

PART II. THE HELIOPOLITAN SYSTEM



CHAPTER SIX

HELIOPOLIS AND SOLAR THEOLOGY

The origin of the cycle of creation centered in the god Atum and his Ennead is a city which lay in ancient times on the eastern bank of the Nile at the head of the Delta; the city is known to modern research as Heliopolis, the name given it by the Greeks because of its emphasis on the worship of the sun. The approximate location of the ancient structures of the city is about seven miles north of modern Cairo; this means that Heliopolis itself was only about twenty miles northeast of the site of Memphis, a fact that was undoubtedly important to the thought of both cities.

The Egyptian name for the city of Heliopolis throughout the whole of Egypt's history was Twn, known to the authors of the Old Testament as On.¹ The name seems to have derived from a prehistoric "pillar worship", the traces of which can be seen in historic texts; the "cult" itself plays a minor part in the thought of the city.² The relation between the "pillar worship" and the Heliopolitan Ennead seems to be the same thing in Heliopolis that the relation between the hare-goddess and the Ogdoad was in Hermopolis: a case of the overshadowing of an earlier form of religious worship by a later theological system based on philosophical speculation. In Hermopolis the change is reflected in the two names Wnw and Hmnw, but in Heliopolis the city-name Twn was retained throughout history alone.

Unlike Hermopolis, the city of Heliopolis did not have to share the claim to its Ennead with other cities; even in earliest times the Ennead was a well-defined concept and its connection with Heliopolis was just as defined. The Pyramid Texts often refer the group to Heliopolis: "the great Ennead which is in Heliopolis" (Pyr. 1655a). Undoubtedly it was this early and positive formulation of the system of Heliopolis which allowed

its influence to become so widespread. There is hardly a doubt as to the extent of the influence which the theological constructs of Heliopolis exercised on the rest of Egyptian religion; the concept of the Ennead, for instance, had a profound influence from the beginning of the Old Kingdom (Dynasty III), and the form was adopted in most of the other theological systems in Egypt.³ And, as Frankfort states, the influence of Heliopolis "was based, not on political developments, but on the quality of its theologians and their sustained preoccupation with the formulation of beliefs which had been held in one form or another by most of the Egyptians from a distant past."⁴ Our examination of this influence must, therefore, proceed within the religious context and along the lines dictated by the religious evidence which has come down to us. This evidence takes primarily the form of the indications of Heliopolitan influence in the royal names of the Old Kingdom and in the type and location of the religious edifices of that same period. These two areas have a special significance; since the rise of Heliopolitan influence took place in a time for which extant documents are scarce, any indication of the acceptance of Heliopolitan forms by the royal circle, and the concretization of that acceptance in the religious architecture, will be an important criterion for judging the extent and the rate of its growth.

The surest sign of the acceptance of Heliopolitan forms comes in the Old Kingdom religious documents which we do possess; of these, nearly the totality is contained in the Pyramid Texts, a corpus of funerary spells which is almost the Bible of the Heliopolitan system. These spells were inscribed in the Pyramids of the Vth and VIth Dynasty kings, but general opinion holds them to be much earlier creations, perhaps even anterior to Dynasty I.⁵ It is at any rate certain that the texts incorporate usages and whole sections which are anterior to the culture of the Vth and VIth Dynasties, and the fact that they are assured Heliopolitan creations indicates a vein of

theological thought reaching back to the earliest days of Egyptian history.⁶ Therefore, even in the face of the absence of archeological remains before Dynasty III in Heliopolis itself, we can safely assume that the city's cosmogony had its beginnings in the Archaic Period or even earlier.⁷ Before Dynasty III, the activity was probably concentrated in Heliopolis, about twenty miles upstream (south) of Heliopolis; excavations there have revealed an extensive protodynastic complex with Heliopolitan characteristics.⁸

Heliopolis itself, however, is noted less for its formulations concerning Atum and the Ennead than for the fact that the sun-god Rē' had his home and probably his origin there.⁹ Around this god, Heliopolis developed a solar theology which was the keynote of the city's influence; so predominant was the solar theme, in fact, that the cosmogonic Atum, who was originally distinct from Rē', became associated with the sun-god in the late Old Kingdom.¹⁰ As might be expected, then, the rise of Heliopolitan influence took the form of a spread of the solar "cult" and its growing acceptance by the rank and file of Egyptians.¹¹


It is in the acceptance of the sun-god's name into the royal titulary that the first traces of an Egypt-wide consciousness of the god's existence and importance can be seen. The first appearance of Rē' in a royal name occurs in the Horus-name of a king of the IIInd Dynasty, Ra'nib or Nibrē'.¹² The fact that it is the Horus-name of the king in which Rē' appears is significant, for it probably indicates the royal nature of the god even at this early date. To Dynasty II may also belong the name of an ephemeral king Neferkarē' listed in the Abydos and Saqqâra king-lists and in the Turin Canon, but it is equally possible that the name is the nsw-bit name of Dynasty III's Kha'ba. Dynasty III shows the first certain instance of a nsw-bit name compounded with Rē', in Nibkarē', the nsw-bit name of the Horus Zinakhete. Beginning with Ra'djedef

in Dynasty IV, the practice becomes fairly common and increases in regularity until, from Dynasty XI onwards, the nsw-bit name of every king is compounded with Rē'. In Dynasty V, Rē' becomes part of the royal titulary itself in the "Son of Rē'" title, first borne by the nsw-bit Neferirkarē', Son of Rē' Kakai. From Kakai on, all the kings of Egypt have the title as part of their titulary; where it is not known for a particular king, it has not been recovered by modern research.

The existence of these Rē'-compounds in the royal names of the Old Kingdom thus indicates an awareness of the sun-god's existence already in the IInd Dynasty (of Thinite origin, in Lower Egypt) and a gradual growth in recognition in the early Old Kingdom until the Vth and VIth Dynasties, which are predominantly solar in their orientation. The latter fact is attested more strongly by the various architectural evidence of the Old Kingdom. Emery has noted that "prior to recent discoveries at Saqqâra it was generally believed that sun worship only became the religion of the state during the Pyramid Age, but the existence of the graves of funerary [solar] barks attached to the big tombs at Saqqâra and later found with the burials of the nobility at Helwân show that [this] belief ... was generally accepted, even as early as the commencement of the First Dynasty."¹³ What is true for the maṣṭaba-tombs of the Archaic Period is perhaps even more so for the Pyramids begun in Dynasty III and continued into Dynasties V and VI, since one of the commonest features of the Pyramid complexes is the burial of a solar bark nearby.¹⁴

The important fact about the Pyramids is that, as Breasted first suggested, their form was derived from the benben stone, a Heliopolitan sun-symbol.¹⁵ Significant as it is, the evidence of the benben-stone is not the sole indication that the Pyramids were influenced by the solar theology of Heliopolis; we have already noted the fact that the buildings themselves were often complemented by the co-interment of a solar bark and by the inscription of the Pyramid Texts in their inner

chambers. In addition to these practices, the construction of buildings of a more directly heliolatric nature, the sun-temples, is a clear indication of the religious influence exercised by Heliopolis.

Although six sun-temples were built in all, by six kings of the Vth Dynasty, only two have been recovered, those of Userkaf, first king of the Dynasty, and Niuserrē Iny, his fifth successor.¹⁶ Both of these temples have as their focal point "a rather squat obelisk perched on a square base like a truncated Pyramid , " which recalls the benben of Heliopolis.¹⁷ However, the obelisk in Userkaf's temple is probably a later addition, "and the suggestion has been made that the maṣṭaba-like construction which eventually served as its podium was intended by Userkaf to symbolize the primeval hill."¹⁸ Userkaf bore no Rē'-compounded names, although he was the founder of the Heliopolitan-oriented Vth Dynasty. The placing of the obelisk on his temple (the first of the sun-temples) by the time of his second successor, therefore, may well be one of the first signs of complete recognition of the Heliopolitan theology.

Together with the knowledge that the true Pyramid was based on Heliopolitan conceptions,* the evidence of the last paragraph allows us to place rather precisely the official establishment of the Heliopolitan system. The evidence of the royal names indicates a period of installation in the IIIrd and IVth Dynasties with a comfortable stabilization in Dynasty V. It is further known that the Bent Pyramid built under Snofru at Dahshūr in the beginning of the IVth Dynasty was the first Pyramid to be planned from the start as a true Pyramid.¹⁹ However, it is not until the first half of the Vth Dynasty that solar architecture becomes the norm. These facts, taken as a whole, thus indicate that Heliopolis first began to concentrate on Rē' at the end of the Archaic Period, that the theology built around the god was stabilized in the first Dynas-

*See n. 15 to this chapter.

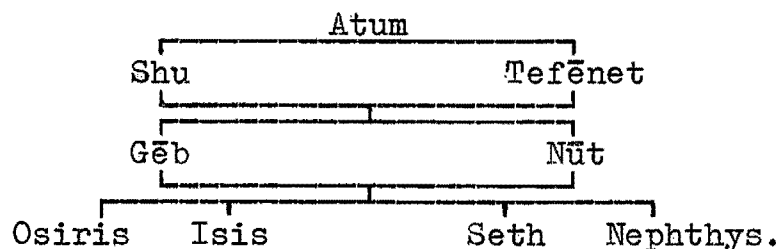
ties of the Old Kingdom, and that this stabilized formulation became the norm in the last Dynasties of that period. This chronology coincides with the dating suggested by other evidence more purely mythological, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Whatever the date of the rise of the national influence of the Heliopolitan solar theology, it was certainly in predominance by the middle of Dynasty V, just before the first Pyramid Texts were inscribed, and its influence continued predominant throughout Egyptian history. It is clear from the whole structure of Egyptian religious expression that the system formulated by Heliopolis was felt to express most satisfactorily the basic beliefs of all Egyptians. It is because of this fact that "from the time of Djosér in the twenty-eighth century B.C., the doctrines of Heliopolis were developed to become the nearest approach to an orthodoxy known in Egypt."²⁰

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ENNEAD

Despite the fact that Heliopolis was most noted for its development of the solar theology surrounding Rē', as we saw in the last chapter, it is not the sun-god but the concept of the Ennead which is the most characteristically Heliopolitan creation. Like the Ogdoad of Hermopolis, the Ennead is a collective designation. Unlike the former group, however, the Ennead expresses the association of its members in a genealogical manner; in its traditional conception, this relation takes the following form:



The origin of the Ennead as a collective concept is somewhat nebulous. Kees has dated it to the Thinite epoch (Dynasties I-II) on the basis of its concretization of the important religious and royal institutions of Egypt, but most scholars prefer a somewhat more general dating, between Dynasties II and V (the Old Kingdom).¹ The concept itself was probably prefigured, as Schott suggested, by the group called the Bꜥw Tw̃n, the "Ba's (emanations, manifestations) of Heliopolis."² The Bꜥw Tw̃n, which figures strongly in some of the older Pyramid Texts, is itself probably a collective designation for two other groups, the Bꜥw P (Ba's of Pe, predynastic Buto) and Bꜥw Nhn (Ba's of Hierakonpolis).³ Most of the available evidence suggests that these two groups, the Ba's of Buto and Hierakonpolis, are the respective predynastic kings of the cities, divinized, despite Kees' contention that they represent the assembled gods of the two halves of the country.⁴ The develop-



ment of the full Ennead from these groups seems assured by a Pyramid Texts which speaks of the Ennead as "foremost of the Bꜥw Tw̃n," and probably occurred sometime in the Archaic Period.⁵ It is certain that the group had been formulated by the reign of Djos̃er, at the beginning of Dynasty III, since its members appear together on monuments of the time, in anthropomorphic guise.⁶

The writing used to express the concept "Ennead" is, in the earliest sources, composed of the sign for "god" repeated nine times.⁷ In the columnar style in which the Pyramid Texts were inscribed, this becomes an arrangement of three groups of three, one after the other. That the Ennead represents a company of gods is certain, from the sign employed in the writing, from the qualification of adjectives such as "divine", and from the simple fact that the word is often followed by a list of the gods composing the group.⁸ The original membership of the Ennead, however, is in doubt, not so much from later texts (of which Pyr. 1655 is the earliest) in which the composition of the group is unequivocally enumerated, but from lists of both early and late date which present a membership including not only some different gods, but in numbers greater than nine. Moreover, the Pyramid Texts alone mention two theoretically distinct Enneads (ps̃dty).⁹

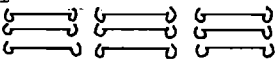
The first Ennead, called 'ꜥt, the "Great Ennead", is specifically Heliopolitan; the Pyramid Texts often qualify it as "the Great Ennead which is in Heliopolis."¹⁰ The membership of this Ennead appears well established in the later Pyramid Texts, and consists of the gods presented on the preceding page. It is an interesting fact, however, that in most of the cases in which the Great Ennead appears, it is the five "cosmological" deities (Atum, Shu, Tef̃net, Gēb, Nūt) who are spoken of, and more often than not, merely the first three of these.¹¹

The second Ennead is called wrt, which also means "great", but which in this context, as in others, is perhaps better ren-

dered as "old" or "elder", since wrt often has that connotation.¹² The "Great Ennead" and the "Old Ennead" are not mentioned together in the Pyramid Texts, except for the one instance of Pyr. 1689, where the two adjectives 'ity wrty following psdty may be an indication that the psdty is actually composed of the two Enneads, as we would expect.* On the whole, it is interesting to note that psdty is not written as a true dual, but rather with eighteen ntr-signs unseparated by other signs or by a space.¹³ Taking into account the fact that the "Great Ennead" is usually connected with the five cosmological deities alone, together with the derivation of the concept of the Ennead from that of the Bw Twn, we may be able to posit a hypothesis to account for all these usages and for the true significance of the Ennead itself.

We have noted above the fact that the known membership of the traditional Ennead sometimes varies, even to the extent of the inclusion of more than nine gods.¹⁴ We have also seen how the concept which is translated "Ennead" was expressed in the earliest writing by the sign for "god" disposed in three groups of three each. Now the Egyptians, following the custom of many primitive peoples, conceived the notion of "number" in a linear fashion, concretely expressed as single strokes, thus: one |, two ||, three |||, four ||||, and so on. In addition, the Egyptians indicated the concept of plurality by a three-fold repetition of the ideogram or determinative-sign, as in  prw, "houses",  nhwt, "trees"; in later times, this method was replaced by an abbreviation using three strokes ||| in place of the repetition of signs.¹⁵ In each case, however, the thought was of an indefinite number rather than of three objects. Considering the writing of "Ennead" in the Pyramid Texts, it is possible the substantive formed by the nine-fold repetition of signs was conceived not as a designation of nine gods, but as "a plural to the second power, a super-plural applicable to a group of unlimited individuals."¹⁶

*n. 5 to this chapter.

The most significant confirmation of this interpretation can be seen in a substantive which, in its graphical disposition, is so similar to that of the earliest writings of "Ennead" as to suggest that it partakes of the same conceptual approach. This is the phrase  psdt-(pdwt), "Nine Bows" which was used from the earliest days to indicate "not the nine neighboring countries of Egypt or those subject to its influence, but the totality of foreign lands, whatever their number."¹⁷ This meaning of the phrase is evident in a Pyramid Text which speaks of the king's rôle over all the universe:

Let him grasp the heavens
And receive the horizon;
Let him dominate the Nine Bows
And equip (with offerings) the Ennead (Pyr. 202).

The universal terms of the passage clearly indicate the indefinite conception of the Nine Bows, and thus, by extension, that of the Ennead as well. (It would be quite ridiculous for the king to be granted dominion over the heavens and the horizon while being limited to domination over a paltry nine countries on the earth itself).

Probably the most conclusive evidence of what Jéquier calls the "fluid" nature of the Ennead, the evidence which led to the formulation of the above theory in the first place, is contained in the Ennead lists of the Pyramid Texts. Of all these texts, only Pyr. 1655 gives the traditional membership of the Ennead as it appeared in later times; and Pyr. 1655 is one of the latest of the Pyramid Texts.¹⁸ Three significant earlier sections give an Ennead of members different not only in name but in numbers. Pyr. 168-176, which is Spell 219, enumerates in a list of invocations the membership of the "Great Ennead" as Atum-Shu-Tefēnet-Gēb-Nūt-Isis-Seth-Nephthys-Thoth-Horus (10 gods!), significantly excluding Osiris.¹⁹ Spell 580 (Pyr. 1546a-b) lists Atum, "father of the gods," together with Shu, Tefēnet, Gēb, Nūt, Isis, Nephthys, Mekhentierte, Kherte (two synonyms of Horus), and Seth, again excluding Osiris. Finally, Spell 577 (Pyr. 1521a-b), in a partially destroyed

list, gives as the Ennead (unspecified): Atum, "father of the gods," Shu, Tefēnet, Gēb, Nūt, Osiris, a name lost but restored as Isis, Seth, and another destroyed name, probably Nēith but perhaps also Nephthys.²⁰ The numbers of the Ennead fluctuate in later times also: a Theban Ennead consisted of fifteen members, an Abydene one, twelve.²¹

Several significant realities can be deduced from these Ennead lists of the early Pyramid Texts, outside the chief fact that the Ennead was not originally taken as a literal group of nine gods. First and most obvious among these is the fact that the fluctuation in name and numbers affects only the names following Nūt, while the first five gods (whom we shall refer to after this as the "Cosmological Cycle", for reasons that will be made clear at the end of this chapter and in the next) are preserved unaltered in all the lists. In Spell 219 Osiris is excluded and his place taken by Thoth and Horus, who often appear as a pair. Spell 580 also excludes Osiris, replacing him by Horus (under two names), who is often called the "tenth god."²² Spell 527 lists an almost complete Ennead in the traditional form, with the exception that Nephthys is probably replaced by Nēith, the Saite goddess of war.

