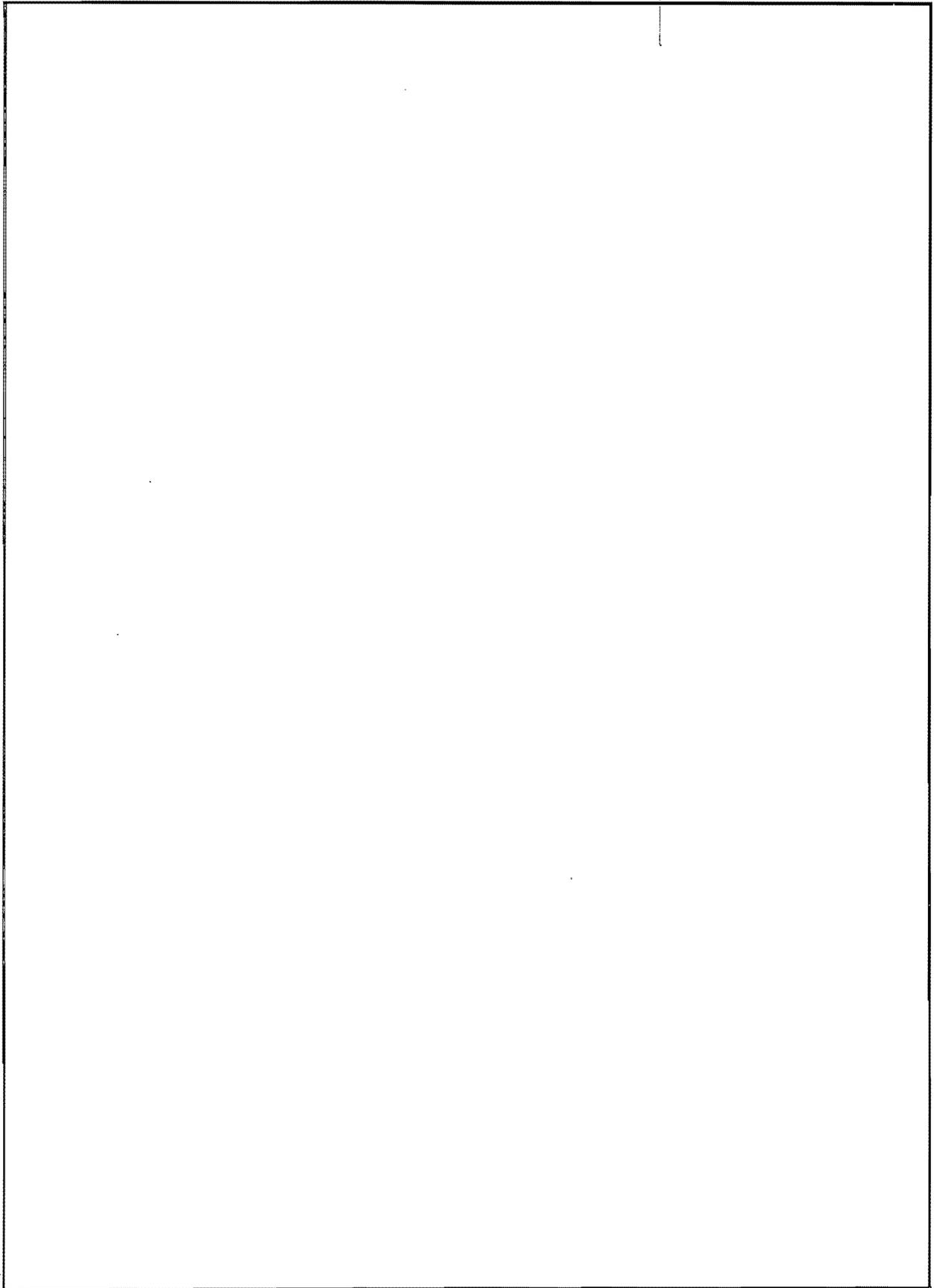


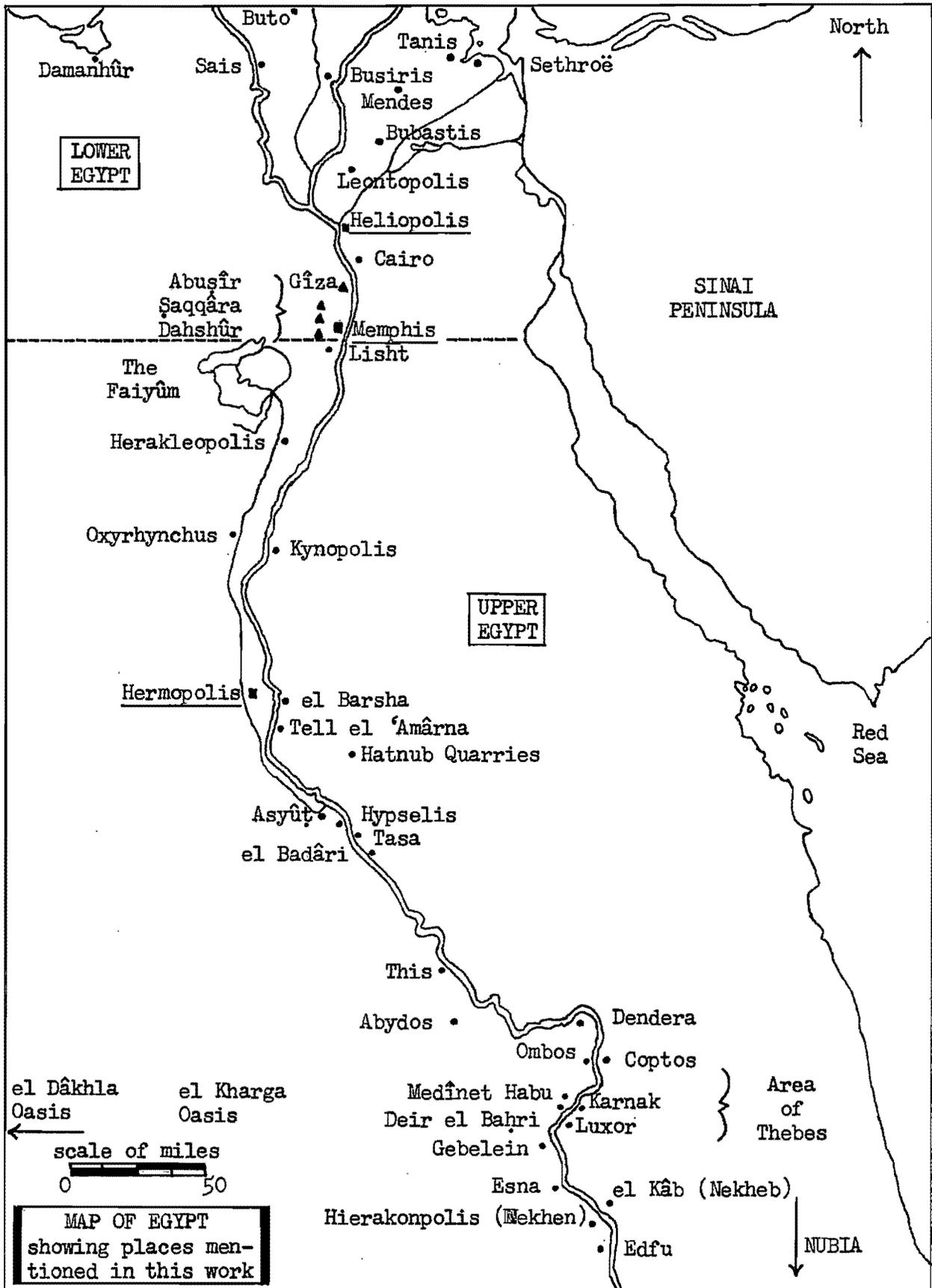
GENESIS IN EGYPT  
A Philosophical Interpretation of  
Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty  
Of the College of Liberal Arts of St. Meinrad Seminary  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

James P. Allen  
May, 1968  
St. Meinrad Seminary  
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DEDICATED TO  
HENRI FRANKFORT  
whose spirit of inquiry  
inspired this work

## PREFACE

It has long been recognized -- beginning with Herodotus in the fifth century B.C. -- that the ancient Egyptians were "the most religious of peoples." In our own time, this understanding has been the source of countless studies, of more or less merit, on the true significance of Egyptian religiosity. For a century or more, we have had open to us incredibly sophisticated tools of interpretation; yet, despite our advantages, modern research has been able to produce an appreciation of Egyptian thought little better than that of the Greeks. It has been only gradually, and somewhat reluctantly, that the Egyptians have come to be credited with anything more than simple piety in the creation of their religion.

To the early Egyptologists, the apparent jungle of Egyptian religious matter appeared so impenetrable as to defy all attempts at understanding; and as a result, the task of interpretation was increasingly avoided in favor of more "scientific" approaches.\* Such an attitude finds it difficult to accept the Egyptians on their own terms; according to the dominant scientific theory of the day, the unifying principle of Egyptian religiosity was variously presented as monotheism (Mariette, de Rougé, Pierret), henotheism (Le Page Renouf), philosophical naturalism (Brugsch), or nothing at all (Maspero, Wiedemann, Naville, Erman, Müller). It was, in fact, a clear case of not being able to see the forest for the trees, and the situation up to 1943 caused one writer to remark: "The Egyptian documents are numerous and varied; what is lacking is the art of penetrating to their very essence."<sup>†</sup>

It is only since 1946 that the task of "penetration" can

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\*Frankfort, Religion, preface.

