 25th Dynasty (712-657 B.C.), when Egypt was ruled by Nubians, as the time of contact (1976: 145-147). This allowed Van Sertima to claim, among other things, that 1) the colossal Olmec heads, with presumably "negroid" features, were portraits of the Nubian captains of the boats (slaves or mercenaries would not have rated this treatment) and 2) that Egypto/Nubians introduced pyramid building into the New World, on the basis that there had been a revival of pyramid building in Nubia in the 8th Century B.C., despite the fact that no pyramids had been erected in Egypt for a thousands years.

This date for first contact is clearly untenable because there is proof that the supposedly "negroid" Olmec heads were made in the Early Formative (1793-1011 B.C.) (Coe, Diehl and Struiver 1967, Coe and Diehl 1980: v. 1, 395-396; Cyphers 1995a, 1995b), hundreds of years before the supposed arrival of the Nubian led expedition.

Van Sertima has reluctantly changed this position in the last few years (948-680 B.C. 1992a:14; 1200 B.C. or 948-680 B.C. 1995:74; 1200 B.C. 1998:75-88 based on Jairazbhoy 1974). As Van Sertima acknowledges (1995:75-76), the prevailing Afrocentric dogma that Egyptians were "black" no longer requires that Nubians from the 25th Dynasty command the expeditions. The new contact date he proposes accomodates the dating of colossal heads, but it poses another dilemma-- why would Egyptians, who had not built a pyramid since 1777 B.C., consider it essential to teach the Olmecs how to build one at La Venta, and how would Egyptian sailors know how to build a pyramid in any case?

(3) As is the case with most of Van Sertima's claims, arguments, and evidence, this presumed contact with the New World were first put forth by Leo Wiener (1920-22).

(4) This is not the place for an extended discussion of the maritime ability of Egyptians or West Africans. However, sails were unknown on the West coast of Africa until the Portuguese arrived in the 15th Century (Mauny, 1969). If Abu-Bakari had departed from the mouth of the Senegal River (16.5°N lat. 7°W long.), he would have had to reach the Canary Current passing northwest of the Cape Verde Islands at approximately 20°N latitude, 30°W longitude. This would have required that the expedition row some 900 km straight out into an unknown sea before encountering a favorable current. The Cape Verde Islands lie directly along this path, and we know that they were still uninhabited when they were discovered by the Portuguese (Mauny 1969). Van Sertima (1976: 190-191, 1994, 1998: 7), claims that returning voyages brought maize and long-staple cotton to Africa before Columbus. He blithely ignores the problem of showing exactly how dugouts without sails would drift back across the Atlantic. The only feasible returning current is the Gulf Stream, and we have no reports of New World Mandingos landing on the shores of Ireland.

(5) Morison (1963: 259) says that Bartolomé de Las Casas made an abstract of the journal of the Third Voyage. This manuscript was first printed in full by De Lolis in *Raccolta I* ii 1-25 and "so far as I can ascertain, the only English translation published is an unreliable one in Thacher... [This is the source used by Van Sertima]." An abstract of a scribe's report of statements from Christopher Columbus is not quite the equivalent of a "controlled archaeological dig" in evaluating an artifact.

(6) Thacher is not quoted correctly- it should read- "... he thought to investigate the report of the Indians of this Española who said that there had come to Española from the south and south-east, a black people, who have the tops of their spears made of a metal which they call 'guanin' of which he had sent samples to the Sovereigns to have them assayed, when it was found that of 32 parts, 18 were of gold, 6 of silver, and 8 of copper." It is also problematic that Thacher was used (presumably because that is what Wiener used) when a better and more accessible translation (Morison 1963: 263) was available.

(7) Why Africans would limit themselves to bring soft gold tipped spears to the New World is beyond us. Africans smelted iron and steel by 600 B.C. in Tanzania (Schmidt and Childs 1995; Schmidt 1996), and iron tools reached West Africa 2000 years ago, fueling the Bantu explosion that populated Central Africa (Diamond 1994). Columbus and his editor, Bartolomé de Las Casas, were convinced that Africans had not come to the Americas because the two continents were too distant from each other (Morison 1963: 271; Thacher 1903-04: vol. 2, 392-393).

(8) Tumbaga is a Sanskrit loan word for copper which came to the New World via Tagalog (Philippines) and Spanish, and in turn, copper/gold alloys taken to the Far East by the Spanish were called tumbaga (Blust 1992).