It is a telling fact that Osiris is excluded in these lists, not only because the exclusion gives an indication of the date of Osiris' entrance into the Heliopolitan system* but also because it coincides with another characteristic known of Osiris, namely, that he is one of the Ba's of Hierakonpolis.²³ We shall see in Chapter 9 that the last four gods of the traditional Ennead are all connected in an intimate manner with the concept and function of kingship. It is significant, therefore, that the Ba's of Buto, Hierakonpolis, and Heliopolis, the precursors of the Ennead itself, are divinized kings, for there is strong evidence to indicate that the "Old Ennead" was itself composed of divinized kings and of gods whose personali-

*See also pp. 161-162, below.

ties echoed some important facet of kingship.²⁴ Add this to the fact that the "Great Ennead" is in most cases associated with the Cosmological Cycle, and a pattern begins to emerge.

We note that the traditional Ennead, which appears already in Pyr. 1655, is composed of two rather distinct "sections" or "cycles". On the one hand, there is the "Cosmological Cycle" composed of Atum, Shu, Tefēnet, Gēb, and Nūt, deities who personify elements of nature, as we shall see in the next chapter, and headed by the creator, Atum. On the other hand, there is the "Kingship Cycle", whose early membership fluctuates but whose gods are all associated with the concept of kingship.²⁵ Each of these cycles, moreover, are connected with a distinct Ennead -- the Cosmological Cycle with the Great Ennead and the Kingship Cycle with the Old Ennead. Further than this, the indefinite nature of the concept of the Ennead itself suggests that the gods associated with these two Enneads were in fact the members of their respective Enneads. This last is even more pronounced in the case of the Kingship Cycle and the Old Ennead, whose membership was fluid almost until the end of the Old Kingdom; the qualification "Old" may even reflect the greater age of this Ennead, and this is especially likely in view of the derivation of the Ennead from the collective designation of the predynastic divinized kings. The union of the Old Ennead with the Great Ennead was thus the second stage in the development of the traditional Ennead, first expressed by the simple juxtaposition of the two groups, the pśdty or "Double Ennead", and then by the concept of the Ennead alone. In later times (that is, later than the original union), the last concept became interpreted as a literal group of nine gods, and it was at that time that the membership of the Kingship Cycle became stabilized into its traditional form.

It should be apparent in considering these two Enneads or Cycles that what we are dealing with are two concepts, two theological formulations incorporated into one coherent whole. It was this incorporation which was the genius of the Heliopolitan

system, the "effective elaboration of common Egyptian beliefs" we noted in the last chapter* which was the key to the acceptance of Heliopolitan theology as the norm of Egyptian religion. The fluidity of the second Cycle, that of kingship, should not indicate to us that the concepts involved are any less detailed or explicit than those of the Cosmological Cycle; only that the notion of kingship was so important and so universal that the modes of its expression were as diverse as its applications. This explains why Horus was not included in the traditional Ennead once the form had become standardized and the original meaning subordinated (though not lost). I suspect that the priests of Heliopolis were not committed to any one particular expression of the kingship idea, as they were to their own formulation of cosmogony and cosmology, but that they attempted to introduce into the total system the most well-known, the most striking, the most apt or influential of the systems. Due to a combination of circumstances -- the stabilization of the Ennead into a literal nine members, the post-Unification concept of the king, and the incursion of the Osirian cycle -- they eventually arrived at a form which utilized the best and most significant ideas on the subject, a form which, while it excluded the god Horus (who had a much more existential role anyway⁺), not only expressed the notion of kingship in all its details but its bond with the forces of the natural order as well.

*Chap. 6 n. 11

⁺See Chap. 9 sub. E, below.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE COSMOLOGICAL CYCLE

B. van de Walle has noted that "the gods of the Ennead symbolize the different stages of the organization of the universe."¹ Nowhere is this more evident than in the natures and the functions of the first five gods of the Ennead, which we have designated as the Cosmological Cycle; Frankfort explains that "Atum, Shu, Tefēnet, Gēb, and Nūt represent a cosmology; their names describe primordial elements; their interrelations imply a story of creation."² In this chapter, we shall be examining the natures of four of these first five gods and the cosmology they represent, as a prerequisite to the discussion of their relation with the creator, Atum, and of the cosmogony implied by their functions.

A. Shu

The god Shu, who appears in the Ennead as the "son of Atum" and thus as the "father of Gēb and Nūt," has a long and complicated history: throughout Egyptian history he functions variously as a god of life, a god of the wind or air, a god of light, and a god who separates heaven and earth, or a personification of the atmosphere. Despite the fact that the first appearances of the god are in the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, it is in Spells 75-81 of the Coffin Texts, developed from the Pyramid Texts in the First Intermediate Period, that the largest and most complete exposition of Shu's various natures occurs. As such, they should be a good index of what was considered most significant in the character of the god.

The largest area of concentration of these "Shu Texts" is on Shu as a god of life. The creator himself says of Shu: "Life is his name," while Shu says the same thing from his own point of reference: "My name is Life, the son of Atum"; "I am Life, for whom the length and the breadth of heaven and earth

were made"; "I am indeed Life, which is under Nūt."³ But Shu is not merely Life in the abstract; he is the life of which men live:

I maintain them, I keep them in life through this my mouth: (I am) life which is in their nostrils ... I sustain all things which are upon the back of Gēb; indeed, I am life, which is under Nūt.(4)

What is important here, if we look a bit more carefully into the texts, is the figure behind the word "life", for Shu is presented as "life which is in their nostrils," in other words, Shu is the air or wind. We saw in Part I that Amūn was often viewed as the wind, and that this was an expression of the life-giving power which he possessed as creator.* Shu's case is different; where the wind is a secondary quality for Amūn, for Shu it is his very nature. As the god himself states: "I am aeriform by nature."⁵ A passage from the Shu Texts put the figure in even more striking terms:

I am Shu ... My garments are the wind of life which comes forth behind me from the mouth of Atum. The wind opens up along my path ... My skin is the pressure of the wind which comes forth after me from the mouth of Atum.(6)

It is for this reason that the texts can say of Shu: "he gives breath to the nose" and mean, in fact, that "he is the breath of life in all things; indeed, when he is absent, men die."⁷

Thus Shu is life because he is that without which men (and "all things") cannot live -- the air; he is the breath of life. An inscription from the temple of Amūn at el Kharga contains one of the fullest expositions of this truly universal importance of Shu:

Thou art Shu, thou art more exalted than all the gods; thou art holy of form in the four winds of heaven, of which men say that they come forth from the mouth of Thy Majesty. Ba of Shu, which supplies the wind for the sun-bark which daily traverses the sky, which lives in what Shu uplifts to the end of the circuit of heaven. When he comes into all the trees, they live, because their branches move to and fro. He makes the sky

*pp. 42-43, above.

rage and causes the sea to be in uproar, and they come to rest when he comes to rest ... his voice is heard but he is not seen, while he gives all throats to breathe ... Ba of Shu, which travels through the clouds, while he separates the sky from the earth. He is in all things: Life through which men live unto eternity.(8)

The inscription calls the air or wind the "Ba of Shu". This figure of speech is often used in place of the usual words for "wind", and the relation is borne out by another text: "the Ba of Shu unites itself with thy nostrils."⁹

It is well known that the ba is an emanation or manifestation of its possessor, and we shall have occasion to examine it as such in a later chapter. If, then, the air or wind is merely -- and properly -- the manifestation-emanation of Shu, what is Shu himself? The answer is suggested by the passage we have just cited: the wind "travels through the clouds", but it also "separates the sky from the earth." Shu is therefore the atmosphere itself, and his "emanation" is the wind; as van de Walle puts it: "Shu, whose name is properly connected with the root šwi, 'be empty', represents the transparent atmosphere separating the earth from the firmament or from the heavenly ocean, and evokes, by extension, the divine breath which vivifies all living beings."¹⁰ The reason for the appearance of Shu as the wind or air lies in the conceptual order, and is not difficult to discover, as Bonnet realized: "every emptiness is not a dead thing and is not nothing: it is air ... It does not only give life; it also supports the sky, under which it has been extended. The Egyptian experienced it as 'He who raises heaven with the breath of his mouth' and so named it Shu."¹¹ Bonnet's words are significant, for in their interpretation of the nature of Shu, they echo the Coffin Texts almost exactly: "I am Life, which is under Nūt."¹²

The conception of Shu as atmosphere is even more recognizable in the depictions of the god. The commonest of these pictures Shu as an anthropomorphic god placed between Nūt, the sky, while beneath his feet lies another anthropomorphic god, iden-

tified as Gēb, the earth (fig. 13). It is to this depiction that the Coffin Texts refer when they call Shu "he for whom the length of heaven and the breadth of the earth was made"; one of the text verbalizes the image in unequivocal terms: "I am the Ba of Shu, above whom is Nūt and under whose feet Gēb lies; I am between them both."¹³ We need not go into a deep analysis to see what the Egyptians intended by such a depiction of Shu: he is the atmosphere, that element which is between heaven and earth and which keeps them apart from one another. In fact, it was Shu who separated Gēb from Nūt at the creation, before which they were joined in total (the texts say sexual) union. "I placed myself between them," the god says, "(when) the Ennead saw me not."¹⁴ The fact that this conception was the original one associated with Shu can be seen not only from the above evidence, but from the ease with which his other functions can be understood as deriving from it, and, ~~unnot~~ ^{at least}, from the meaning of the god's name itself.¹⁵

B. Tefēnet

The goddess Tefēnet, who appears in the Ennead as the sister and husband of Shu, presents rather a special problem, for in the earliest texts she seems to have no cosmological significance at all. The early Egyptologists attempted to justify her appearance with the other three gods of the Cosmological Cycle, who represent purely natural elements, as a goddess of moisture, or as its personifications, but there is no more evidence for this than the fact that her name appears in a few purification formulae and derives from the verb tf or tfn, "to spit out, to emit (water)."¹⁶

In later times, Tefēnet assumes two major roles. The first of these occurs in the Coffin Texts, and is theological in its nature; this is her identification with the goddess or the principle called Ma'at, which we have noted in the introduction as a principle of cosmic order.* The identification proceeds on

*pp. 7-8, above, and nn. 19-20 to the Introduction

an analogy with the identification of Shu as Life: "Then Atum said: It is my living daughter Tefēnet, who is with her brother Shu whose name is Life; her name is Ma'at."¹⁷ What is significant here is not so much the identification of Tefēnet with the concept of Ma'at -- since it is limited almost exclusively to the Coffin Texts -- but rather the fact that Tefēnet was created "after" Shu, and that she accompanies him. This accompaniment of Shu is, in fact, the primary quality in Tefēnet's nature, and it is reflected even in her second major role, her appearance as a "lioness".

Tefēnet's conception as a lioness is particularly evident in the late period, particularly in the identification of the goddess with Hathor, but the role itself refers back to an epithet of the Pyramid Texts, in which both Shu and Tefēnet are called "Double Lion" (~~𓆎~~ 𓆎 𓆎 Rwtj).¹⁸ The identification is certified by several passages in the Pyramid Texts, as in one instance which contains a gloss on the original line:

Thy offering is thine, O Atum and Double-Lion, you
who made your own godhood yourselves:
That is, Shu and Tefēnet, who made the gods, who be-
got the gods, who established the gods (Pyr. 447a-b);






one paronomasia of Tefēnet's name with the verb tf(n) in the Pyramid Texts even has, as a variant to the "spitting lips" determinative (𓆎), a determinative which pictures a lion's head in the act of spitting: 𓆎 (Pyr. 1652c).¹⁹

We could say, then, that the Pyramid Texts contain the origin of Tefēnet's "lionhood", but the disturbing fact of the matter is that both Shu and Tefēnet appear as lions, and no later texts continue the tradition for Shu as they do for his consort. The significance of the appellation, therefore, probably lies in its expression of a characteristic applicable to both deities at the same time, and this can only be their union. Such is the import of at least one of the Pyramid Texts:

Words to be said: It is Atum who came into being ...
He placed his phallus in his fist
And made passion with it:
The two twins were born -- Shu and Tefēnet (Pyr. 1248a-d).

Tefēnet thus has her place in the earliest versions of the Heliopolitan theology as the complement to Shu; this is the meaning behind the recurring phrase "the two twins" and the source of the epithet "Double Lion". It is probably because of the latter epithet that Tefēnet appears after the Old Kingdom (if not in it) as a lioness. Within the Pyramid Texts, however, she has significance only in company with Shu, and specifically as his sexual partner; Pyr. 447, cited on the preceding page, refers to the two gods as the pair that "made, begot, and established the gods" and another Pyramid Text makes specific reference to this aspect: "(the waters) arise through Atum, which the phallus of Shu makes and the vulva of Tefēnet brings into being" (Pyr. 2065b). It is important also to note that Shu and Tefēnet are the "first parents" (of Gēb and Nūt), and thus the initiators of sexual procreation.²⁰ With this in mind, it appears that Tefēnet is much less a cosmological deity than an expression of the procreative side of Shu's nature: her primary function is to serve as Shu's sexual partner, so that the rest of the Ennead might be brought into being. This, at least, is her function in the Pyramid Texts; certainly, it coincides with the import of the texts and is a reasonable explanation of her membership in a group of deities who are, in themselves, primarily cosmological elements.

C. Gēb

The god Gēb was conceived as the earth from earliest times. His name appears in one writing  almost exclusively, which recalls the word  gb, "goose" (hence the writing ), but it almost certainly derives from an obscure noun  gbb, "earth", as the early phonetic variant  shows.²¹ At any rate, Gēb appears throughout history as the earth; the Pyramid Texts relate his name to the phrase "Ba of the earth" (Pyr. 1663a), and the words "Gēb" and "earth" or "Gēb" and "Aker" occur in parallel phrases quite a few times, while there is at least one instance of the same sort of

parallelism between Gēb and Ta-tjenen.²²

The texts which speak of the nature of Gēb confirm his identification with the earth.²³ Most important, however, is the fact that Gēb, as the earth, is a source of life, since it is from his power that the food which nourishes all living things is made to grow; barley is grown "on the ribs of Gēb" and the harvest is "what the Nile causes to grow on the back of Gēb."²⁴ Although, as the last text indicates, Gēb exercises this power for growth in conjunction with the life-giving waters of the Nile, he still plays an important part in the substance of life itself, since he is the medium through which sustenance arises:

Thou (Gēb) art the Ka of all the gods;
Thou hast taken them that thou mayest foster them;
Thou dost give them to live (Pyr. 1663);



in other words, "Gēb, the earth, produces sustenance; hence he fosters the gods, makes them live, is their Ka."²⁵

A great deal arises from this one fact, especially with regard to Gēb's role in the Ennead itself; he can be seen as powerful in a much larger context than simply "agricultural": "Gēb, divine begetter, whose name is hidden, reproducer, Bull of the divine Ennead, chosen emanation of the divine members."²⁶ He is thus the "noble heir of the gods" and the "eldest of the gods" or the "father of the gods" at the same time; moreover, he appears in the Pyramid Texts as "chief of his Ennead" and "Gēb at the head of his Ennead," although perhaps not through his own nature alone: "Gēb ... whom Atum placed at the head of his Ennead" (Pyr. 1645a-b).²⁷ The importance of such epithets as these lies in the fact that they point to a conception of Gēb as a king; his assumption of kingship recognizes his primary power as the earth and is, in fact, the link between the gods of the Cosmological Cycle and those of the Kingship Cycle. The king of Egypt, who embodies the god Horus, is "the seed of Gēb" (Pyr. 466b), and Thutmose I even describes his own descent from Gēb: "He has seated himself upon the

throne of Gēb, wearing the radiance of the double crown, the staff of royalty; he has taken his inheritance; he has assumed the seat of Horus."²⁸

We shall have an opportunity to discuss this aspect of Gēb in a later chapter, but the important thing to note here is that Gēb is bound up with the Cosmological Cycle and with the Kingship Cycle, in a role which derives both despite his original conception as the earth and from it.

D. Nūt

Although the primeval stem of  nwt, which is the common writing of the name of the goddess Nūt, has been lost to historic times, the determinative , always employed in the writing, indicates that the goddess is the sky.²⁹ In the genealogical progression of the Ennead, Nūt is the daughter of Shu and Tefēnet; "thou art supported by thy father Shu," says one of the Pyramid Texts (Pyr. 784), while another describes her birth:

Nūt ... thou didst grow mighty in the belly of thy mother Tefēnet before thou wast born ... thou didst stir in the belly of thy mother in thy name of Nūt.³⁰

She is also the sister and the wife of Gēb, to whom the texts refer as the "bull of Nūt" (Pyr. 316a); the Pyramid Texts make the relationship graphically clear, when Gēb says to her: "I have fertilized thee as Gēb, in thy name of Sky" (Pyr. 783a).

