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Greek philosophers who came to Africa to study

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Today many Africans trek to Europe and other places to study and work, but the reverse was true in the past when other nationals braced the peril of the seas and deserts to come to study in Africa. These included European intellectual and cultural icons who sat at the feet of African masters and went back to their native lands to spread the light they had seen from the so-called "dark continent". They came to learn the rudiments of science, mathematics, philosophy and all. But don't expect to find this in orthodox history books. **Barima Adu-Asamoah** takes us through the records.

It is interesting to note that the ancient Greeks knew much more about the cultural and racial identity of Ancient Egyptians than modern European historians, long before the coming of the Romans, Turks and Arabs. The primary aim of these modern Eurocentric scholars (modern Arab historians included) is to completely expunge black Africans from the "map of human geography" and world history. The ideological position has been, and still is, that nothing came out of Africa but powerless, defenceless, uncivilised, barbaric and primitive peoples and ideas.

If so, why did the great Greek philosophers cross the seas and deserts to study in Africa? Aristotle, one of the greatest of Greek philosophers, wrote in *Physiognomonica* that "the Ethiopians and Egyp-

tians are very black". Herodotus (also a Greek historian) adds that the ancient Egyptians had "black skin and wooly hair". Why then is ancient Egyptian racial identity critical to Africa's self appraisal?

The logic, according to European hegemony, runs like this: To ascribe one of the world's greatest civilisations – Ancient Egypt – to Africans, undermines the notion of racial superiority necessary for the "Maafa" (European and Arab slave trade in Africa), and its attendant economic, spiritual and psychological onslaught. But Ancient Egypt is prior to Greece as Greece is prior to Rome, and Greece is credited with spreading civilisation in Europe. In his book, *The Significance of African History*, the African-Caribbean writer, Richard B. Moore, rightly points out that: "The significance of African history is shown...

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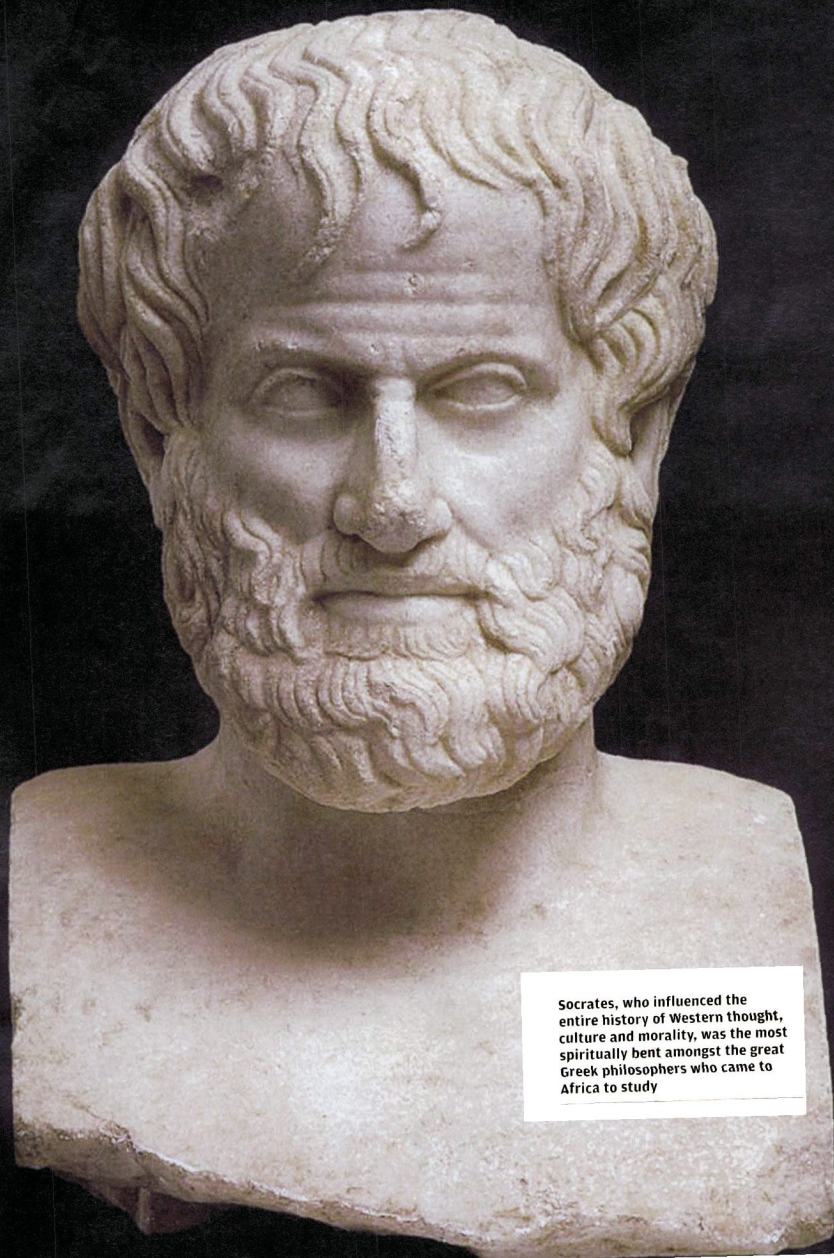
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Socrates, who influenced the entire history of Western thought, culture and morality, was the most spiritually bent amongst the great Greek philosophers who came to Africa to study