(9) Rivet and Arsandaux (1946: 48-59) found tumbaga objects with a gold content ranging from 11% to 81% and copper ranging from 18% to 87%>

(10) Van Sertima confuses the species involved in the initial crossing. Schwerin (1970:22) actually says: “Canavalia regalis (red seeds) or its ancestor of 4000 B.C. (perhaps C. virosa) hybridized with the endemic C. brasilensis (white seeds) of northern South America, giving rise to the form known as C. plagiosperma (mottled seeds) [BOM underline].

(11) We now know this ruler's name, the date of his birth (A.D 603), his death (A.D. 683) and other biographical details.

(12) Van Sertima (1988:125) says that, “The oldest mummy so far found is an infant mummy buried in Nubia... the infant mummy of Uan Muhuggiag is dated 7,438 B.C. plus or minus 220.... The mummy was so named because it was unearthed beneath the Uan Muhuggiag natural rock shelter located in the Tagzelt Valley.” The original source (Cockburn and Cockburn 1980: 224-226) tells a different story. The Uan Muhuggiag site is not in Nubia, but in Western Libya, 1200 miles from the Nile. Two different radiocarbon dates were obtained, 7438 +/- 220 or 5405 +/- 180 years ago (i.e. the zero date of A.D. 1950 must be subtracted to convert years before the present to years B.C.). The actual dates are either 5488 +/- 220 B.C. or 3455 +/- 180 B.C. Also this Libyan mummy was not embalmed or dried with natron in the classic Egyptian manner. It had been naturally dehydrated and wrapped in animal skins after the removal of its viscera (The oldest natural Chinchorro mummy dates to 7020 +/- 255 B.C.).

(13) Scientists agree that there are no biological races associated with particular physical or mental attributes (Latter 1980). However, “social races” exist, and the public believes that they are biologic. If one is going to use a “Negroid” racial stereotype to claim an African identity for Olmec iconography, why should thick lips and flat noses be privileged over other equally characteristic stereotypical traits such as dolichocephaly (long headedness) and prognathism (projecting jaws), which the Olmec heads do not have? Most of the 18 colossal Olmec heads are round and short, rather than long; the profiles are flat rather than prognathous; have flat, wide noses; and epicanthic folds over the eyes. They resemble neither Egypto/Nubians (round heads, flat noses, flat profiles, epicanthic folds), nor the ancestors of African Americans (flat profiles, round heads, epicanthic folds).

(14) Morphological analysis using a number of trivially adaptive cranial measurements show that Egyptian and Nubian populations differ significantly from sub-Saharan West Africans (Brace, et al 1993; Froment 1992, 1994 ; Howells 1989, 1995). These conclusions are supported by dental analysis (Irish 1998) and a variety of different genetic analyses: Y-chromosome (Hammer, et al. 1997), microsatellites (Bowcock, et al. 1994; Scozzari, et al. 1997), and classical genetic polymorphisms (Cavalli-Sforza, et al. 1988).

(15) Van Sertima (1998: 31-39) argues both that Haslip-Viera, Ortiz de Montellano, and Barbour are racist because they deny the “negroidness” of Egyptians, and that, modern Egyptians do not look like ancient Egyptians, due to repeated invasions by “caucasian” groups. Trigger (1978), El-Batrawi (1946) and Berry and Berry (1987) point to a “remarkable degree of homogeneity and continuity” in this area for 5,000 years (4,500 B.C- A.D. 300) a period encompassing most of the invasions referred to by Van

Sertima. Furthermore, most conquests of Egypt were political and cultural rather than demographic. Brace, Howells, and Froment used ancient populations in their studies. Froment (1994: 55) demonstrates that the nasal index (height/width x100) of Egyptians has varied little over 6000 years and has always been much closer to that of European than to that of the West African Bantu ancestors of African Americans.

(16) Sixty percent of the citations in Van Sertima's 1976 book come from references prior to 1940 (64 overt citations from Wiener). The pattern holds because 80% of the citations from Van Sertima (1985) are more than 35 years old (see Ortiz de Montellano, Haslip-Viera, and Barbour 1997).

(17) Even in 1920, a review of Wiener's book states that "[there is doubt] whether the author intended his work to be taken as a serious contribution or has attempted to perpetrate a rather elaborate jest" and "... there is... so much... unsubstantiated assumption, hasty correlation, false reasoning, misunderstanding and misrepresentation of sources and evident lack of familiarity with the results of American archaeology, that it is difficult to take the volume seriously (Dixon 1920)." The identical words could be applied to Van Sertima's work. Williams (1991: 251-254) criticizes the methodology of the "self-made, self taught" Wiener, a professor of Slavic literatures, and decries Van Sertima's word-for-word repetition of Wiener's claims 50 years later.

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