In the cosmological context of this first "section" of the Ennead, to which she belongs, Nūt is the sky, and in the religious literature she is the most predominant of the images of the sky. She is called "Nūt the high" (Nwt hryt, Pyr. 784-785) and "the great one who has become the sky" (Pyr. 780), and is pictured most often as a woman bending over the earth, which she touches with her hands and feet (fig. 4): "I am thy mother Nūt, I spread myself over thee in my name of Sky."³¹ Upon her belly sails the boat of the sun-god during the day: "Homage to thee, Rē', who passest through heaven, who sailest through Nūt" (Pyr. 543a); at night, the sun enters her mouth and passes

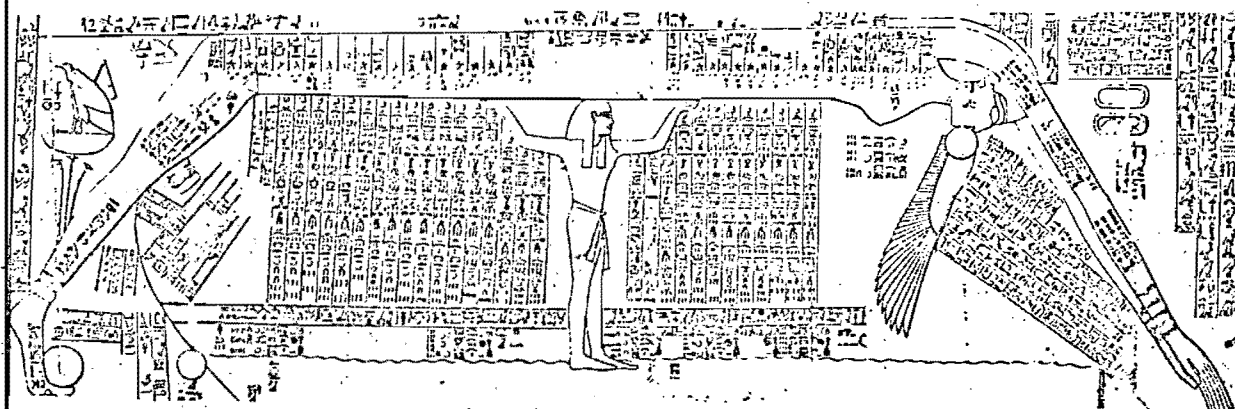


Fig. 4. Nūt as the Sky

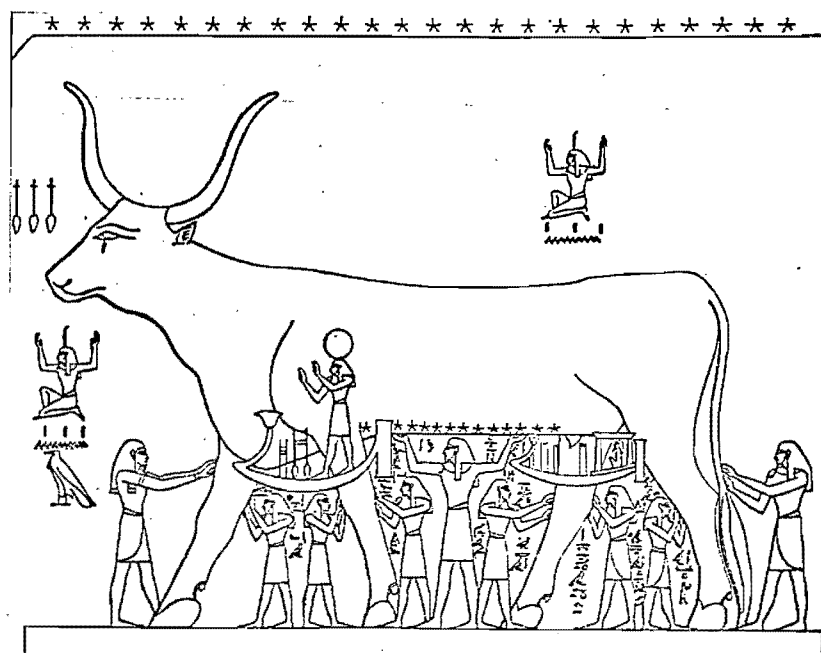


Fig. 5. The Heavenly Cow

through her body, to be reborn in the morning.³² The stars, too, are elements of Nūt; the Pyramid Texts call Nūt H;-b;w.ś, "Thousand-Ba'd", in reference to this association.³³

Through her association with the sun and with the stars, Nūt is very early conceived as the "mother of the sun", and by extension, the "mother of the dead" -- who become, among other things, the stars or the attendants of (or even identical with) the sun-god when they die.³⁴ More importantly, she is also pictured as the "Heavenly Cow" (fig. 5). Recall that Gēb is often called "Bull of Nūt"; Frankfort notes that "Nūt, like Isis, is depicted with cows' horns if she is shown among other gods."³⁵ One text, which addresses the sun-god, preserves a simultaneous image of Nūt as both the "Heavenly Cow" and the anthropomorphic sky:

Homage to thee! Homage to thee, thou calf ... which came forth from the ocean of heaven. Thy mother Nūt speaks to thee and stretches out her arms to greet thee, (saying): "Thou hast been suckled by me." (36)

Nūt probably received this image from the goddess Ḥathor, who is commonly depicted as a cow, and who is, in fact, the most frequent "Heavenly Cow." Ḥathor herself is shown either as a woman with cows' horns and the sun-disk upon her head, or as a woman with cows' ears, and is sometimes equated with Nūt.³⁷ She arrives at her role as "Heavenly Cow" through her role as mother of Horus, and since Horus is also a sun-god (Ḥarakhtē), Ḥathor can be conceived as the sky.

CHAPTER NINE

THE KINGSHIP CYCLE

Just as the gods of the Cosmogonical Cycle evoke, in their names, representations, and functions, a specific conception of the important elements of nature, so too do the gods of the Kingship Cycle, the second "section" of the Heliopolitan Ennead, constitute a specific approach to the reality of existence. In their characters and roles, these gods emphasize different aspects of the concept of kingship, which was the central fact and the salient reality of Egyptian life.

It may seem out of place for us to consider here a scheme which is apparently non-cosmogonic, and it may be objected that the gods of the Kingship Cycle have little to do with the fact of creation itself. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Egyptians themselves recognized a deep and significant relationship between the gods of the Cosmogonical Cycle and those whose natures were bound up in the concept of kingship, for they united the two groups into the functional whole of the Ennead. And if the gods of the first part of that Ennead are more strikingly concerned with the events of the creation, the gods of the Kingship Cycle are no less so, for they "lead us from the cosmic plan to the terrestrial, to the political and historical scheme, since they explain, in the competition between Osiris and Seth and then between Horus and Seth, the constitution of the earthly monarchy."¹ While it is true, therefore, that the gods we shall discuss in this chapter do not figure in the description of the physical universe embodied in the Cosmogonical Cycle, they do play an important part in the total cosmogony of the Heliopolitan system, for they "establish a bridge between nature and man, and that in the only manner in which the Egyptians could conceive such a bond -- through kingship."² The Kingship Cycle is thus closely linked to what is

perhaps the most important feature of any system of cosmogony, the final end of creation. In this chapter, we shall discuss the manner in which the association was formulated by the Egyptians; in a later chapter, we shall discuss its function in the cosmogony of the Heliopolitan system.

A. Osiris

The role of Osiris, who has been called "the most characteristic of Egyptian gods," is so complex and diverse that to conduct even a cursory survey of all the god's functions and their interrelations would fill pages on end, out of proportion to our purpose here. We shall, therefore, restrict ourselves to mentioning those most indicative of his function in the Heliopolitan system.

Osiris figures in the Heliopolitan Ennead as the son of Gēb and Nūt; the Book of the Dead describes him as "first son of the womb of Nūt, whom Gēb the Heir begot."³ It is certain, however, that Osiris was not originally a member of the Heliopolitan Ennead, but that he was incorporated into the system sometime in the Old Kingdom.⁴ Rusch notes an early relation between Osiris and Gēb, and postulates that this may have been the impetus for Osiris' introduction into the Ennead.⁵ While Rusch's interpretation is open for discussion (though not in this context), the association of Osiris with Gēb is an assured fact, and is so marked that it has led some scholars to the conclusion that Osiris is, in the last analysis, only a "local form of the earth."⁶ The opinion of van de Walle is probably closer to the truth; he sees in Osiris the representative of a "terrestrial order, counterpart of the preceding generations [of the Ennead], who evoke rather the cosmic order."⁷

It is in connection with the earth that a good part of the functions of Osiris appear in Egyptian literature. As the earth alone, he is

Lord of the soil ... when thou movest, the earth trembles. Houses and temples ... monuments ... the fields ... tomb-chapels and tombs ... they rest on thee, it is thou who makest them, they are on thy back.⁸

We need search no farther for confirmation of this quality of Osiris' nature than the phrase of the Memphite Theology: "Thus Osiris became earth."⁹ Yet it seems that the original conception of Osiris as an earth-god is as "a drowned one", and the Memphite Theology itself preserves the tradition that "Osiris was drowned in his water."¹⁰ This is the clue to the second of Osiris' major roles, his appearance as a god of water; in the Pyramid Texts, for instance, he appears not only associated with the element itself, but with the sea, with "fresh water", with the Nile, and with the swamps and inundated land.¹¹ Probably the most representative phrase on what exactly is meant by the fact that Osiris is the Nile (the most common of his "liquid" manifestations) comes from an address of Ra'messe IV to the god:

Thou art indeed the Nile, great on the fields at the beginning of the (Inundation) season; gods and men live by the moisture that is in thee.(12)

Finally, Osiris is often pictured as immanent in the grain or in vegetation in general; one text describes him as "he who made the corn from the liquid that is in him to nourish the nobles and the commoners; ruler and lord of food-offerings; sovereign and lord of sustenance."¹³ The most graphic illustration of this last association can be seen in the well-known silhouette-figures of Osiris which have been found in any number of Egyptian tombs, filled with earth and seeded with grain, and placed in the tombs to grow as a symbol of rebirth.¹⁴

Perhaps the facts of the above paragraph can be best summarized in the words of Frankfort, who notes that "Osiris 'becomes earth' but he is not a 'god of the earth'; he is a god of the manifestations of life which come forth from it ... anything which seems to come forth from the earth may be considered a manifestation of Osiris."¹⁵ We might, then, expect from the information above and from the fact that Osiris is not himself the earth -- as is Gēb -- that the god represent some aspect of fertility, for that is the logical connection between the im-

ages of earth, water, and vegetation. But this is not the case. Frankfort has shown that it was not Osiris but the god Min "who personified the generative force in nature, the abundant power of procreation in men, beasts, and plants"; Min's

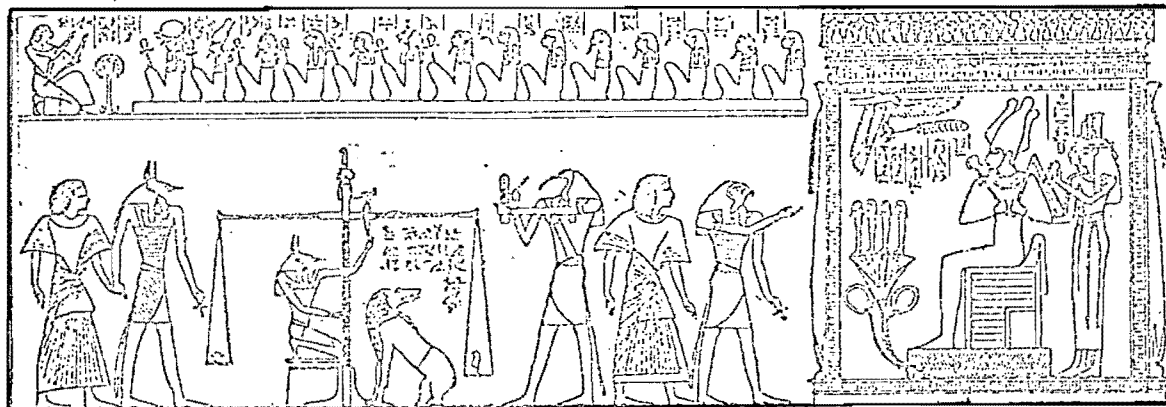


Fig. 6. Osiris as King of the Dead, accompanied by Isis and Nephthys

nature is, moreover, abundantly evident in the depiction of him, which was, "from the earliest times, the figure of an ithyphallic man."¹⁶ The answer to the question of the god's fundamental nature must, thus, be sought elsewhere.

Gardiner has remarked the fact that, although the agrarian character of Osiris is undeniable, it does not hold first place among the god's roles, either chronologically or in importance; to this fact, the Osiris-feasts celebrated at the end of the Inundation-season bear witness, for the point of these festivities is not so much their agrarian nature as it is the resurrection of Osiris at the end of the feast, as a dead king reborn.¹⁷ This aspect of Osiris -- his appearance as a (dead) king -- is, in fact, the earliest for which we have evidence.¹⁸ The qualification "dead" is the important word, for it points out the basic quality in Osiris' character, one imbued with the idea of resurrection and rebirth. If Osiris appeared earliest as a king, his connections with the agricultural cycle, presumably later, are no less important; if it is in the figure of the dead king that the idea of rebirth is concretized, the yearly growing cycle is a constant reminder of its effective

force. This is the very reason for the union of the two images in the all-important Inundation feasts. Frankfort has provided a concise summarization of the union of all of Osiris' "manifestations", a union fostered by the common theme of rebirth:

If many natural phenomena can be interpreted as resurrections, the power of resurrection is peculiarly Osiris' own. The divine figure of the dead king personified the resurgence of vitality which becomes manifest in the growing corn, the waxing flood, the increasing moon. But Osiris was not characterized by sheer vitality such as Min possessed; his was the gift of revival, of resurrection. For the king had to die to enter the earth and benefit man as a chthonic god; the seed corn had to die to bring forth the harvest; the Nile had to recede to bring forth the flood. Osiris, then, defeats death. Therefore, he could gain a significance which surpassed even the Egyptian's concern about the integration of society and nature. His fate might be construed as a promise of future life for all.⁽¹⁹⁾

We have seen that Gēb's power as the earth was the key to his participation in the concept of kingship; with Osiris, the situation is just the opposite: his power as the dead king, his concretization of the hope for and the force of resurrection, led to his association with all those natural elements in which the idea could be immediately present to the mind of man. If, however, the starting-point was different in Osiris' case, the end result was a close union with Gēb and a perfectly logical bond between the pure forces of the natural elements and those which "are not quite molecular, but are."²⁰

B. Isis

As Isis' name indicates, Isis is simply "the Throne", and it is as the personified throne of the king that she enters the Ennead as the wife of Osiris and the mother of Horus.²¹ In fact, her role in the Pyramid Texts indicates that she was originally the personification of the throne.²²

The concept of the throne in the cycle of kingship is one well-attested both in Egypt and in other primitive societies. An extremely common epithet of Amūn when he is addressed as universal king is "Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands"; Mem-

this, the first capital of unified Egypt, is called "Great Throne" in the Memphite Theology and throughout history; dominion over the earth is expressed by the phrase "the thrones of Gēb."²³ Frankfort, in his study of this aspect of kingship in Egypt, notes that "among the Shilluk of the Upper Nile, who retain many traits recalling Egyptian usages and beliefs, the king becomes charged with supernatural power of royalty by being enthroned on the sacred stool which normally supports the fetish Nyakang, who, like Osiris, is both a god and the ancestor of the new monarch"; likewise, in Egypt, "the central ceremony of the accession took place when the ruler was enthroned and received the diadems and scepters."²⁴ The throne is the bestower of kingship upon the princely heir; that is, the one object which imparts to the king his royal nature, by which he becomes Horus, the successor of his dead father Osiris. It is only natural, therefore, that the throne be considered the "mother" of the king.²⁵ In the Pyramid Texts, the dead king ascends to heaven to sit upon the "great throne which made the gods"; and Ra 'messe IV traced the legitimacy of his claim to the throne with the words:

I am a legitimate ruler, not a usurper, for I occupy the place of my sire, as the son of Isis, since I have appeared as king on the throne of Horus.(26)

Through this role as the throne -- which is to say that Isis is the mother of Horus, the king -- Isis becomes a type of the Magna Mater so well known in the Greek and Roman religious mysteries. It is the key to her identification with Hathor and Nūt, both "mother-goddesses", and is the meaning behind her depiction as the "ideal mother" in the Osiris-myth.






C. Seth

The god Seth, one of the four "children" of Gēb and Nūt, is closely connected with the mysterious animal called, for lack of a closer identification, the "Seth-animal", and in which he appears manifest throughout Egyptian history.²⁷ The Greeks identified the god with their Τυφών, from the similarity

in the roles the two gods play. Seth is commonly accepted as "the antagonist per se," and it is as the eternal enemy of Osiris and -- later -- Horus that he figures in the Heliopolitan cosmology. The significance of this role will be discussed below, in our treatment of Horus and Seth, where it can be better associated with the entire cycle, but it would be well to note here some of the roles which Seth plays in Egyptian literature. These roles, all of them subsequent to his function as "perennial antagonist", can give us some idea of the god's nature as conceived by the Egyptians.