in the very effort to deny anything of the name of history to Africa and the African peoples. For it is logical and apparent that no such undertaking [falsifying African history] would ever have been carried out, and at such length, in order to obscure and bury what is actually of little or no significance."

There is sufficient evidence that the distortion of African history was deliberately planned and executed, and this has reaped dividends for the perpetrators. But to the African, this has led to a lack of self-confidence and a can-do attitude; hence the restoration of African history must be a critical component of an African renaissance.

The African Union should, therefore, create a restoration programme of African history and give it all the necessary importance. This would imply that the government of modern Egypt acknowledges the original creators of Ancient Egyptian civilisation and gives them their due place. It should stop being party to the denial which has gone on for so long. Ancient Egypt was, and still is, the cultural legacy of black Africans, not Arabs who were the last invaders of North Africa.

Indeed when the Muslim General Amr ibn al-As and his army of some 4,000 Arabs, ordered by Caliph Umar to invade Egypt (December 639AD), was asked what to do with the sacred African books found in the libraries of Alexandria and other cities, his reply has stood the test of time: "If it's not in the *Koran*, it's not worthy; if it's in the *Koran*, it is superfluous; burn it." This statement would have shamed the followers of Bilal, the African companion of Prophet Mohammed. This implies that Africa has the moral duty to re-aculture all "foreign" cultural elements for its own self-preservation.

The Rosetta Stone

During the 18th century, there was a renewed interest by Europe in Egyptian gold and artefacts. This made possible the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone which was found in 1799 at the mouth of the River Nile by members of Napoleon's expedition. On the Stone was a decree issued by Ptolemy Epihanes V in Greek and Medu-Neter which was deciphered by the Frenchman Jean-Francois Champollion who, in turn, while still in Egypt, wrote about what he saw in the temples to his brother Jacques Joseph Champollion-Figeac.

Jean-Francois died in 1832. His brother, Jacques Joseph, who later became the icon of European Egyptology, published the full text of Jean-Francois' letter in 1883. The Europeans were baffled to discover a first hand account by the Ancient Egyptians themselves, pointing to Negro Egypt. It was at the same time that Europe was enslaving Negro Africans and sending them to the Americas. As a result, Europe could not admit to a Negro Egypt, the source of ancient Greek civilisation, even if the Ancient Egyptians themselves had affirmed this.

Jacques' publication of Jean-Francois' correspondence established a major piece of evidence from a European which should render all suppositions unnecessary regarding Negro Egypt. As early as 233BC (18th Dynasty), the Egyptians continuously represented the two groups of their own race in a manner that could not possibly be confused by anybody. Significantly, the order in which the four races then known to the Egyptians (Kemmu, Nahasi, Namou, and Tahmou) are consistently arranged in relation to the god, Horus, also bestowed on them their social hierarchy.

Jean-Francois affirmed this in his letter to his brother. He wrote:

"Right in the valley of Biban-el Moluk, we admired like all previous visitors the astonishing freshness of the painting and the fine sculpture of



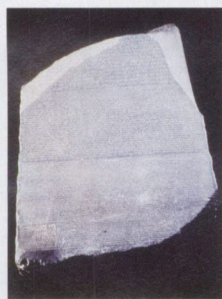
tombs. I had a copy of the peoples represented on the bas-relief. According to legend, they wished to represent the inhabitants of Egypt and those of foreign lands.

