

Table I. Microsatellite Instability in Neurofibromas of Two Related NF-1 Patients^a

Markers	T1	T2	T3	T4
D2S123	+	-	-	-
D9S126	+	+	+	-
D9S196	-	+	+	-
D9S287	-	+	-	-
D9S176	-	+	+	-
D9S127	-	-	+	-

^a Three neurofibromas of the father (T1, T2, T3) and one of the daughter (T4) were analyzed at 23 microsatellite loci. Altered microsatellite markers are shown.

suggests that this genetic event may be characteristic of the late stages of tumor development. On the other hand, the increased susceptibility to environmental factors, probably involved in neurofibroma tumorigenesis, may also explain differences between individuals.

Multiple genes responsible for several genodermatoses have been recently mapped on chromosome 9 (Pericak-Vance *et al*, 1995). Our finding of multiple alterations on chromosome 9 indicates that "modifying genes" (Easton *et al*, 1993), unlinked to the NF-1 locus and located in the regions we analyzed, might have a role in the pathogenesis of neurofibromas in NF-1 patients. Further investiga-

tions on a larger number of NF-1 patients are needed to clarify the precise role of chromosome 9 in the development of these tumors.

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Black Skin and the Ideal of Beauty

To the Editor:

أهدد صبا به سبا مي فرستمت

Oh lapwing East! To Saba hence I send thee . . .
(Hafiz, ~1325-1389)

Black skin has unjustifiably been equaled with negative values of the bearer since at least the time of Ancient Rome two thousand years ago (Habermehl 1992). Proverbial and indiscriminate use of *black* as a synonym for bad, malicious, repugnant, was perpetuated. The ideal of beauty, female beauty at that, was pale or white throughout the Old World from the coast of Ireland to the Sea of Japan (Holubar and Schmidt, 1994). Christian mythology, rooted in classical Roman fundamentals, carried these traditions into present day. Liberation movements in the second half of this century led to the slogan *black is beautiful*, coined to boost the self confidence and pride of more heavily pigmented clines (Holubar and Schmidt, 1994) of man.

What should be proven in the following is that black did not necessarily constitute a derogative designation in earlier times, but rather served to depict an exception from the pale-complexioned peoples in various Old World societies over the centuries.

The argument shall be exemplified with the aid of a black beauty of the High Middle Ages, the Queen of Sheba of Biblical fame, a descendant of Kush and Ham, who is presumed to have been black. She is a well known figure in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic lore and has been depicted time and again. According to the Bible (1 Kings X:1-13 and 2 Chronicles IX:1-12) the queen visited Solomon to present him with riches and to question him. According to Koranic tradition (Sura XXVII), Solomon sent a bird to deliver a letter and to summon her to Jerusalem. This bird, in Hebrew, is called dukhipat (דוכיפת); in Arabic, hudhud (هدهد); in English, hoopoe; in Biblical tradition (Leviticus XI:19) it is an unclean bird, but one that guards treasures and carries the shamir (Hebrew, שמיר), the

wondrous worm that split the stones for the Temple because iron tools were forbidden.

One of the most elaborate and comprehensive illustrations of the Story of Salvation is the romanesque enamel alter of Nicholas of Verdun, France, finished before A.D. 1181 in the monastery of Klosterneuburg in the suburbs of Vienna and preserved on site since (Röhrig, 1994). In this altar the Queen of Sheba is beautifully depicted with a black face and black hands (Fig 1). She is elegantly positioned between King Solomon sitting on his throne and one of her servants kneeling before the monarch—she is a classical ideal of female beauty, at the same time a late echo of the beauties of antiquity and a harbinger of the gothic madonnas soon to follow.

In light-complexioned societies, the ideals of male and female beauty usually were white. Europe, Near and Middle East, China, and Japan may be viewed as the historical habitat of light-complexioned peoples. Literary sources including holy scriptures, proverbs, and miniatures illustrate this point. King David, a redhead in Biblical tradition and a central figure of the Old Testament, serves as a good example (1 Samuel XVI:12; reading in Hebrew, hu admoni, הו אדמוני). The most famous Chinese poetess, Li Ching Chao 李清照 (1084-1151), wrote *red silk gauze so sheer my white skin shines through*. (Watson, 1984), 綉銷縷薄冰肌莹. (phonetically translating into: jiàng xiāo lóu báo bīng jī yīng). The Japanese proverb has it that *white skin makes up for seven defects* 色ノ白イハ七難隠ス, (Japanese phonetically translates into *irono shiro iwa schichinan kakusu*). Historically, both Chinese and Japanese see themselves as *white*, caucasians of European ancestry as *translucent*. This is a very good observation indeed if one looks at the skin of phototype I persons, in whom blue veins, red capillaries, and yellow elastosis shine through. Women are less strongly pigmented because in many societies women are more likely to stay indoors and are less exposed to environmental ultraviolet light. The above Japanese proverb uses *shiro*, 白, *white*, pronounced *bai* in Chinese, as a character. The Chinese verse is less trivial, utilizing the character, *yíng*, 莹 *shiny*,



Figure 1. Depiction of the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon and two servants. (Enamel altar of Nicholas of Verdun, before A.D. 1181, Monastery of Klostersneuburg, Austria)

translucent, which incorporates the character 玉, jade, 玉, to indicate the lustrous quality of pale skin.

Over the 2-1/2 millennia of which we have a written tradition

of Western and Eastern societies, persons of dark complexion always constituted exceptions from the rule, and the fact of darker skin in a particular individual merited special mention. Sappho, the great poetess of about 600 B.C., was dark. μικρὰ καὶ μέλαινα. *small and black* she is called by Maximus of Tyrus. Ovid has her say, *caudida si non sum, (but white I am not)* (Wissowa *et al*, 1968). Sunburn is considered cosmetically undesirable, both in the Song of Songs 1:6, *don't look at me, I am tanned*, reading in Hebrew, *al tirani sheani shekharkhoret*, אַל תִּרְאֵנִי שְׂאֵנִי שֶׁחַרְחֹרֶת and in the play *Dyskolos* by Menandros (342/1-291/0 B.C.) where Knemon says, *He is sunburned, is he a farmer?* (act IV, verse 754) ἐπικεκαυται μὲν. γεωργός ἐστι;

What can be concluded from this literary excursion? Black as a color is as neutral in its value as is white or any other. Ideals of beauty are white in white societies, black in black ones. Due to media domination (script, printing, libraries, etc.) by pale-complexioned peoples as much as by the spread of religions, Christianity primarily, prevailing white views became common-place. Circumstances facilitated such a stance; because night is dark and to sense fear in the dark night is easier than in bright daylight, to compare dark to frightening is not unnatural. It is immoral though, if such epithets are applied to fellow man. This notwithstanding, black historically was not synonymous with ugly; on the contrary, it could, in white societies as well as dark ones, be a facet of beauty and attraction (from the Queen of Sheba to Josephine Baker, Whitney Houston and Naomi Campbell), of admiration (Grace Bumbry or Leontyne Price), or of veneration (the black madonnas of Jasna Gora, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (Sara), and elsewhere).

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