Briefly, Seth was considered as a god of the desert regions, the "Red Land" as against Egypt proper, the "Black Land".²⁸ He seems to have been feared from the earliest days, and the Pyramid Texts preserve such epithets of the god as "great of strength" (Pyr. 1145) and "rich in 'magic' (Hīke)" (Pyr. 204). From this quality perhaps stems his connection with thunder and storms; the words for "turmoil", "storm", "rage", etc., are all determined by the Seth-animal.²⁹ Finally, where Horus is pictured as a god of the sky, Seth is opposed as a god of the earth (desert).³⁰

D. Nephthys

The name of the goddess Nephthys appears in Egyptian as  or , which is an abbreviated form of the fuller   , Nbt-hwt (or Nbt-hyt), "Mistress of the House."³¹ The second element of the name is usually translated "temple (of a god)", but it can also have the meaning "castle, mansion," specifically the royal residence; Memphis, the first Residence of unified Egypt, is called hwt-ity, "Mansion of the King," several times in the Memphite Theology.³² If Nephthys' name is perhaps, then, more properly "Mistress of the Residence," it could well have the same significance that Isis' name does -- the throne.

Nephthys herself is an enigmatic figure; she is the most unimposing member of the Ennead, and appears usually only in

the Ennead-lists or in company with Isis (fig. 6). In the Ennead, she is the sister of Isis and the wife of Seth, but in the Osirian cycle, she has the strange role of "traitor" to Seth. When Seth murders Osiris to obtain the throne for himself, Nephthys, in what later texts hint is disgust, deserts her husband to assist Isis in bewailing the dead Osiris, in searching for his dismembered body, and in raising the infant Horus in the seclusion of the Delta swamps. Due to this last action, Nephthys has throughout Egyptian history a secondary role as a goddess of birth, along with Isis, Hathor, Thouëris, and other goddesses. The role which she plays in the Osirian myth-cycle cannot, however, have been her original one in the



Fig. 7. Nephthys

Ennead, since it belies her relation to Seth in that corporation, is of popular origin, and does not, at any rate, concern the original concept of the Kingship Cycle.


Much more likely is the possibility that Nephthys held a role in relation to Seth which is the equivalent of Isis' role in relation to Osiris; in other words, Seth and Nephthys probably constituted in the early days of Egyptian religion the same sort of cycle that Osiris and Isis embodied. Nephthys' independent nature; the fact that, although identical with Isis in many respects, she is never identified with Isis; her relatively featureless existence; and the fact that her name perhaps means the same as Isis' all suggest this interpretation. Once Seth became the protagonist of Horus and Osiris, Nephthys' original role was lost, or perhaps subordinated to that which she plays in more historic times.

E. Horus

"If Horus, the living king, stood outside the Ennead," notes Frankfort, "he was yet the pivot of its theological con-

struction."³³ It is of absolute importance to consider the role and the person of Horus, since the Kingship Cycle is manifestly incomplete without him; in fact, as we have noted above, he is often called the "tenth god".* Following Frankfort, we will examine the god in the two main "categories" into which his activities can be grouped.³⁴

"Horus, the Great God, Lord of Heaven"

The hieroglyphic writing of Horus' name is almost exclusively the falcon  in which he is manifest; however, his name does not mean "falcon" but more probably "the distant one."³⁵ The god Horus is definitely related to the falcon, but "we do not know whether the bird was thought in some way to be merely the god's manifestation; whether the god was embodied, temporarily or permanently, in a single bird or in the species as a whole; or whether the falcon was used as a sign referring to a much more intangible divinity."³⁶ The latter possibility, which Frankfort notes "does not exclude the others," is suggested by the cosmic role Horus often plays.

As a sky-god, Horus has the usual epithet "the great god, Lord of heaven," and is idealized as a gigantic falcon whose wings are the sky, whose feathered breast is the clouds at sunrise and sunset, and whose two eyes are the sun and moon.³⁷ A Ptolemaic text speaks of him in this way as "the august bird in whose shadow is the wide earth; Lord of the Two Lands under whose wings is the circuit of heaven; the falcon radiating light from his eyes."³⁸ This conception of Horus is the one expressed in Hr-wr, Haroëris or "Horus the Elder," whom the Pyramid Texts call "son of Atum before the Ennead had come into being" (Pyr. 881b, 847b). A specification of this form of Horus is the sun-god Harakhte, whom we shall examine more fully in the next chapter.

"Horus, Son of Osiris"

This aspect of the god Horus is the one most well-known,

*See p. 81, above.

both to the classical world and to modern research, as well as perhaps to the Egyptians themselves. Horus as son of Osiris is the prototype of the royal heir and the pattern for the "dutiful son" so common in Egyptian literature.³⁹ In later times Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, is known as Hr-pꜣ-hrd, "Horus the child," which the Greeks vocalized as Harpokrates. He is usually depicted as a child with the "side-lock of youth" seated on the lap of his mother Isis, with his finger in his mouth, another sign of youth which the Greeks later misinterpreted as expressive of his "divine wisdom".⁴⁰ In the Osirian myth-cycle, Horus avenges his father's death at the hands of Seth, and is thus known as Hr-nd-it·f, "Horus, avenger (or protector) of his father," the Greek Harendotes.⁴¹ In his battle with Seth, Horus is wounded: his eye is torn out by Seth and cut into six pieces; the wounded and restored eye, one of the most common of Egyptian religious symbols, is reminiscent of the waxing and waning moon, an aspect Horus possesses as god of the sky.

These "two Horuses" are in reality one and the same god; Frankfort has shown that there is no question of the two roles of Horus having been qualities of two originally distinct gods who coalesced: "It is a mistake to separate 'Horus, the great god, Lord of heaven,' from 'Horus, son of Osiris,' or to explain their identity as due to syncretism in comparatively late times."⁴² As Frankfort notes, the identity is confirmed by a Pyramid Text which addresses the king: "Thou art Horus, son of Osiris, the eldest god, son of Hator" (Pyr. 466a).

Most importantly, these two roles of Horus are united in the much broader picture of Horus as a king, ruler of the universe (Haroëris) and legitimate descendent of a line of earthly kingship which stretches back to Gēb and, ultimately, to the creator himself (Horus, son of Osiris). We have seen how the king derived his kingship from the throne, which is Isis, his mother; this is the significance of the name Harsieše, "Horus, son of Isis."⁴³ The king is Horus, son of Isis from whom he

derives his immediate right to the throne; and he is Horus, son of Osiris, the dead king, and receives his ancestral privilege through this fact. As Horus, son of both Osiris and Isis, he is entitled to the throne both from the fact of his immediate accession and through his ultimate relation with the first kings, the gods of the Cosmological Cycle. An important passage from the Book of the Dead concisely outlines the union: "As for 'He to whom is given magic (Hike) over the gods,' it is Horus, the son of Isis, who is installed as ruler in the place of his father Osiris."⁴⁴ Yet the king is also undoubtedly Har-oëris, Horus the "sky-god", whose mother is Hāthor, "House of Horus," the goddess who suckled him in the swamps under the name of Sekhat-Hor, "She who remembers Horus"; Pepi I is called "the great god, Lord of the horizon" and "Horus of the horizon (Harakhtē), Lord of heaven."⁴⁵ The king is thus the culmination of all the great and divine qualities of "Kingship" in the abstract; as Horus, he is the perfect and personal representative of that mysterious bond between men and the "gods of the beginning."

F. Hōrus and Seth

With all that has been said above concerning Horus, the culmination and embodiment of the bond which the Kingship Cycle of the Ennead supposedly represents, it may appear strange that Horus is not a part of the Ennead while Seth and Nephthys, who do not form a part of the direct line of kingship, are. Yet the full story behind Seth's inclusion in the Ennead is not revealed in the summary of his nature we have given above; it is told rather in the god's relationship with Horus, and it is in that relationship alone that his existence is significant.

The eternally antagonistic nature of the bond between Horus and Seth has already been mentioned. They appear from the earliest times as irreconcilable enemies, and the struggle in which they are involved is an eternal one, never ended. Seth is overcome, but never completely vanquished, and the

king, who is Horus, must be continually on his guard against him.⁴⁶ The Memphite Theology suggests that the two gods once ruled Egypt in equal portion, but later events required that Horus be given the total "inheritance", while Seth is outlawed to the wild regions of the desert.* Many scholars have seen in this struggle between Horus and Seth the echoes of a long-lost predynastic battle for control of Egypt between rival kingdoms of the North and South, while some -- Sethe for instance -- have even seen in Osiris evidence for a predynastic union of the Two Lands which broke apart after his death in a struggle between two members of the royal family for dominance.⁴⁷ While it is not within our field of study here, it is necessary to mention this struggle because of the effects it has upon the Heliopolitan Ennead; as for the political theories it has engendered, suffice it to say that I agree with Frankfort's dismissal: "religious phenomena cannot be made the by-products of developments in other spheres."⁴⁸

Frankfort has noted instances in which Seth does not appear as inimical and, quite rightly I think, concluded that these occur when the two gods are referred to the concept of kingship itself; moreover, if we accept Westendorf's analysis

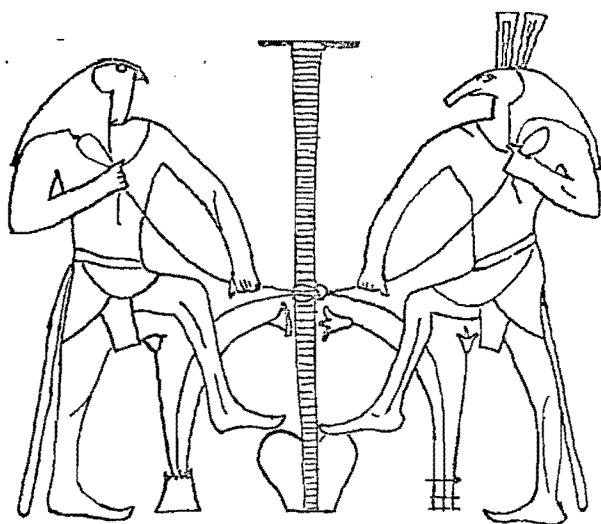


Fig. 8. Horus and Seth
symbolically unifying Egypt

of the origin of Seth, he need not have been inimical in the beginning at all.⁺ Yet the fact remains that Seth was considered as the antagonist of both Horus and Osiris. The key to this dual role of Seth lies in the picture at the left; taken together with Frankfort's analysis, it presents the total context of Seth's existence: "Reconcilia-

*Cf. Appendix III.

⁺n. 27.

tion, an unchanging order in which conflicting forces play their allotted part -- that is the Egyptian's view of the world and also his conception of the state; if the king is called (and that in the early texts) Horus-and-Seth, this formula ... indicates not merely that the king rules the dual monarchy but that he has crushed opposition, reconciled conflicting forces -- that he represents an unchanging order."⁴⁹

The king, who embodies Horus, thus unifies within his own person all the elements of the natural order. In the last analysis, therefore, it is unimportant whether this unification be incorporated into the Ennead as Osiris-Seth or Horus-Seth, for both Osiris and Horus are kings.⁵⁰ The Heliopolitan theologians saw in Seth the other pole of the protagonist-antagonist dualism which, along with many other dualisms, was reconciled in the king of Egypt, who was the god Horus. The fact of this reconciliation says a good deal not only about the Egyptian mentality as a whole, but about the nature and the significance of the Heliopolitan Ennead as well. As a cosmological statement, it is total in its extent; as a cosmogonical formulation, it is perhaps more so, if such a thought is possible, for it not only expresses the existing order of the universe but also contains an implicit account of the origins of that order. To the author of that order, the creator and the head of the Ennead, we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER TEN

THE CREATOR AND THE SUN

One of the most obvious characteristics of the Heliopolitan system is its preoccupation with the sun. Some of the results of this preoccupation have been mentioned in past chapters: the benben and its offspring, the Pyramids, Nūt's role as mother of the sun, Shu's identification with light, and so on. Nowhere is the importance of the sun in the Heliopolitan system more evident than in its union with the creative principle of the system, Atum. Perhaps because of the ultimate significance of the union, and certainly because of the intricacies of Egyptian logic, the role of the sun and that of the creator are tightly interwoven. Because each figures prominently in the Heliopolitan explanation of creation, it will be our task in this chapter to distinguish between them; only in light of such a distinction is the true significance of the Heliopolitan cosmogony comprehensible.

As we noted in Chapter 6, the sun became important in Heliopolis under the name Rē'. Although Rē' very early assumed a large and diverse set of functions in the Egyptian religion, he always remained, at base, simply the sun itself, and his name is nothing more than the Egyptian word for "sun".¹ The Book of the Dead calls him "this sun-disk, Lord of rays, who shines in the horizon every day."² In Heliopolis, Rē' is very early equated with Ḥarakhtē, a form of Horus as the sun, as the god Rē'-Ḥarakhtē (plate II). The name Ḥarakhtē itself means "Horus of the Horizon," and equates the god Horus with the sun specifically in its appearance at dawn and sunrise. Ḥarakhtē himself is more important cosmologically than in the creation, where he figures only secondarily, if at all.³

Much more significant for the cosmogony of Heliopolis is the sun-god Khopri (early Kheprer), a sun-god whose name means

"the Becoming One."⁴ Paronomastic derivations of the name of the god in Egyptian literature always involve the verb hpr, "to come into being", when the context is strictly theological. The tradition of the derivation runs through all the ages of Egyptian religion, and is reflected in the theological literature of each age. We can see, for instance, one phrase of the Pyramid Texts:

Homage to thee, Kheprer (Hpr), who came into being (hpr) of himself ... thou didst come into being in this thy name of Kheprer (Pyr. 1587b-d),

continued into the Coffin Texts as

O thou that didst arise in thy arising, O thou that didst come into being (hpr) in this thy name of Khopri (Hpri),

and finally appearing in the Book of the Dead in virtually the same form:

I came into being (hpr) of myself in the midst of the primeval waters in this my name of Khopri (Hpri).⁽⁵⁾

Khopri is a manifestation of the sun particularly (and almost always) as it appears at dawn.

In the cosmology formulated by Heliopolis and accepted across all of Egypt the daily journey of the sun plays a highly important part, and exercises a role significant for the cosmogony as well, since, as we noted in the Introduction,* the daily cycle is but a repetition of the normative events of the creation itself. The ancient Egyptian approached this cycle, the daily journey of the sun, in two significantly different ways, which might be styled the cosmological and the cosmogonical.

In the first of these, the sun traverses the sky in two ~~beats~~; the day-bark (m'ndt) and the night-bark (msktt). During the day, the sun travels along the body of Nūt, the sky: "Homage to thee, Rē', who passest through heaven, who sails along Nūt" (Pyr. 543a). At night, the sun enters the mouth of Nūt, passes through her body, and is born at dawn. The cenotaph of

*See pp. 6 and 10, above.

Seti I at Abydos preserves an illustration of this conception of the sun's journey (fig. 4). Beside the winged sun-disk shown at the mouth of Nūt is written: "the majesty of this god enters her mouth"; halfway down the leg of the goddess appears a winged beetle (Khopri) with the words: "he opens the thighs of his mother Nūt; he rises towards the sky; he moves towards earth, rising and being born."⁶ The Pyramid Texts also speak of the same conception: "This N. is this Eye of Rē', who passes the night in being conceived and who is being born every day" (Pyr. 698).