"Thus we have before our eyes the images of various races of man known to the Egyptians, established during that early epoch. Men led by Horus, belong to four races; the first, the one closest to the god, has a dark red colour, a well proportioned body, kind face, long braided hair, slightly aquiline nose, designated men par excellence.

"There can be no uncertainty about the racial identity of the man who comes next: he belongs to the black race designated Nahasi. 'The third man present a very different aspect: his skin colour borders on yellow or tan; he has a strong aquiline nose, thick, black pointed beard and wears a short garment of varied colours; these called Namou.

"Finally, the last one, what we call the flesh-coloured, a white skin of the most delicate shade, a nose straight or slightly arched, blue eyes, blond or red bearded, tall stature, very slender and clad in hairy ox-skin, a veritable savage tattooed on various parts of his body, he is called Tahmou.

"I hasten to seek the tableau corresponding to this one in the other royal tombs and, as a matter of fact I found several, convincing me of that fact that the Egyptians were representing namely: (1) Egyptian, (2) Black Africans, (3) Asians, (4) finally (and I am ashamed to say so, since our race is the last and most savage in the series) Europeans, who in those remote epoch, frankly did not cut too fine a figure in the world.



(Above) Modern scientists at work in the complex at Saqqara built by Imhotep over 2,500 years ago. In the background is his famous Step Pyramid. (Left) The original Rosetta Stone now in the British Museum has remained one of the major pieces of evidence proving that the creators of Ancient Egypt were black Africans.

"This manner of viewing the tableau is accurate, because on the other tombs, the same generic names reappear always in the same order. We find there, Egyptians and Africans represented in the same way, which could not be otherwise; but Namou (the Asian) and Talmou (Indo-Europeans) present significant and curious variants.

"I certainly did not expect, on arriving here to find sculptures that could serve as vignettes for history of primitive Europeans, if ever one has the courage to attempt it. Nevertheless there is something flattering and consoling in seeing them, since they make us appreciate the progress we have subsequently achieved."

Amazing stuff, especially coming from a European.

The novitiates

There are two parts to the word "philosophy" as it comes to us from the Greeks: "Philo" meaning brother or lover and "Sophia" meaning wisdom or wise. Thus, a philosopher is called a "lover of wisdom". The origin of "Sophia" is clearly in the African language, Mdu Neter, the language of Ancient Egypt, where the word "Seba", meaning "the wise" appears first in 2052BC in the tomb of Antef I, long before the existence of Greece or Greek.

The word became "Sebo" in Coptic, and "Sophia" in Greek. As to "philosopher", the lover of wisdom that is precisely what is meant by "Seba", the wise, in ancient tomb writings of the Ancient Egyptians. By all Greek and ancient accounts, philosophy as we know it, began first with the black Africans around 2800BC – that is, 2,200 years before the appearance of the first so-called Greek philosopher.

Learning was until the modern age pointed to Africa where higher education began. It is here that the seven "Liberal Arts" originated from – the Ancient Egyptian mystical teachings which formed the basis of the priesthood, the custodians of learning.

Each novitiate had to be up to speed with the 42 *Books of Hermes* specialising in mathematics, hieroglyphics, etc, followed by applied science revealed by the monuments, engineering, and social science such as geography and economics.

From the writings of Diodorus, Herodotus, and Clement of Alexandria (all of whom visited Egypt), we learn that there were six orders of the African priesthood, and in procession they appear as such.

First comes the "singer" (including royal praise singers) bearing an instrument of music (*mbira* - still in use in Africa). Next comes the Horoscopus carrying the horologium or sun-dial (the Zodiac sign was first invented in Egypt; the first known zodiac was looted by Napoleon, it now hangs in the *Musée du Louvre*, Paris) followed by the Hierogrammat with feathers on their heads and papyrus (books) in their right hands, and the Pastophori carrying the symbol of the coiled serpent (or the original caduceus, the medical symbol). Next comes the Stolistes carrying a cubit of justices and a libation vessel. Then comes the Prophet carrying a vessel of water.

The masters

* **Imhotep**, 2700BC, was the first known recorded philosopher. Much of his writings have been looted or lost, but we know he was the builder of the first pyramid at Saqqara. Imhotep was also the first recorded physician, the first architect, and the first counsellor to a king recorded in history. The reports of his life and work on the walls of temples and in books indicate the esteem in which he was held. Among other notable African philosophers are:

* **Ptahhotep**, 2414BC, the first ethical philosopher. He believed that life consisted of making harmony and peace with nature. All discourse on the relationship between humans and nature must give credit to the life of Ptahhotep.

* **Kagemni**, 2300BC, the first teacher of right action for the sake of goodness rather than personal advantage. He came upon the human scene as an African philosopher nearly 1,800 years before Buddha.

* **Merikare**, 1990BC, he valued the art of good speech. His classical teachings on good speech were recorded and passed down from generation to generation.

* **Schotep-ibra**, 1991BC, the first philosopher who espoused a sort of nationalism based on allegiance and loyalty to a political leader.

* **Amen-emhat**, 1991BC, the world's first cynic. He expressed a cynical view of intimates and friends, warning that one must not trust those who are close to you.

* **Amenhotep**, son of Hepu, 1400BC, was the most revered of the ancient Kemetic philosophers. He was considered the "son of God", a master-saint long before Jesus.

* **Duauf**, 1340BC, was seen as the master of protocols. He was concerned with reading books for wisdom, the first intellectual in the history of philosophy.

Greek philosophers

Thales of Miletus is considered the first Western philosopher. He travelled to Kemet as stated by himself and advised his students to go to Africa to study. Deodorise Siculus, the Greek writer, came to Africa and stayed at Anu in Egypt. He admitted that many who are "celebrated among the Greeks for intelligence and learning" studied in Egypt.

When Africans finished building the pyramids in 2500BC, it was 1,700 years before Homer, the first Greek writer, began writing *The Iliad*, the European classic. Homer is said to have spent seven years in Africa, and studied law, philosophy, religion, astronomy, and politics. Many of the great European philosophers studied in Africa because it was the educational capital of the ancient world. Pythagoras is known to have spent over 20 years in Africa. When Socrates wrote of his studies in the book *Bucyrus*, he admitted categorically: "I studied philosophy and medicine in Egypt." He did not study these subjects in Greece, but in Africa!

In the area of medicine, the Africans (Ancient Egyptians) wrote such medical books as the *Hears Papyrus* (7th Dynasty 2000BC), the *Kahun Papyrus* (12th and 13th Dynasty 2133-1766BC) which contains gynaecological treatments, and the *Ebers Papyrus* (18th Dynasty 1500BC).

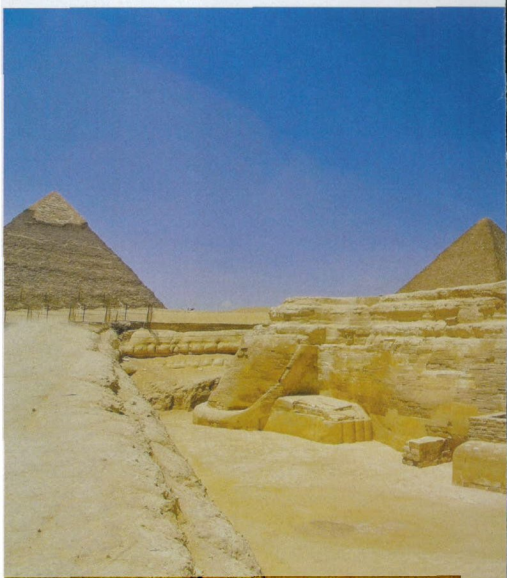
On the walls of the Temple of Kom Ombo, they left records of the original medical tools they used in their operations. These tools consist of forceps, aircurps, knives, sponge, scissors, triceps, a balance to weigh portions of medicine, retractor to separate skin, birthing or delivery chair, and the origin of the modern-day RX prescription symbol.

In 47BC, the medical doctors in ancient Kemet delivered Cleopatra VII's son named Caesarion ("Little Caesar"). The medical procedure performed by these African doctors in the BC era to deliver this boy-child was named after Little Caesar, from which we now have the medical term "Caesarean Section".