The second conception of the sun's daily journey recalls

strongly the facts we have noted in our examination of the Hermopolitan explanation of creation in Chapter 4, above. There it was noted that the sun rises at the beginning of creation from the primeval waters, through a variety of means. The illustration at the left pictures the extension of this idea into the daily cycle. The words across the top of the clear space read; in reference to the sun:

"This god rests in the day-bark of the gods, his entourage," while the legend above the god identified as Nun explain: "These arms come forth from the waters; they elevate this god." According to the

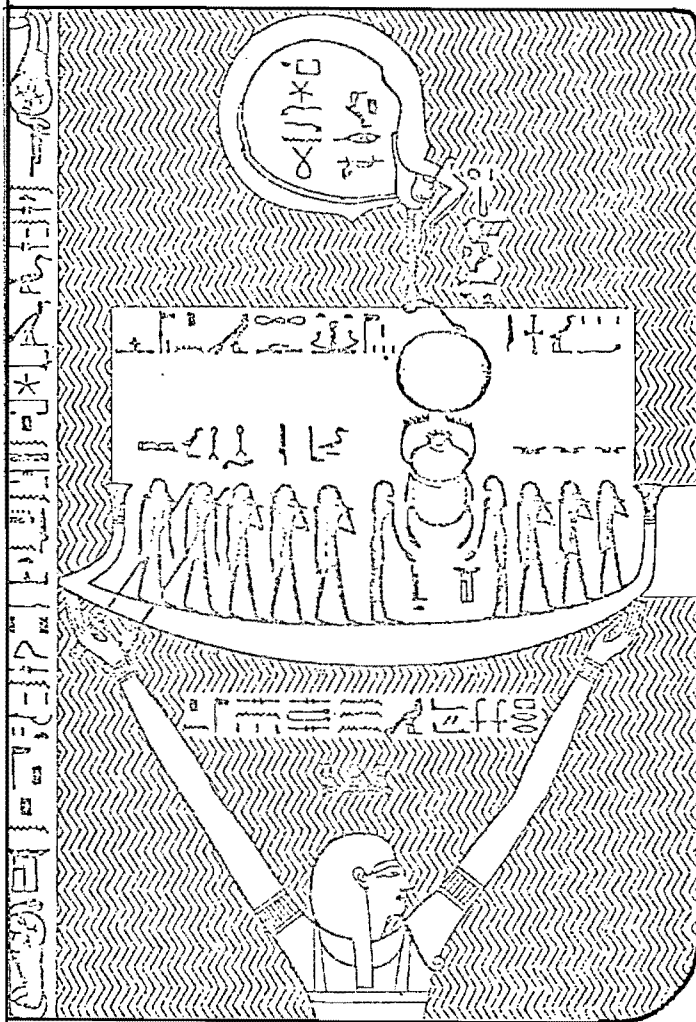


Fig. 9. The Morning Sun, Khopri, passing from the Netherworld at dawn

cosmogonical conception, of which this illustration presents only one section, the sun travels at night in the Netherworld, the realm of Naunet (see fig. 2), and is reborn from Nun every morning, just as at the dawn of creation. At the junction of the sky and the Netherworld (both East and West) is a space known as the "connecting darkness", and it is in this space that the sun-god makes his transfer to the appropriate bark (as pictured in fig. 9) in order to continue his journey. A description of the morning transfer illustrates this idea:

This god (the sun) comes to rest in this space, the end of the connecting darkness. This great god is reborn in this space in the shape of Khopri. Nun and Naunet, Kuk and Kauket are present in this space in order to have the great god reborn when he proceeds from the Netherworld and settles in the morning-boat.(7)

It should not be assumed from the above analysis of the two conceptions of the daily solar cycle that the division was as rigid as we have made it. The Egyptians, in their inimitable fashion, often (one is tempted to say even "always") conceived the two approaches as a unit, so that the sun could be considered to pass the night both in Nūt and in the Netherworld; the text above is an excellent example, for it continues immediately "and appears between the thighs of Nūt." An excellent example of this conceptual union is afforded by the following text:

He (Rē') comes out of the Netherworld and rests in the day-bark. He sails upon Nun until the hour of Rē' (called) "She who sees her master." He becomes Khopri and moves toward the horizon. He enters the mouth and comes out of the vulva. He shines forth in the opening of the door of the horizon at the hour (called) "She who causes the beauty of Rē' to appear", to cause the people to live.(8)

The examination of these two circuits of the sun are important not only for an understanding of the description of creation offered by the Heliopolitan theologians but also because they throw light on the most significant role of the sun in the Heliopolitan system -- his union with the creator, Atum. So profoundly momentous was this union, and so cohesive its

bond, that some scholars have doubted the ability of modern research to distinguish the original conceptions of the two gods.⁹ This thesis follows the more commonly held view, first elaborated by Sethe, that Atum and Rē' were not only originally distinct deities but that each had a well-defined role in the Heliopolitan system and, further, that the significance of these original roles was preserved even after the coalescence of the two gods into one.¹⁰

The god Atum is perhaps the first truly theological creation Egyptian history has presented us. His name alone is an index of his highly rational origins; its meaning has perplexed many modern scholars. "Atum", the English transliteration of the Egyptian ṯtmw, derives from the stem tm, which has roughly two meanings or applications.¹¹ The first of these appears in the negative verb tm, used to connote a state of "non-existence".¹² The second appears in the verb tm, "(be) complete", and its related substantives tm, "everything, the universe," and tmw, "totality (of men), everyone."¹³ Gardiner has analyzed the radical tm to have meant, at base, "be complete" in the sense of "being finished (with)."¹⁴ Atum's name thus has a sense of positive non-existence, the quality Wilson has characterized as "all-inclusiveness and ... emptiness, at the beginning rather than at the end."¹⁵ It is highly important that this be understood as the true sense of the name, rather than a sort of privation of existence, for it is as "complete" and all-inclusive that Atum has significance in the cosmogony. Exactly what the name means in the context of creation has been analyzed by Lanczkowski: "Atum is ... infinite, in the sense of the unformed chaos, and at the same time complete, in the sense of the formed chaos; in fact, a text of the First Intermediate Period designates him in this way as "the one who is not (yet) complete, who completes himself."¹⁶ Lanczkowski has also added a temporal dimension to the name of Atum: "he spans the whole of temporality and brings it back to his starting-point," which recalls the description of the Coffin Texts: "this august god

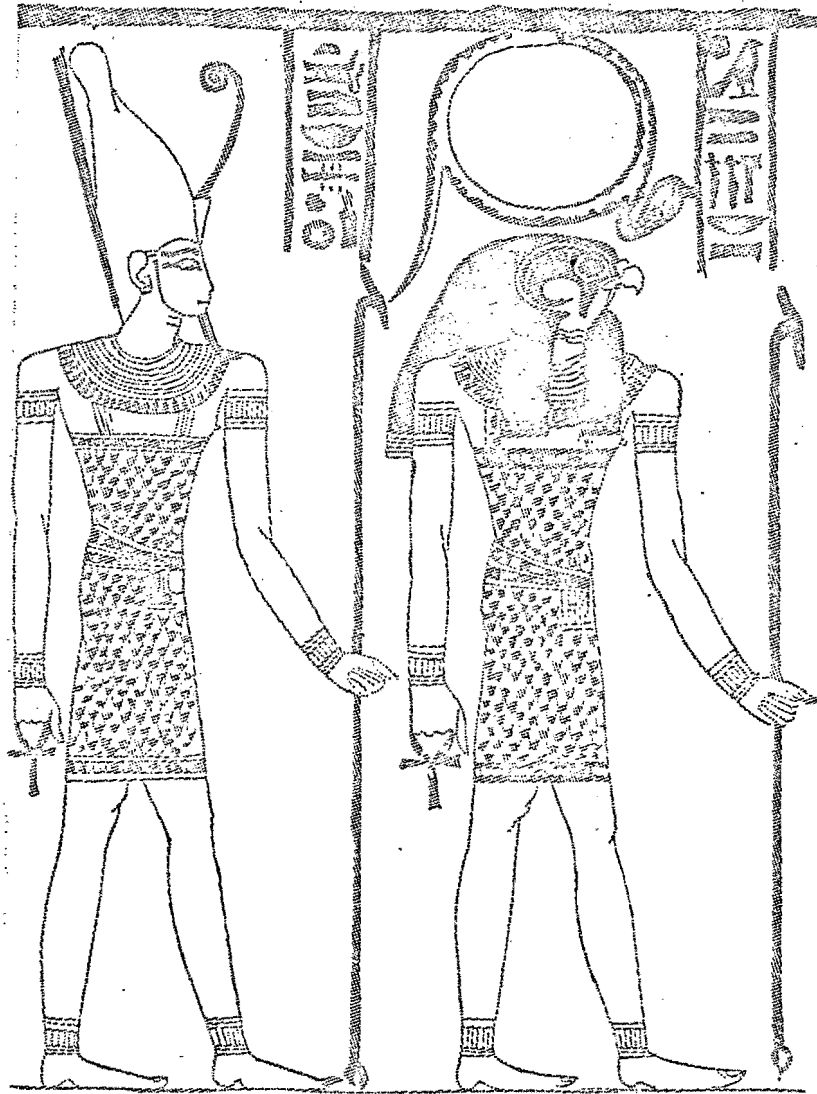


Plate II. Atum and Rē'-Harakhtē

who came into being of himself, who does not turn back upon what he has spoken from his mouth."¹⁷

As far as the majority of the Pyramid Texts are concerned, it is Atum who is the creator and the head of the Ennead; they call him "Chief of the Great Ennead" (Pyr. 1660c) and all the gods are united under him: "Ho, all ye gods, gather together; come, unite as ye gathered together for Atum in Heliopolis" (Pyr. 1650). It is Atum who creates the Ennead and it is he who transmits to them his Ka, his vital force (Pyr. 1652). The benben, Heliopolitan symbol of the sun-god, is in fact the seed of Atum.¹⁸ Rē', on the other hand, appears in the Pyramid Texts in most cases either as the sun or as the existing ruler of the universe, and the king's relations with him are either funerary or specifically "royal".¹⁹ The king's father, however, is Atum, and it is from Atum that he inherits his throne and his quality of kingship. Thutmose III is called "he who is on the throne of Atum," and Ra'messe II addresses his deceased father: "Thou restest in the Netherworld as Osiris, while I shine as Rē' for the people, being upon the great throne of Atum, as Horus, son of Isis."²⁰ The relation between the king and Atum is clearly delineated in the Pyramid Texts:

Father of Teti! Atum in the darkness (Pyr. 605);

King Pepi was given birth by his father Atum (Pyr. 1446c);

Atum, let this Unis ascend to thee; embrace him.

He is thy son, of thy body, throughout eternity (Pyr. 212).

It is telling, in view of this relationship between Atum and the king, that the "Son of Rē'" title only appears in Dynasty V, at approximately the same time that the union Rē'-Atum appears.²¹ We have noted the "cosmological" conception of the sun's daily circuit. Several scholars hold the view that this context was, in fact, the earliest in which Rē' appeared, even before his introduction into the unified Heliopolitan system and, eventually, into the Ennead itself; this hypothesis now seems entirely reasonable, in view of the facts given above.²²

The distinction between Atum and Rē' was thus predicated

on the original roles of the two gods, Atum as creator and prime source of kingship, Rē' as the natural element, the sun, and ruler of the universe. By the end of the Old Kingdom, the roles had been united by the coalescence of the two gods into one "high god", both creator and ruler of the world; it is through this coalition that Atum becomes a sun-god, specifically, a manifestation of the sun at evening: "Homage to thee, Rē' when thou shinest, Atum when thou settest."²³ Even in the later periods of Egyptian history, however, the original roles were not forgotten, and sometimes appear in hymns to the sun:

Homage to thee, Rē', Lord of Ma'at,
Whose sanctuary is hidden, Lord of the gods;
Khopri in the midst of his sun-beat,
Who commanded and the gods came into being;
Atum, who made the people,
Who distinguished their types,
Maker of their sustenance.(24)

Perhaps the most significant example of the union of Rē', the sun-god, with Atum, the creator, occurs in the Book of the Dead, in a cosmogonic context:

I am Atum when I existed alone. I came into being in Nun. I am Rē' when he appeared, when he began to rule that which he had made.

Who is he?

It is Rē' when he began to appear as a king, as one who existed before the Lifting of Shu had taken place, being on the hill which is in Hermopolis. I am the great god who came into being of himself.

Who is he?

It is Nun.

Another saying. It is Rē' who created his name(s) as the gods of the Ennead.

Who is he?

It is Rē', who created the names of his members, and that is how these came into being as gods who are in his following. I am he among the gods who is not avoided.

Who is he?

It is Atum, who is in his sun-disk.

Another saying. It is Rē' when he shines in the eastern horizon of the sky.(25)

Here the union of the two gods and their functions is complete. The primeval creator, "Atum when I existed alone," is the same

as the sun, the manifest ruler of the universe: "I am Rē' when he appeared, when he began to rule that which he had made."

The significance of this passage for the whole of Egyptian cosmogony cannot be underestimated. However, the area in which its significance is most felt is broader than the one to which we have limited ourselves here; it has an important bearing on the total picture created by the creation accounts, but only an a posteriori effect on the accounts themselves. For this reason, we shall withhold our examination of its importance until the Conclusion, where its full import can be made clear.

Above this, however, the passage marks our entrance into the field of the creation itself, for in the union of the sun with the creator we leave the field of cosmology which has occupied our attention for the last few chapters and turn to the realm of the first act, which belongs to both the creator and the sun.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CREATION - STAGE ONE: THE CREATOR AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SUN

The first act, according to the formulation of Heliopolis, was the coming into being of the creator, Atum, in the midst of the primeval waters. This assumes that the becoming of the first god preceded the actual creation, if only by the minutest degree of time. In point of fact, the pre-creation existence of the creator appears to have lasted for an indefinite period, which the Egyptians called nḥh, or "pre-creation eternity."¹ In this state and period of time the creator "floats" in the primeval waters, and is described as "inert"; that is, though he is capable of creating, he has not yet aroused himself to the action. Spell 80 of the Coffin Texts describes the situation of the creator in some detail:

I was alone with Nun in a state of inertness,
before I had found a place in which to stand or sit,
before Heliopolis had been founded that I might be
there, or before a support had been raised that I
might sit on it;
before I had made Nūt that she might be over my head,
before I had made Gēb for her;
before the first corporation had been born,
before the primeval Ennead had come into being that
it might be with me.
Then Atum said to Nun: I am immersed and very weary,
my mankind is inert.
It is my son Life who shall gladden my heart;
he shall enliven my heart when he has collected these
my very weary members.(2)

We are thus presented with the picture of a cosmic god anthropomorphic in nature (plate II). Spell 80 assures us, through a series of negative images, that the creator existed when nothing else did, though in a state of "inertness".

The concept behind this word is revealing; it is the same term that underlies the name of Nun, containing the idea of "rest, stagnation," as well as the connotation of incipient

life. When the text says "It is my son Life who shall gladden my heart when he has collected these my very weary members," it is referring not to the joy of the creator in the world-to-come, but to a purely theological argument that life is the property and the outflow of the creator. The universe is to come into being from and through Atum; his limbs are to be "assembled", which is to say that the proper disposition of his qualities are to result in the formation of the earth. Papyrus Bremner-Rhind recognizes this when it has the creator say: "I made whatever I wished in this land, and I was extended in it."³ The text quoted above puts the same thought concisely, referring to the incipient derivation of human life from Atum: "I am immersed and very weary, my mankind is inert."

This conception is by no means to be taken as an affirmation of the pantheistic nature of the universe. Although such conclusions can be drawn from the texts by modern philosophical analysis, it is certain that the Egyptians did not conceive their gods as being Nature, but rather as manifest and immanent through Nature. To them it was a question of causality and not one of in-formation. Convinced of the "Thou-ness" of the universe, they could not conceive of an impersonal causality but were compelled, in Frankfort's words, "to find a cause as specific and individual as the events which it must explain": "Primitive thought naturally recognized the relationship of cause and effect, but it cannot recognize our view of an impersonal, mechanical, and lawlike functioning of causality ... it looks, not for the 'how', but for the 'who', when it looks for a cause."⁴

This is the true meaning of "Atum"; the god who bears the name is the first cause, and everything that is to be comes from and through his nature. It is in this most real of senses that Atum is the "complete"; correspondingly, it is as a corollary of this idea that he is at the same time "nothing", "at the beginning rather than at the end." Lanczkowski's remark gains significance here, taken in conjunction with the idea of

nhh-eternity: "Atum spans the whole of temporality and brings it back to the starting-point."*

It is as first cause, therefore, that Atum figures in the Cosmological Cycle and in the cosmogony of Heliopolis, more precisely as source than as efficient cause (we carefully avoid the term "prime mover", for reasons which will be made clear at the Conclusion). But if Atum was properly formal cause, almost all of the texts, from the earliest days, do not make the distinction between the formal and the efficient causality of the creator. Atum appears throughout history as the creator per se: once bestirred from his age-long "inertness", he sets in motion a series of events which constitute the coming into being of the cosmos.

We began this chapter by referring to the "inertness" of the creator and to the connotation of incipient life which the word contains in Egyptian, and then moved to an exposition of the how of Atum's role in the creation without actually explaining the connection between the two stages. The crux of the matter lies at the point where the creator bestirred himself from his "inertness" and began the creation, and it is at that point that our examination begins in earnest.

Papyrus Bremner-Rhind opens its account of the creation with a general statement which is a word-play on the verb hpr, "come into being," and its many derivatives:

The Lord of All, he spoke when he came into being: I am he who came into being (hpr.i) as Khopri (Hpri). When I came into being (hpr.n.i), Being (hpr) came into being (hpr), and all Being (hpr nb) came into being (hpr) when I came into being (hpr.i).

The second version of the same account, which occurs a column later, gives an informational variant of the opening sentences:

The Lord of All, he says: I came into being (hpr.i) and Being (hprw) came into being (hpr), while I came into being (hpr.kwi) in the form of Khopri (m hprw n Hpri), who came into being (hpr) on the first occasion, while I came into being (hpr.kwi) in the form of Khopri (m hprw n Hpri). My coming into being (hpr.

*See p. 111, above.

1) was the coming into being of Being (hpr hprw pw).⁵ As it stands, this statement (in both variants) is a patent announcement that the creator is coterminous and coeval with Being; but there is more here than first meets the eye. Hpr is used here on several levels, and to understand the significance of the whole text, we must be aware of each of them.

On the first and most obvious level, hpr is used in its derivative form hpr(w), which we have translated as "being" and as "form". The two terms, however, are the same.⁶ Thus, when the creator says "I came into being in the form of Khopri," there is more than simple accidentals involved: the creator is actually (in the sense of the German wirklich) equivalent to the very being of the god Khopri. Moreover, the very fact of Being itself (in the sense of our discussions in Chapter 5) is completely dependent upon and identical with the creator's coming into being.