When African doctors were writing these medical texts and performing all these medical operations, Hippocrates, the Greek (now said to be the "father of medicine") was not yet born, until 333BC, almost 2,000 years later.

Recently, Dr Jackie Campbell, a member of a British research team from the KNH Centre for Biological Egyptology at the University of Manchester, who examined medical papyri dating back to the 1500BC era – a whole 1,000 years before the birth of Hippocrates – affirmed that: "Classical scholars have always considered the Ancient Greeks, particularly Hippocrates, as being the fathers of medicine, but our findings suggest that the Ancient Egyptians were practising a credible form of pharmacy and medicine much earlier."

Imhotep, the world's "first recorded multi-genius" is the *real* "father of medicine". He was born in 2800BC, so instead of modern doctors taking the derived Hippocratic Oath, medical students today



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should take the true, original Imhotep Oath.

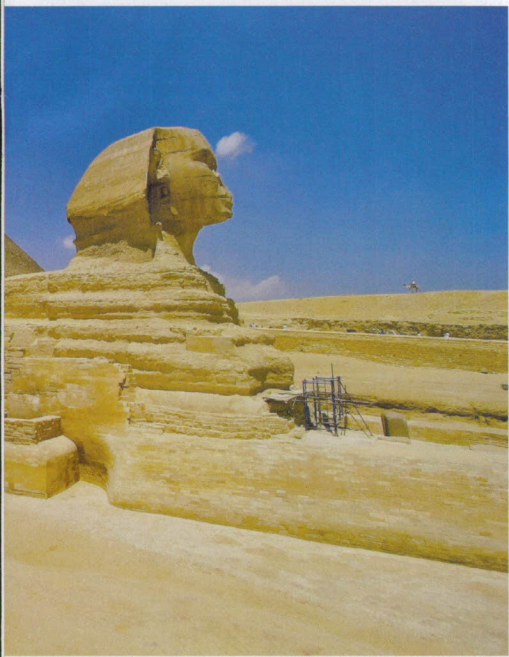
The renowned African-American scholar, Molefi Kete Asante, states in his classic book, *Ancient Egyptian Philosophers*: "When the Egyptians crossed the Mediterranean, becoming the foundation of the Greek culture, Imhotep's teachings were absorbed there. Yet, as the Greeks were determined to assert that they were the originators of everything, Imhotep was forgotten for thousands of years and a legendary figure, Hippocrates, who came 2,000 years after him became known as the Father of Medicine."

As a philosopher, Imhotep is credited with having written the slogan: "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we shall die."

In the arena of city planning, the Africans/Kemites invented the concept of a province or district which they called a "Nome"; there were 42 Nomes in ancient Kemet. The Greeks would later call these, "city states".

After the death of Aristotle, his Athenian pupils undertook to compile a history of philosophy, recognised at that time as the Sophia or Wisdom of the Egyptians, which had become current and traditional in the ancient world. This history was later erroneously called Greek philosophy.

In fact, the mathematical system that is the spinal cord of the computer in our AD era was invented by the Kemites in the BC era –



ie, the Binary mathematical system. These facts, therefore, prove that we cannot have a world of today and even a Europe of today if we did not have a Kemet ("land of the blacks", as Ancient Egyptians called their land) of yesterday in Africa.

The A-List

Almost every Greek philosopher worth his salt, from the Ionian school consisting of Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, and Democritus to the Athenian school spent time in Africa or their tutors were taught by African philosophers. After nearly 3,000 years of prohibition against the Greeks, they were allowed to enter Kemet to study. This was made possible, first, through the Persian invasion and, secondly, through the invasion of Alexander the Great (from the 6th century BC) to the death of Aristotle (322 BC). When Egypt came under Roman control, they looted and ransacked the great libraries of Egypt. This continued when Napoleon's invading army arrived in Egypt in 1798 AD. Indeed, Democritus, another Greek historian, accused his fellow Greek, Anaxagoras, of having "stolen" the Egyptian mystical teachings on the sun and moon, and passed it round as his.

The death of Aristotle, who had inherited a vast quantity of books from the libraries of Egypt through his friendship with Alexander the Great, was naturally followed by the death of Greek philosophy which

degenerated into a system of borrowed ideas, known by themselves as eclecticism.

The compilation of Greek philosophy (if not at the instigation of Aristotle himself, certainly students of his school) was not authorised by the Greek government which persecuted the Greek philosophers since it considered philosophy as African and foreign to Greek sensibilities, and thus could lead to the corruption of the youth.

As a result, Anaxagoras was indicted and fled from prison to exile in Ionia. Socrates was also executed for exhibiting some of the qualities mandatory for initiation into ancient African mystical teachings. Plato was also persecuted and fled to Megara for refuge.

***Thales of Miletus** (624-547BC): He left his country and studied with the wise men of Egypt, but was taken captive when the Persian king Cambyses invaded Ancient Egypt. His belief in reincarnation was formulated in Africa, a belief which is still prevalent in modern Africa, before the advent of Islam and Christianity. At the end of the sixth century, Thales lived in the city of Miletus, now western Turkey. According to Herodotus, Thales was of Phoenician descent. He moved to southern Italy, where he founded a community of philosophers. The Greek scholar, Iamblichus, wrote that Thales made it clear to Pythagoras that he (Pythagoras) had to go to Memphis, in Egypt, to study. Thales added that if the source of his knowledge came from his studies and tutelage under African masters in Egypt, Pythagoras could not afford not to go there.

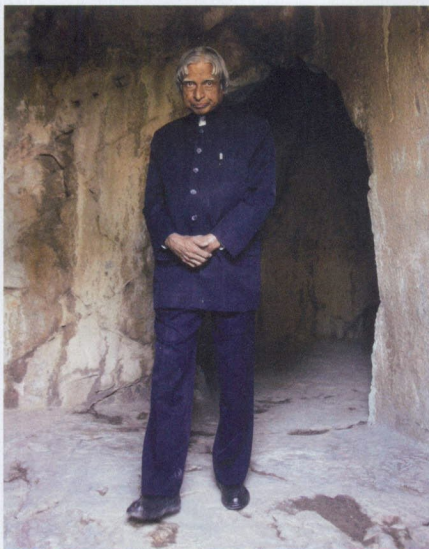
Plato also records that Thales was educated in Egypt under the priests: "Thales was well and truly indebted to Egypt for his education." The science of geometry was invented in Africa by Africans, and Thales transferred the speculative science of geometry to Greece.

***Socrates** (469-399BC): St. Clement of Alexandria, the Greek, stated that "if you were to write a book of 1,000 pages, you could not put down the names of all the Greeks who went to the Nile Valley in Ancient Egypt to be educated, and even those who did not go claim they went because it was prestigious". Socrates lived in Athens and wrote nothing himself, he was interested in ethics. It was his axiom that no one would knowingly do a bad thing. So knowledge was important, because it resulted in good behaviour, yet through his pupil Plato, Socrates has influenced the entire history of Western thought, culture and morality.

He travelled to Africa for his early education and was the most spiritually bent amongst the Greek philosophers that came to Africa. He was falsely accused and condemned to death at 70 years of age for "corrupting the youth of Athens" by drinking a cup of hemlock.

While awaiting condemnation in prison, he admitted to his pupils that he plagiarised (if not word for word) the work of the African philosopher, Aesop, the Ethiopian (560BC). Said Socrates: "I availed myself of some of Aesop's fables which were ready to hand and familiar to me and I verified the first of them that suggested themselves." He is credited with the axiom: "Man know thyself" (in Greek Hellenic language, "gnothi seauton"). The truth is that the original glory of these words were already written by ancient Africans on the outside walls of temples some 2,000 years before Socrates came to learn its spiritual import. He stayed for over 10 years in Africa, according to his own biography.

***Plato** (428-347BC). He was one of Socrates' pupils and many of his writings (called "dialogues") contained conversations with Socrates. Plato's most famous work, *The Republic*, was chiefly concerned with the best form of life for men and states. He died aged 81 and was



Socrates (like his fellow philosophers persecuted by the Greek government) returned from Africa with knowledge deemed too radical, and was later condemned to death. Today his prison has become a shrine, visited by both the low and the mighty, including, here, the former Indian president, Abdul Kalam

buried in Athens at the Academy, a school which he founded. Most of his doctrines are eclectic and point to Ancient Egyptian source. He copied his so-called four virtues: wisdom, justice, courage and temperance from the original African (Ancient Egyptian) spiritual belief system which contained 10 virtues. The Greeks re-named this belief system the "Mystery System".