Beneath all of this -- and behind the import of the creator's coming into being -- is at rock-bottom the meaning of the verb hpr itself, which has all the connotations (the term is deliberate) of "become, come into being, come into existence, happen," and so on. The context in which the verb is used in the passages above, the creation, gives us a clue to its true significance. The texts speak of the beginning of the creation, which follows upon the creator's initial "inertness" in the primeval waters. But how can they also assert that Being qua Being comes into being with the creator when the creator, who is the sum and source of all being, has existed ("be-ed") in nhh-eternity alone? Sauneron and Yoyotte have seen the answer in a solution so simple that it cannot but be right; their insight is worth quoting in full:

The phrases which speak of the birth of the creator, as well as those which describe the birth of created things, generally use the verb hpr, which corresponds to a concept extremely difficult to grasp, and more difficult yet to translate. According to the contexts in which the verb figures, modern Western man is forced to render it in ways which are quite distinct

from one another: "to be born," "to come into existence," "to exist," "to be in existence," "to become," "to transform oneself into," "to manifest oneself"; the substantive hprw must be sometimes given as "(mode of) existence," sometimes as "transformation". Only a better appreciation of the fundamental sense of the radical hpr, a sense which is static or dynamic according to the situation, can allow us to determine the true metaphysical conceptions of the Egyptians on the subject of the genesis of the creator (and of his creatures). The long cosmogonic dissertations of Papyrus Bremner-Rhind use and abuse the terms hpr and hprw with a disconcerting subtlety. The least that can be said, by hypothesis, is that hpr, at once "existence" and "transformation", represents, when it is applied to the creator, not a true coming into being ex nihilo, but rather the "realization" of an already virtually existent being, and that the hprw of the first god constitutes his adoption of a tangible and active "mode of existence". This conclusion seems confirmed by the textual allusions to the creator's "sleep" and to the state of "inertness" in which he existed while immersed in Nun. But if the primeval ocean was his habitat, it was not his raison d'être. The genesis of the real world begins when the creator, settling (constituant) his own body, becomes self-conscious without the assistance of an external force (prend conscience de lui-même sans l'appoint d'une aide externe).⁽⁷⁾

The god described in this analysis is the creator envisaged by the Egyptians: not the vague and apparently contradictory deity which appears to be presented by the texts, but the clear and simple idea behind the words: a god who holds within himself all that is to come, and whose final realization of himself initiated time and being in all its complexity.⁸ The creator's "awakening" is also the "awakening" of the cosmos, for that which was to come into being has been in potency within him, requiring only his action to realize itself. And paradoxically, this is why Atum has the quality of positive non-existence we noted in the last chapter; the fact of his not-being is not actual (again, wirklich), as is his "completeness", but is rather conditional. In the quotation above, Sauneron and Yoyotte state that the creator's proper purpose is in the creation: "If the primeval ocean was his habitat, it was not his raison d'être"; and we have already noted Wilson's inter-

pretation that Atum is "emptiness, at the beginning rather than at the end."* Atum's negative aspect is thus contingent upon the fact that his true raison d'être is in the act of the creation, for without this act, without his hpr, his "self-realization", he has no reason to exist.

It is at this point that the concept of the creator's "inertness" becomes important. We have referred twice to this concept without elaborating on its significance with regard to the coming into being of the creator, but we can now see, with an understanding of just what the hpr of Atum meant, that it has a pregnant connection with that hpr. For the inertness of the creator carries with it an awareness that Atum was to be the creator: in his inertness he had within himself the possibility of the creation, a possibility which his hpr realized, just as it reduced his conditional "nothingness" to actual "completeness". It should be clear, then, that the concept of hpr is crucial to the whole of the creation; it is the bridge between nhh and dt, between incipience and actuality, between nothingness and All. But the act of hpr involved more than just a passage from one state to another. Sauneron and Yoyotte referred to the hprw of the first god as constituting "his adoption of a tangible and active 'mode of existence'." For the Egyptians, that "mode of existence" could only have taken one form.

The account of the Bremner-Rhind papyrus would lead us to assume, once we understand what is at the bottom of its concern with the hpr of the creator, that the unfolding of creation was concomitant with the realization of the creator. If we cannot state categorically that this was the mind of its authors, it seems at least to be the import of the texts themselves. Nothing can substantiate this assumption more satisfactorily than a true understanding of the form which the hpr of the creator took.

If the texts do not expressly confirm the simultaneity of

*p. 111, above.

the creation and the creator's self-realization, they do assert in unmistakable terms the identity of Atum and the first "feature" of creation,* the primeval hill:

Words to be said: Homage to thee, Atum!
Homage to thee, Kheprer, who came into being of himself.
Thou art high, in this thy name of Hill.
Thou dost come into being, in this thy name of Kheprer (Pyr. 1587).

Even more precisely, they identify Atum with the benben, the Heliopolitan version of the hill:

Words to be said: Atum Kheprer!
Thou wert high, as the hill,
Thou didst shine, as the benben
in the "Temple of the Benben",
in Heliopolis (Pyr. 1652a-b)

It is clear from these texts that one of the first conceptions of Atum's coming into being was his manifestation in the primeval hillock. In Heliopolis -- which, like almost every Egyptian city, considered itself as the site of the primeval hill -- the hill was revered under a form known as bn(bn), the benben stone we met in Chapter 6.⁺ The popular derivation of the name was from the seed of the creator, as in a text which speaks of Amon-rē': "He is the god who begot (bnn) a place (bw) in Nun, when seed (bnnt) flowed out (bnbn) on the first occasion ... it flowed out (bnbn) under him, as it was supposed to do, in its name of 'seed' (bnnt) ... the high ground (which came forth) from Nun."⁹ But the stone

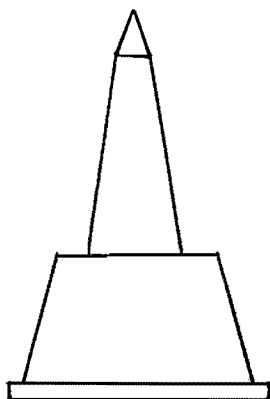


Fig. 10. The hieroglyph bn(bn)

also had another derivation, one which determined its usage in architecture and religious monuments; this derivation, the original, is reflected in the text quoted above: "Atum Kheprer! Thou wert high, as the hill, thou didst shine (wbn) as the benben." The connection displayed in this passage with the concept "shine" is verified not only in the obelisks of the

*pp. 50-53, above.

⁺pp. 74-75, above.

Vth Dynasty sun-temples but in the obelisks of later times as well, on which the pyramidion, corresponding to the old benben, was covered in gold leaf to reflect the rays of the sun. The dedicatory inscriptions on the Karnak obelisks of Hashepsowe:

She made them as her monument for her father Amūn, Lord of Thebes ... making for him two great obelisks of enduring granite of the South, their tops being of fine gold of the best of every country. They are seen on both sides of the river, their rays flood the Two Lands when the sun rises between them, as he arises in the horizon of heaven.(10).

There has been much discussion as to what the benben was meant to symbolize, but for our purposes it is enough to note that it is the Heliopolitan symbol of the primeval hillock and is, at the same time, connected with the sun; its outflowing (bn) is thus both of the "seed" of the creator (whence the derivation bnnt) and of the rays of the sun (wn, "shine, be brilliant").¹¹

It is important to note that the two main Pyramid Texts which speak of Atum as the primeval hillock also equate him with the god Khopri, the sun at dawn, in the same breath. Here the derivation of the name Khopri, examined in the last chapter,* from the verb hpr takes on great significance, for our discussions in this chapter indicate that Khopri, "the hpr-ing

one

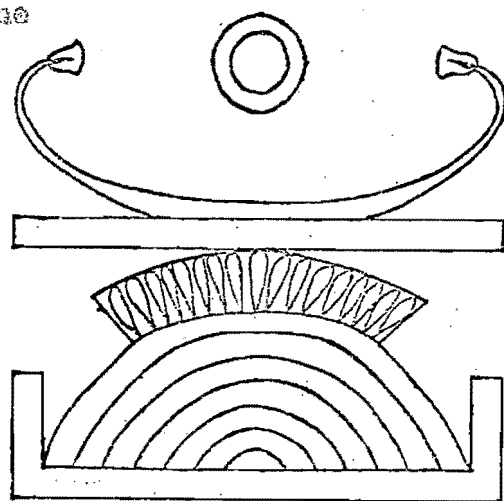








Fig. 11. The Sun-Boat rising above the primeval hillock

one," is properly the sun at the first sunrise. Taken together with the evidence presented in Chapter 4 and the indications given by the cosmogonical conception of the solar circuit, the functions of Khopri lead unavoidably to the conclusion that the god is a personification of the sun as it appeared from the primeval waters at the first

*pp. 108-110, above.

dawn. Chapter 4 indicated that this first appearance of the sun was intimately linked with the appearance of the primeval hillock; in the Hermopolitan system, that link was expressed in the name iw-nrsr, "Isle of (the sun's) Flames"; in Heliopolis, the link was embodied in the benben, the primeval hill whose name contained the dual concept "arise-and-shine". A much clearer expression of this dual idea of the primeval hillock can be seen in a variant depiction of it which occurs as an ideograph in the Pyramid Texts and as a phoneme in the following ages of Egyptian writing. This sign, , has been thoroughly examined by deBuck, who reached the conclusion that "the hieroglyph  is, in fact, the representation of a hill over which the sun rises and above which the sun's rays spread."¹² To support the interpretation, deBuck reproduces the early variants ,  (Dynasty II),  (Dynasty V), and the picture on the preceding page -- all clear illustrations of the bond between the two ideas. As the sign itself makes clear, we are dealing with an expression of the sun's first rising over the primeval hillock; the  itself is called h'y n lhty, "hill of the horizon-dweller (the sun)," and its name is the source of the common verb h', "rise, appear in glory like the sun."¹³

When we read, therefore, that Atum is both Khopri and the primeval hill at the same time (the Pyramid Texts cited two pages ago), the conclusion is obvious that Atum's "adoption of a tangible and active 'mode of existence'" took the form of the first rising of the sun above the primeval hillock, the first act of the creation. The distinction made by the first Pyramid Text (Atum-hill, Kheprer-hpr) becomes in the second a unification (Atum-Kheprer - hill-shine), indicating the union of the creator with the rising of the sun, his first manifestation. The argument is clinched by the Coffin Texts:

Atum ... he shines every day, coming forth from his egg. The birth of the god is the appearance of daylight.(14)

This manifestation of the creator in concrete form should not surprise us. The modern mind might expect something more "worthy" of a first god to be his manifestation -- "spirit" or "Nous" or the like -- but to the Egyptian, caught up in the daily cycle of life in the Nile Valley, this was the only form Atum could significantly take. It was manifest that, for anything concrete to take place -- for growth and life to occur -- the sun had first to rise, the day had to begin. Combine this frame of mind with with an awareness of Nun as the watery pre-creation chaos, recalling the Nile in Inundation, and the concept of a first hill emerging from the cosmic Inundation together with the sun is a foregone conclusion. Thus the realization of the creator, Atum, is also the simultaneous appearance of the first and highest element of the natural order, the sun. It is also the last (or only) stage in the creation which involves the creator alone; the next stage will bring in the completion of the natural order and the first members of the Ennead.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CREATION - STAGE TWO: THE ELEMENTS OF THE NATURAL ORDER

In the last chapter we examined the "first stage" of the creation as formulated by the theologians of Heliopolis, and we saw there that when the creator emerged from his eternal "inertness" in the primeval waters, through the process conceptualized in the verb hpr, his first manifestation was the sun which arose above the primeval hillock. Moreover, because the commencement of the creation was simultaneous with the self-realization of the creator, it could truly be said by him: "When I came into being, Being came into being ... my coming into being was the coming into being of Being." It was noted in the discussion of the Hermopolitan system in Part I that the Egyptians viewed the whole of What Is as a combination of Being -- the known world and its elements -- and Not-Being, or Nun, which stood outside the cosmos and was "non-existent" only in the sense that the cosmos was "existent". The last chapter discussed only the first part of the quotation above: "When I came into being." In this chapter we will examine what was involved in the second part of the quotation: "Being came into being."

"But 'came into being' is a colorless phrase," notes Frankfort; "the Egyptian interpreted it in terms of begetting and conceiving, and that is natural enough, since he knew the universe to be alive."¹ We saw in the Introduction that the Egyptian, though he had ideas as profoundly philosophical as those of the Greeks, was nonetheless constrained by his very outlook on life to put those thoughts into words which do not readily convey to the modern mind the depth which underlies them. There is no more perfect example of this than the Heliopolitan explanations of the process of creation.

Once the relatively simple process which was the creator's

self-realization was conceived as fact, the next in order (logically, though not of necessity historically) to be described was the manner in which the physical universe came about. And it is at this point that we meet with Frankfort's "multiplicity of approaches," explanations couched in terms which do credit to the variety and force of the Egyptians' imagination but which speak very little to the modern mind. In order to facilitate discussion of this difficult topic -- and because we are of the "modern mind" -- we will be constrained to do something which the Egyptians themselves would never have conceived of doing: we shall divide our examination of the Heliopolitan theology of the creation of the natural order into the "motifs" which appear most commonly throughout the texts. It is to the credit of the Egyptians' comprehensive logic, however, that by the time we have finished, we shall have been forced to unite our discoveries into the system that they postulated in the first place.

A. The Masturbation Motif

After the self-realization of the creator and the concomitant appearance of the sun, the next step in the creation accounts is the description of the appearance of Shu and Tefēnet. These two gods are the only members of the Ennead specifically engendered (or created) by Atum himself. It has been mentioned that the Egyptians interpreted "came into being" in human terms. The creation of Shu and Tefēnet is the prime example of this practice; as Bonnet notes, "Atum does not create; he begets."² Two "versions" or approaches are used in the texts to explain the creation (or emergence) of these two gods by (or from) one creator. The first of these is summarized in a Spell (527) of the Pyramid Texts:

Words to be said: It is Atum who came into being as a masturbator, in Heliopolis. He placed his phallus in his fist and made passion with it: the two twins were born -- that is, Shu and Tefēnet (Pyr. 1248).

Between the first recording of this masturbation account in the Pyramid Texts and the writing of the Bremner-Rhind papyrus, the

obviously monosexual theme of Spell 527 took on bisexual overtones, as can be seen in two lines from P. Brämner-Rhind:

I am he who acted as husband with my fist, I copulated with my shadow;
I knit ~~together~~ my hand, being alone, when they (the primeval gods) were yet unborn ... after I had acted as husband with my fist, my desire came into my hand.³

The texts leave many things unsaid. Above all, they do not make clear just how the seed of Atum, produced by his masturbation, became two distinct deities. In this case, however, comparison with other texts suggest that it was from a mingling of the living seed with the life-giving waters of Nun.⁴ The benben, for example, was supposed to have been produced when a seed of the creator fell in the primeval waters and was solidified.* Papyrus d'Orbiney, the "Tale of the Two Brothers," describes how Bata, the younger brother, was slain and his heart turned into a grape (= seed). When the elder brother, Anubis, comes to search for Bata, he finds the grape and places it in a vase of cold water.

Now afterwards, when it came to be night, his heart (the grape) swallowed the water, and Bata shuddered in his every limb. He proceeded to look at his elder brother while his heart was in the vase. Anubis, his elder brother, took up the vase of cold water, in which was the heart of his younger brother, and drank it. His heart stood in its place and he became like he had been. Then one embraced the other, and one talked with the other.(5)

Finally, a text cited in Part I gives an additional insight into the problem. In this text, a late demotic papyrus, Amūn as a black bull attempts to fertilize Amaunet, a black cow, but in the attempt spills some of his seed into the primeval waters, "which brought forth a lotus blossom and a lotus bud."⁺

We can gather from all of this that there was, at least minimally, a tradition in which seed and water figured as the elements of life. If this was the case, then we can further assume that the tradition was perhaps operative in the produc-

*See p. 122, above.

⁺See p. 57, above.

tion of Shu and Tefēnet, and it was the seed of Atum, produced by self-abuse, falling into the waters of the primeval ocean which brought the "two twins" into existence.

There is another tradition, however, which implies that this engendering of the first two gods resulted only in the production of their "physical forms" (hprw in the sense we noted in Chapter 11: "modes of existence"), and that one final act of the creator was required to give them life.

Words to be said: Atum Kheprer! Thou didst spit forth as Shu and emit as Tefēnet. Thou didst place thine arms about them, with thy Ka, so that thy Ka might be in them. (Pyr. 1652a-1653a).

The import of the text is clear. The creator, Atum, having begotten Shu and Tefēnet, imparts to them his own vital essence, his Ka.⁶ The parallel of the king's Ka is instructive, for the Ka of the king, which is his very kingship, his essence, derives from his father Osiris and from the ruler of creation, Rē'.⁷ A Pyramid Text addresses the predecessor of the king: "O Osiris, Horus (the living king) has supported thee; he has done it for his Ka in thee" (Pyr. 582). If the king, as we noted in Chapter 9,* derives his ancestral privilege from the fact that he is the son of Osiris, he derives the fact of his present kingship from Rē'; it is significant, therefore, that the king's Ka is also Rē', as another Pyramid Text makes clear:

Messages of thy Ka come for thee;
Messages of thy father come for thee;
Messages of Rē' come for thee (Pyr. 136).

Since we are moving in this case in the divine sphere (since the king is a god), we may assume that, just as the very essence of the king derives from and is dependent upon his divine father, so too the act of Atum in bestowing his Ka upon Shu and Tefēnet resulted in their assumption of his vital force, through which they received his essence and their own lives.

We can see this idea of the derivation of Shu and Tefēnet from Atum in a much clearer light if we realize that this is

*p. 104, above.

in fact the reason behind the apparent crassness of the masturbation motif. The Coffin Texts preserve another approach to the same idea, in which derivation of Shu and Tefēnet from the essence of the creator is more readily apparent; Shu speaks:

I came into being in the body of this god who came into being of himself ... I grew in his feet, I came into being in his arms, I dried in his members ... I came into being in the body of this august god who came into being of himself ... He forms (in himself) the sum total of my nature.

I am Shu ... whom Atum begot. He made me as the efflux of his members, whose names Atum made ... in the vastness, the invisible, the darkness.(8)

The Egyptians, as has been noted, were inclined to view the coming into being of things in the light of human (animal) begetting and conceiving. Faced with the problem of expressing the derivation of two divinities from a sole creator, they turned naturally to the idea of self-abuse, which, coupled with the tradition of seed-and-water, gave them a logical and attractive medium for expressing the otherwise ineffable. If we collect all we have discovered underlying this sexual motif, and place it in its correct order together with terms suited to its abstract nature (for all thoughts are abstracts), we can clearly see what the Egyptians meant to express by their concrete terminology.

The production of the first two gods of the Ennead, elements of the natural order, derived in some way from the essence of the creator himself; as the text above says, precisely and in so many words, Shu and Tefēnet are the "efflux of his members."⁹ They were creations in the truest sense, since they were begotten of the creator, from his own essence, and were not mere in-formations of materia externa: their existence required that the creator give of himself both "formally (hprw)" and essentially (Ka). When the texts speak of Shu and Tefēnet as the "children of Atum," they mean it in its deepest (and, we may add, in its most intellectual) sense. This shall become clearer as we proceed.

B. The "Spitting" Motif

A second motif appears in the Heliopolitan explanations of the birth of Shu and Tefēnet, almost in the nature of another approach to the problem. This is the "spitting" motif, and it occurs, like the masturbation motif, throughout Egyptian history, from the Pyramid Texts --

Words to be said: Atum Kheprer! ... Thou didst spit forth as Shu, thou didst make emission as Tefēnet --

to the Coffin Texts --

I am Shu ... My father Atum spat me out as a spitting of his mouth, together with my sister Tefēnet. She came forth after me ... in the vastness, in the darkness, in Nun, in the invisible --

to the period in which Papyrus Bremner-Rhind was written down:

I let fall from my own mouth: I spat forth as Shu and emitted as Tefēnet;

I am he who spat forth as Shu and emitted as Tefēnet
... I made a discharge, letting fall from my mouth:
I spat forth as Shu and emitted as Tefēnet.(10)

The derivation of this "explanation" is patently paronomastic, as the Egyptian shows; even the wording remains little changed throughout 2000 years of history, from the Pyramid Texts to the Bremner-Rhind papyrus: išš m šw, tf(n) m tfnt.¹¹ The origin of both deities is derived from a play on words -- Shu from išš, Tefēnet from tf(n) -- but we should not assume from this that it was felt to be any less valid than the more "physical" account; its validity to the Egyptians is evident from the abundance of its uses throughout Egyptian history. We have only to recall what was said in the Introduction concerning the validity and significance of the name of an object to see that such derivations were far from being simple literary artfulness; that they held a validity all their own.*

Yet it is interesting that in spite of this validity, the "spitting" motif invariably occurs in company with the masturbation account, as if it were an adjunct to the sexual motif

*pp. 5 and 8, above. See also pp. 163-164, below.

and not an independent explanation. In this one phenomenon we have, in fact, the key to what lies behind the word-play, the real reason for its association with the other motif. It is a strengthening of the masturbation motif, and additional confirmation -- in another sphere -- of the reality that lies behind that motif.¹²

It should be clear from what we have seen so far that we are dealing with a profoundly philosophical approach to the "first occasion," what we have called above a creation not from materia externa but from the very essence of the creator himself, an outflowing of the divine essence of the creator which takes form as Shu and Tefēnet. We have previously avoided a consideration of the elements of which these two deities are embodiments, but if we now bring our attention to bear upon the natures of Shu and Tefēnet as we saw them in Chapter 8, and on the manner of their genesis, we shall find their existence to be a manifestation of a concept so broad that it embraces not only the creator, Atum, but all the elements we have yet discussed.

In our examination of the nature of Shu and Tefēnet in Chapter 8, we noted that the primary role of Shu is that of the atmosphere, the space between the earth and the sky. We also noted in Part I that the emergence of the cosmos from the primeval waters had, of necessity, two interpretations, depending upon which conception of Nun was involved -- either as the definition of a precise continuum on the otherwise infinite surface of the primeval waters, or as a space within the waters, what R.T. Rundle Clark calls "a bubble of clarity and order enveloped by the eternal night of the primordial ocean."¹³ The first of these conceptions, however, most probably had justification only as a corollary to the idea of the primeval hillock and the sun which rises above it. The sun itself, as we saw in the last chapter, was a manifestation of the creator in the first act, and was associated with the primeval hillock only insofar as that locality served to give his rising place. With

If we now concentrate upon the three-dimensional conception of Nun with these facts in mind, we can appreciate that the creation of Shu is due not merely to the will of the creator but is in fact a necessity postulated upon the first manifestation of the creator as the rising sun, Khopri. To put it simply, it was inconceivable even to the Egyptians that the sun could rise, much less exist, within the primeval waters which were the pre-creation (we might say "pre-realization") cosmos. Religious notions do not contradict obvious natural facts, and fire and water have never had the ability to exist coterminally.¹⁴ Shu figures into this notion in the most important of ways, for he is the space within the primeval waters which permits the sun to rise; his very name means "emptiness". The Coffin Texts have him say:

I am that space which came about in the waters. I came into being in them, I grew in them, and I did not belong to the place of darkness.(15)

Spell 75 of the Coffin Texts makes the separation between Shu, the space in the waters, and Nun, the waters themselves, absolutely clear; Shu says:

I repeated the words of the gods who existed aforetime, who came into being after me. They ask Nun about my coming into being, when they see me (after) I have arisen among them, having made a lifting as I came into being. When I speak, the Ennead is silent, the gods fear. I shall tell you my coming into being in my own form. Do not ask Nun about my coming into being. Nun did not see me as I came into being, he did not know the place in which I should come into being: my coming into being was out of his sight, as I was alone.(16)

Moreover, the relationship between Shu and the sun is explicitly defined in the Coffin Texts; Shu says of the sun-god: "I am he who foretells him when he comes forth from the horizon," while Spell 77 calls Shu "the predecessor of the blaze and the blast of fire."¹⁷

The whole question, in the final analysis, revolves around the notion of simultaneity, and if we are to have any valid reason for our assumptions, we must try to settle the matter.

Fortunately, the Coffin Texts are again explicit:

I am Shu, whom Atum created on the day on which he himself came into being ... My father Atum spat me out as a spitting of his mouth, together with my sister Tefēnet. She came forth after me ... on the day on which Atum came into being in the vastness, in the darkness, in Nun, in the invisible.(18)

We might be tempted to take this as a figure of speech, indicating the equal "primevalness" of these cosmogonic gods, but neither the Coffin Texts nor the later documents of Egyptian literature allow us to do so, for they not only announce the essential relationship between the creator and his first "children" but they also define the "coevalness" of the first three gods:

I am Life, Lord of years, living for eternity, Lord of everlastingness. The eldest whom Atum made with his efficient power, when he gave birth to Shu and Tefēnet in Heliopolis, when he was one and became three, when he separated Gēb from Nūt, before the first corporation had been born, before the (two) primeval Enneads had come into being, that they might be with me.

The Lord of All, he says ... I am he who spat forth as Shu and emitted as Tefēnet. I came into being as one god: that was three god(s) -- in addition to myself, two gods having come into being in this land. Then Shu and Tefēnet rejoiced in Nun, in which they were.(19)

The validity of the necessary nature of the production of Shu and Tefēnet holds true no matter in which light we view it, no matter which approach out the "multitude of approaches" we examine. Even in the first conception of Nun, the two-dimensional infinite expanse postulated upon the primeval hillock, what we have said above still holds true, even if the connection is not made by the texts (which undoubtedly saw no need to do so). For even if the sun is to rise above the hill, it still demands a definite continuum to rise into. In all the literature of the Egyptian religion, the sun never illumines the vastness of Nun, but only that which is contained between the earth and the sky, the "world-bubble." Nun remains the

"place of darkness"; even the appellation of the creator-sun as "Lord of All" does not extend to dominion over Nun, since its literal translation is Nb-r-dr, "Lord to the Limits."²⁰

C. The Motif of Natural Birth

The creation of Shu and Tefēnet marks the end of the active role of the creator in the processes of creation. It is by no means the end of the creation, however, for the texts relate that the continuation of the Weltbau was to be carried out by Shu and Tefēnet, and this, moreover, in a manner more "natural" than that in which they themselves had been engendered. This, as we noted in Chapter 8,* is the only reason for Tefēnet's existence -- to be the sexual partner of Shu.²¹

Shu, son of Atum! Thou art the eldest son of Atum, his first offspring. Atum spat thee from his mouth, saying: Raise up my children (Pyr. 1872).

Shu and Tefēnet, the first productions of the creator, were also the "first parents", if we may use human terms in a cosmogonic context (the Egyptians did). The activity of these two gods resulted in the production of Gēb, the earth, and Nūt, the sky. That the genesis of Gēb and Nūt was recorded as occurring in the manner of natural birth is not open to doubt. The Pyramid Texts speak of the "phallus of Shu" and the "vulva of Tefēnet" (Pyr. 2065b), and in at least one case the origin of Nūt is graphically described:

Nūt ... thou didst grow mighty in the belly of thy mother Tefēnet before thou wast born ... thou didst stir in the belly of thy mother in thy name of Nūt.²²

If the origin of Gēb and Nūt is certain, the reason for their existence (other than the obvious fact that they are the natural elements earth and sky), their proper place in the creation, may be in doubt, and it may seem that we are hard put to find references to their specific activity in the creation. In the texts, the essential event involving both Gēb and Nūt is their separation, and it is to this event that we must look for

*p. 89, above.



Fig. 12. Gēb and Nūt in separation, with a graphic emphasis on their previous union

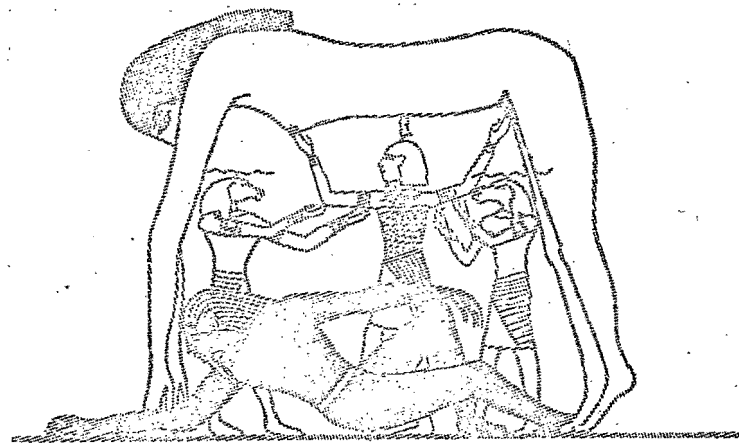


Fig. 13. Nūt separated from Gēb by Shu

the cosmogonic significance of the two gods.

We have only to look at the allusions to Gēb and Nūt as husband and wife and to their engaging in intercourse -- "I have fertilized thee as Gēb, in this thy name of heaven" (Pyr. 783a) -- to understand that at one time they must have been joined together (fig. 12). It is, however, their ultimate separation which has cosmogonic importance, and in this Shu plays a prominent role. A Coffin Text describes the separation:

I am weary upon the supports of Shu, since the time when I lifted my daughter Nūt over my head, giving her to my father Atum, while he gave me Gēb under my feet ... I placed myself between them, while the Ennead saw me not.(23)

The separation is the source of the "Supports of Shu" (fig. 5):

I am the Ba of Shu, who gave him Nūt over his head and Gēb under his feet -- I am between them. O ye eight Supports, whom Shu conceived, whom Shu bore, whom Shu created, whom Shu joined together, whom Shu begot as the efflux of his flesh, as the drippings of his seed. Begotten of Nun, created by Atum, the supports of Shu, who raised Nun under Atum, who guard the way of Nun under Atum, whose length is to the length of the sky, whose breadth is to the breadth of the earth.(24)

From these texts, one fact stands out clearly: Gēb and Nūt, as earth and sky, were originally in union, but were at some distinct point in time parted from one another by the interposition of Shu. We may assume that this point was the exact moment of Shu's creation, for the god himself says: "(The gods) ask Nun about my coming into being, when they see me (after) I have arisen among them, having made a lifting as I came into being."* The texts distinctly indicate an original state in which Gēb and Nūt were joined; therefore, of necessity, the coming into existence of Shu, the atmosphere, can only have been simultaneous with the rending apart of the two elements. We recall that the creation of Shu was postulated upon the first appearance of the sun in the primeval waters; the separation of the earth and the sky is therefore also contingent

*See p. 133, above (second text).

upon that first dawn, and a text cited in Part I proves the point:

Horus: august child who rose from the lotus. This august god who came into being in the Great Park and was led forth from Nun within the lotus, for whose ba the sky was uplifted so that he might shine therein.²⁵

This passage brings us back to our starting-point, the manifestation of the creator as the sun, and affirms the theme of simultaneity we have discovered inherent in the Heliopolitan conception of creation. The creator, after existing for an eternity in a potential state of "inertness", realizes himself at some definite point at the very beginning of time. Simultaneous with this self-realization, the sun as Khopri -- which is the first manifestation of the creator himself -- rises over the primeval hillock to initiate the first dawn. At that exact moment Shu, as the atmosphere, comes into being together with his complement Tefēnet, and the earth and sky, hitherto undifferentiated, become distinct entities separated from one another by the atmosphere which has come between them.

Gēb and Nūt owe their specific existence to Shu and Tefēnet; in human terms, they are the children of their parents. But in reality, the whole Cosmological Cycle of the Heliopolitan Ennead, seen in the proper light, owes its existence to the realization of the creator, Atum; and when we consider the original significance of the (combined) Ennead as an infinitude of the forces of existence itself, we can say moreover that Atum is the source of everything, of all the elements of the creation and the cosmos: "To say that the creator first brought Shu and Tefēnet into existence, and that these in turn brought forth Gēb and Nūt, is to express, with all the concreteness of mythopoeic thought, the idea that powers latent in the creator were objectivated as distinct deities who exercised power in their appropriate spheres."²⁶

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CREATION AND MAN

As grand and as totally comprehensive as the cosmogony outlined in the last few chapters appears, it is difficult to appreciate the fact that those events and their actors should have been objects of anything more than an academic interest. To a large degree, the problem centers in the lack of immediacy they present to the modern mind, which senses the absence of a sense of purpose strong enough to remove these events from the sphere of past concern and put them forward with the urgent validity they obviously held for the Egyptians themselves. To put it in more precisely philosophical terms, the creation accounts lack a final cause, and to the modern heirs of the Greek and Hebrew heritage, this can only be man himself.