After the death of Socrates, Plato left for Egypt where he studied for a period of 13 years. His mentor was Sennuphis (or Seneferu), a scholar and philosopher priest of Anu (Heliopolis). Strabo, the Greek historian who later travelled through Egypt, states that his "Egyptian guide showed him where Plato had lived, it was how Plato learned the fable of Thoth (Djehuti – African god of wisdom and sacred text) and Amun, which he wrote down in *Phaedrus*".

* **Pythagoras** (582-500BC). A native of Samos, he was born in circa 572BC. Like his contemporaries, he journeyed in his youth to Egypt where he studied for almost 15 years. He travelled to Egypt for the purpose of education, and took advantage of the friendship between his fellow Greek Polycrates and Pharaoh Amasis. Polycrates gave Pythagoras a letter of introduction to Pharaoh Amasis. He pursued studies in astronomy, geometry, and theology under the tutelage of Egyptian priests.

However, more than 1,000 years before him, Africans (Ancient Egyptians) had correctly calculated the areas of rectangles, triangles,

isosceles, trapeziums, and the area of a circle had also been obtained accurately. Iamblichus, a fellow Greek philosopher recorded in *The Life of Pythagoras*: "Thales laying stress on his advance age and the infirmities of the body, advised (Pythagoras) to go to Egypt to get in touch with the priests of Memphis (Menef). Thales confessed that the instruction of these priests was the source of his own reputation for wisdom, while neither his own endowments nor achievement equaled those which were evident in Pythagoras. Thales insisted that, in view of all this, he (Pythagoras) should study with those priests, he was certain of becoming the wisest and most divine."

The Pythagorean Theorem is a theorem stating that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Pythagoras travelled to Africa and was taught geometry by his African teachers (high priests) and was shown the proof of the theorem of the square on the hypotenuse of a right angle triangle. Africans had been using this principle for over 1,000 years before Pythagoras set foot on the continent. He did not discover this proof and it is therefore misleading to name the theorem after him (*Herodotus Bk III, Diogenes BK VII*).

* **Aristotle** (385-322BC). A pupil of Plato's, Aristotle was born in Thracia (now mostly Bulgaria) and joined Plato's Academy at the age of 18. After Plato's death, Aristotle left Athens and was afterwards invited by Philip of Macedonia to be a tutor to his son Alexander (who became Alexander the Great). Years later, Aristotle returned to Athens to found a rival school, the Lyceum, where he laid the foundations of various sciences including biology and zoology.

Aristotle's works include *Metaphysics* and *Ethics*. His main works are *Prior Analytics* (in which he described the rules of logic), *Physics*, *Animal History*, *Rhetorics*, *Poetics*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*. Considered by modern Western scholars as the most influential philosopher of all ages and the founder of modern science, he is supposed to have spent over 20 years as a pupil under Plato.

He accompanied Alexander the Great when he invaded and conquered Egypt and helped himself to the libraries of all the major cities of Ancient Egypt. He is credited with writing 1,000 books on different subjects, a sheer impossibility for any individual in a lifetime.

* **The Unmoved Mover** (*proton kinoun akineton*): This doctrine, like the many others that the Greek appropriated, has been ascribed to Aristotle where he proves the existence of God. But according to the African-American writer, George G. M. James in his book *Stolen Legacy*, the "Unmoved Mover" is the essential trust of the sacred African text recorded in "*The Memphite Theology*" thousands of years before Aristotle was born.

It is the first recorded story of creation known in the world, now kept in the British Museum. During the reign of Pharaoh Shabaka, the Nubian king, now Sudan, he ordered a copy of this story to be recorded on a slab, referred to as the "Shabaka Stone". It is from this theology that Aristotle derived and plagiarised his concept of the "Unmoved Mover".

The Memphite Theology is an African authoritative statement that contains the cosmology, theology and philosophy of the Ancient Egyptians (older than any religious text in the history of humanity) and should form the basis of classic African philosophy and taught in our universities, and not the carbon copies from Greece and elsewhere. The achievements of our forebears to the advancement of humanity need to be reclaimed, for it underscores how the world measures and values us. ■ **NA**