The creation accounts of the Heliopolitan formulation do not concern themselves with the origin of man. The Cosmological Cycle of the Ennead contained an explanation of the gross elements of nature -- sun, earth, sky, atmosphere. Of these, it appears from their very definition that Nūt, as the sky, also encompassed the existence of the stars, while Gēb, the earth, contained the powers of growth and reproduction. Osiris, the sixth member of the Ennead and the first of the Kingship Cycle, was the personification of the power of resurrection embodied in the life-cycle of plants (and presumably of animals as well), and was thus the perfect continuation of the natural order. He was also the link between nature and man, through his nature of the "dead king", father of the living ruler. But in essence Osiris was first the personification of a power and not the representative of a species. The Ennead contains no provision for an explanation of the existence of the occupants of the cosmos -- whether plant, animal, or man himself. The creation accounts, when they do express the creation of these

of these elements (which is relatively rarely, and in the Pyramid Texts not at all), are content with mentioning their dependence upon the creator.¹ The Coffin Texts are representative in this respect:

The falcons live on smaller birds;
the dogs, on their game;
the wild pigs, on the desert;
the hippopotami, on the swamps;
men, on the grains;
the crocodiles, on the fish;
the fish, on that which is in the
 rising flood:
(all) according to the order of Atum.²

This is expressive of a concept of world order which was concomitant with the creation itself, for "the creation simply put into place, in successive stages, those things which constituted for an inhabitant of the Nile Valley the totality of the world ... ipso facto, it provided for the existence of each species."³

It does not seem that it appeared necessary to the Egyptian to explain the exact method by which man and the lesser forms of life had come into existence; indeed, as the text above intimates, the creation of men apparently did not distinguish itself by any special significance from that of the other species. Nor should this surprise us, when we recall what was said in the Introduction concerning the unity of man with nature so strongly felt by the Egyptians; for them, the whole of nature was something approaching Marx's phrase: man's "inorganic body." The religious texts are clear enough on one point: men were and are made by the creator. We have noted Atum's common epithet "he who made men," and the creator often states explicitly: "I made men."⁴ Yet even these are not descriptive of how men were made, merely that they were; it seems we are at an impasse between the explanations of the creation and the existence of men, one somewhat akin in its difficulty to the famous philosophical gap between Plato's Forms and the species themselves. The whole tenor of the corpus of creation

accounts suggests that man, like the primeval waters, was a "given". He somehow "began to be" once the process of the Cosmological Cycle's creation had established the elements of the cosmos, or he was "just there"; in fact, some texts name men before the gods in their lists of creatures.⁶

The closest approach to a specific system embodying the creation of men is the cycle constructed by the religious center of Esna around the god Khnum. Late texts from the temple at Esna, equating Khnum with the sun-god Rē' and with Ptaḥ, the Memphite creator, describe the concept:

Homage to thee! Khnum-rē', Lord of Esna,
 Ptaḥ who gave birth to the primeval ones ...
 Crafter of craftsmen,
 father of fathers, mother of mothers,
 who made the things of the heavens
 and created the things of the earth ...
 He fashioned men in their turn,
 he gave birth to the gods, in order to populate the
 land and the circuit of the Great Green (Sēa).
 He came in time to give life to all who came forth
 according to his plan,
 making the grass to maintain all animals,
 and the staff-of-life plants for the living (men) ...
 The destiny and the sustenance of children are subject
 to his word ...
 Thou art the all-powerful ... thou who hast made man
 according to thy plan ...
 Thou art the Lord of Esna, the god of the potter's
 wheel,
 who fashioned the gods,
 who formed men and the animals.⁷

Khnum is usually pictured as a ram-headed man, sometimes seated at a potter's wheel upon which he fashions the bodies of those about to be born, accompanied by his consort, the frog-headed deity Ḥeket, who fashions the Ka of the new man (fig. 14).⁸ It is certain, however, that the role of Khnum as a universal creator of men is of late origins. His functions in the earlier stages of Egyptian religion show him as a shaper of individual men, a uniter (ḥnm) of their different parts; his proper role belongs outside the creation cycle, though it originated as a result of speculation upon the proximate origins

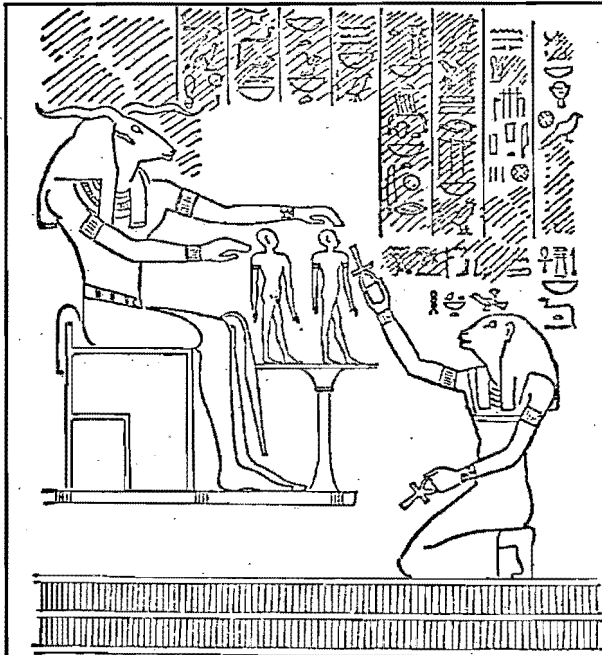


Fig. 14. Khnum and Heket form the body and the Ka of the King

of man; Anthes has summarized its significance: "The idea that men were shaped individually in clay by the god Khnum occurs late, and is not cosmogonic; that is, it does not include the notion that there was a first man who was created of clay."⁹

The interesting thing about the "Khnum-cycle", the reason it is mentioned here, is its conception of the creation of men. The Egyptians viewed man as an entity composed of three major elements: the

body, the ba, and the Ka. Now Khnum's name means "fashion (on a potter's wheel)," but the primary meaning of the stem from which it derives, hnm, is "unite, join together."¹⁰ Moreover, Khnum is concerned with the formation of the individual body and the Ka. But it is the creator who makes men. In other words, Khnum fashions individual men, but not humanity as a whole. With this realization, and its connection with the creation of species, we are close to the heart of the problem of finality. A consideration of man himself should bring us to its solution.

We have several times referred to the ba as a "manifestation" or "emanation" in the course of our discussions. It is difficult to determine exactly what the Egyptians did mean by the word, and many interpretations of its significance have been offered.¹¹ In view of its complete reference to an individual -- the installation of "reserve statues" in Egyptian tombs, to provide a referent for the ba in case the mummy itself should be destroyed, is an example -- perhaps the best interpretation of the ba is as an expression of a man's individu-

al existence, what Frankfort calls his "animation"; from this concept, it is an easy step to the idea of "manifestation" or "emanation", the commonest application of "ba".¹²

In distinction to the ba, the Ka is an impersonal, universal life-force, almost infinite in its applications.¹³ If the ba may be called "animation" ("being-animated"), the Ka is life itself, the ineffable something that allows us to say of one man: "he is alive," and of another: "he is not"; the absolute bond between the concept of the Ka and the reality of life can be seen in fig. 44, which depicts the goddess Heket presenting "life" (𓆎 'nh) to the Ka of the newly-formed pharaoh.¹⁴ And even inanimate objects, when personified, are said to have a Ka (Pyr. 1278b). It would seem, therefore, that in the abstract the Ka is a power, something like an inexhaustible source of vital energy from which all living things (even those personified and thus "enlivened") may draw alike, an entity highly impersonal yet applicable to individuality.¹⁵ So close is the notion of the Ka to that of actual existence that it may at times be translated by "essence"; Faulkner writes that "the primitive notion of the Ka was that it was the essence, the fundamental nature of the god or king who possessed it ... in association with the king, the Ka is the quality of kingship," and illustrates the idea with a translation of Pyr. 149d, n sk.k n sk k! .k twt k!, "If thou perishest not, thy kingship will not perish, (for) thou art kingship."¹⁶ The relationship between the two applications, vital force and essence, becomes clear if we realize that, for the king, his existence implies his rule: he lives as and to be king.

An important aspect of the concept of the Ka is its connotation of dependence. The king derives his kingship from his late father, Osiris; and so we find a Pyramid Text which addresses the late king: "O Osiris, Horus has supported thee; he has done it for his Ka in thee" (Pyr. 582). The life of Shu and Tefēnet, as we saw in Chapter 12, derives from the creator, Atum, and the relation is expressed by the transference of the

of the creator's Ka to his children:

Words to be said: Atum Kheprer! Thou didst spit forth as Shu and emit as Tefēnet. Thou didst place thine arms about them, with thy Ka, so that thy Ka might be in them (Pyr. 1652a-1653a).

The king's relation to his dead father has exactly the same character; an important Pyramid Text describes the derivation of the ruler's kingship from his father in the same sort of action described in the account above:

Thou hast closed thine arms round him, round him;
His bones stretch themselves, his heart becomes
great.

O Osiris, move thyself to Horus; go to him; do not
depart from him.

Horus has come that he may greet thee.
He has beaten and bound Seth for thee;
For thou art his Ka (Pyr. 585-587).

Our examination of the process of the creation revealed the fact that the whole of existence derives from the creator; he is, in fact, "extended in it." We might expect from this that the ultimate origin of the Ka lie in the creator himself, and this is in fact the case. Frankfort has characterized the Ka as "the mysterious life-force emanating from the creator," and L. Greven has seen it as "the divine origin of essence, insofar as it is a divine life-giving efficiency."¹⁷ The Shabaka Stone specifically assigns the creation of the Ka's and their feminine versions, the Hemsowē, to the Memphite creator Ptah.¹⁸

For the common man, this fact is of significance, for his Ka (as is the king's) is born with him, remains with him throughout his life, and is reunited with him after death; when a man dies, he "goes to his Ka."¹⁹ If the Ka of the common man was felt to derive from the creator -- as indicated by the abundance of personal names of the type K*ʾ*.i-(n)-N., "My Ka is (the god) So-and-So" -- it was, however, bestowed on him only at birth; this confirms our observation that the Ka is an impersonal fund of vital energy which, though deriving ultimately from the creator, is "united" with a man's body at birth. The latter is the significance of Khnum's role, for he is the "U

"Uniter" who joins the life-force to the body, and might be said to bestow the ba as well, for it is certainly in the union of his body with his Ka that a man becomes "animated".

In view of this line of descent, then, it must be of great significance to note such Old Kingdom personal names as Kꜥ.i-n-nsw and Kꜥ.i-nsw, "My Ka belongs to the king," "My Ka is the king."²⁰ We intimated in Chapter 9 that the Kingship Cycle of the Heliopolitan Ennead contains an implicit notion of the final causality of the creation. In these names, the truth of this suggestion becomes clear, for their patent announcements leave no doubt that the vital force which inspirits man is transmitted through the person of the king: "the Egyptians apprehended the involvement of man in nature and the mediating function of their king by means of the concept of the Ka."²¹ "Transmission" is hardly appropriate, however; the Egyptian felt that the fact of his life itself derived from the king, and if it was the creator who had made the Ka's, it was the king himself who bestowed them, and with them, life and "animation". The words of the "Instruction of Shetpibrē" are explicit confirmation:

The King is Ka,
His mouth is increase.
He is the one creating him who is to be.
He is the Khnum of all limbs,
The begetter who causes men to be.²²

This was the concept which formed the purpose and force of the creation accounts, and which presented them to the Egyptian mind with an all-compelling sense of present validity. If the accounts did not describe the actual creation of men in so many words, they presented a unification of the ultimately significant act of the creator with the only significant reality of the existence which flowed from that act -- the kingship. It was in this unification that the common man found his own reality and his very life, for if the creator had been the first cause of all life, pharaoh was its proximate cause, and it was through him that all men had life. In his autobiography, written in his tomb at Thebes, the vizier Rekhmirē' expressed the

thought and its reality for every Egyptian::

What is the King of Upper and Lower Egypt?
He is a god by whose dealings one lives.(23)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SUMMARY OF PART II: THE NATURE OF BEING

We concluded our discussion of the Hermopolitan system in Part I by referring to the fact that the Egyptian viewed the universe as a combination of Being and Not-Being. These two terms, as we noted, are more of a verbal convention for our own uses than a verbalization of actual Egyptian conventions: "Being" refers to the whole of the observable natural phenomena, while "Not-Being" expresses that which lies outside these phenomena, both physically and epistemologically. We use the words "physical" and "epistemological" advisedly, since the distinction between Being and Not-Being applies in both and only in both of these categories: the terms are not mutually exclusive in a logical sense, but only within the areas of the physical and the intelligible. Being excludes Not-Being because the natural phenomena which are the whole of Being are not coterminous with the waters lying outside their continuum. The same applies in an epistemological sense, since Being is the whole of the observable natural phenomena; Not-Being, in lying outside the natural sphere, also lies apart from the observable. We might apply the full sense of the Latin and characterize the two spheres by saying that they "exist" (ex-sist) one another; the fact that the one continuum is limited and contained within the infinitude of the other does not contradict this conception, but merely specifies it.

It is obvious from the discussions in Part II that, while the Hermopolitan system was an expression of the nature of Not-Being, the Heliopolitan system was concerned with an explanation of the origins and nature of Being. This, of course, is not quite correct: it was the whole of the Cosmological Cycle which was associated with the creation of Being, since, as we have seen, the Kingship Cycle involved a bridge between the

forces behind the observable natural phenomena and man himself. Nonetheless, the fact that the first member of the Kingship Cycle, Osiris, is also a personification of a force observable in the natural order -- that of resurrection or rebirth -- indicates that it was the natural which determined the Kingship Cycle, not man. There is at work here an attitude towards reality more basic than that which informs the modern mind. It is not a case of a distinction between the sphere of the natural phenomena and that of man, but rather of the unity of all reality. The gods of the Egyptians -- sun, sky, earth, water, air -- possessed an immediate relevance to man himself because they revealed an order applicable to his own life, an order of which he was in fact a part.

When the universe is seen, not as dead matter, but as suffused with life, man's own existence -- with the critical phases of birth, procreation, and death -- imparts significance to the cosmic phenomena and acquires a new depth in return. When the sunset is inseparable from the thought of death, dawn is a surety of resurrection. In this way the immanence of the gods in nature, far from diminishing their significance for the Egyptians, enabled a correlation of human and natural life which was an inexhaustible source of strength.(1)

When seen in this light, the union of the two cycles of the Heliopolitan Ennead becomes much less of an artificial construct and more of a conceptual necessity, postulated upon the basic attitude which invented it. The fact that, as we have seen, the two cycles were originally distinct and were, in the case of the Kingship Cycle, even composed of several deities possibly originally unrelated to one another, should not negate the analysis we have just made but rather impress us even more deeply with the genius of the men who constructed from these diverse elements a system which so precisely and so comprehensively united the basic elements of the Egyptians' convictions as to life itself.

We referred, when discussing the problem of man in the Heliopolitan system, to the gap which seemed to exist between

the events of the creation and the existence of man himself. Yet we came to see that man comprehended his relation to the constituents of the natural order in a very real way, through the concept of the Ka, the vital force which passed from the creator through the king to man himself, and thus involved man in the natural order. Because of the intimate nature of that involvement, it was obviously not felt necessary to include within the creation accounts themselves an explanation of the origin of man and the species. A man might look to the union of his king with the forces of the creation, and feel secure in the knowledge that, through this union, his own life had been ably and permanently provided for. And on the deepest level, it was enough to know that the whole of Being, of which he felt a part, partook of the same fundamental unity:

There was a continuing substance across the phenomena of the universe, whether organic, inorganic, or abstract ... to the ancient Egyptian the elements of the universe were consubstantial ... Between god and man there was no point at which one could erect a boundary line and state that here substance changed from divine, superhuman, immortal, to mundane, human, mortal.(2)

The Greeks had a phrase for it: πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφή μία ; the Egyptians themselves put it another way:

The Lord of All spoke to the gods ...
I made every man like his fellow ...
The gods I created as my efflux,
and men from the tears of my Eye.³

It is at this basic level of appreciation that the lines from Papyrus Bremner-Rhind become ultimately significant: "when I came into being, Being came into being ... my coming into being was the coming into being of Being."* We observed, in discussing the use of hpr in that papyrus, that the verb was used with a meaning on several levels; we are here at its most basic, its subtlest. When the creator realized himself at the beginning of time he initiated a simultaneity of events which were, in sum, the "creation" of Being in the sense we have just seen

*See pp. 118-121, above.

it; the second part of the quotation from Bremner-Rhind means, at the bottom-most level, "when I hpr-ed, that was Being: my hpr-ing was the genesis of the uniform substance of the cosmos."

It may seem that we are here relating our definition of Being -- the natural phenomena -- to an altogether conventional rendering of the Egyptian hpr(w), but when we recall that hpr(w) means basically "modes of existence, ways of being," we can see that the reservation is groundless. For with the realization provided us by Wilson -- that, to the Egyptians, the elements of the universe were consubstantial -- it becomes obvious that what the creator's hpr initiated was the fact of "ways of being", that "existence" might now have "modes", that actuality might now be.

It is of utmost importance that we clearly distinguish between this "monophysitism" of the Egyptians (the term is Wilson's) and any preconceived notion of monotheism we might have, especially when we reconsider the meaning and the function of the creator, for, despite Wilson's statement that "it is not a matter of a single god but of single nature of observed phenomena in the universe," it is tempting to regard Atum himself as the "continuing substance," especially when we recall that his name means "the Complete, the All."⁴ The distinction made by Wilson must be kept clearly in mind, if we are not to confuse the two and end in an assertion that the Egyptians were ultimately pantheists. Atum is the All, but he is the All because he is the source of the natural phenomena, not because he is the natural phenomena; he is the All at the beginning, because from his self-realization has come Being, and from him has come the vital force, the Ka, which infuses the whole of the phenomena with life. If any one thing might be said to be the "continuing substance", it is the Ka and not Atum; but we do not wish to say even this, since the consideration is much broader; the Ka is coterminous with the "continuing substance" but to say that it is the "continuing substance" is to go farther than

any evidence will permit. To indulge in pure conjecture, we might even say (only-half-seriously) that the Egyptians themselves affirmed the distinction between Atum and Being itself when they gave him a name which means not only "Complete" but at the same time "Not-Being". The conjecture is only half-serious, and less than that, because to presume such an affirmation on the part of the Egyptians would be to assume a consciousness on their part of another frame of mind, one which, like ours, would make distinctions where they had only seen unity. Atum, like all the other Egyptian gods, is immanent in nature (and more so, because he is immanent in all of nature), but he is not, by any stretch of conjecture, nature itself.

Having come to this point in our summary -- or, more properly, our synthesis -- of the elements of the Heliopolitan system, we may opportunely anticipate our discussion in Part III by presenting an observation of Frankfort's relative to our discussion of immanence above: "There is only one Egyptian dogma which clearly recognizes divinity beyond, not in, the phenomena."⁵ That dogma is the Memphite Theology, the subject of Part III.

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