<sup>†</sup>B. Celada, in Sefarad 3 (1943), fasc. 1, p. 217 = Chron. d'Ég. 37 (1944), p. 68. A good account of the state of affairs in the middle 1940's can be found in Drioton-Vandier, L'Égypte, pp. 111-131, and in Vandier, La religion égyptienne, passim.

be said to have begun in earnest. That year saw the publication of The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, in which Frankfort and Wilson made the first comprehensive attempt to appreciate the Egyptian mind on its own terms. This and Frankfort's later work, as well as several succeeding studies by different authors, have made it possible to study the Egyptian religion from the ground up, to understand its own peculiar coherence and significance, and to ask for the first time the question "What was Egyptian philosophy?".

In the past 20 years, much has been done toward answering that question. To date, however, comprehensive study has been lacking in one important area -- that aspect of Egyptian philosophy embodied in the many texts which represent the attempts of the ancient Egyptians to understand the origin and significance of the world around them: the creation accounts. It is true that both Frankfort and Wilson have made important contributions to an understanding of Egyptian cosmogony, but these have been small studies in the course of larger, more general works, and not examinations in their own right. Sauneron and Yoyotte have come closest to an in-depth study in their examination of "La naissance du monde selon l'Égypte ancienne," but, for all its insights, their work is incoherent as a whole, primarily because the authors lack an appreciation of the fundamentals and the interrelations of the creation accounts.

It is therefore in an attempt to bring together the cosmogonical concepts of the ancient Egyptians, and by a comprehensive examination of the material to understand how the Egyptians conceived the origins of the world, that I have undertaken this thesis. At this stage, of course, the work can only be a beginning, but the subject it treats has remained for too long a secondary discipline, and the time is past due for a beginning to be attempted.

I have limited my study to the three "systems" of Hermopolis, Heliopolis, and Memphis, and have not been specifically concerned with those of Thebes and other centers such as Esna

and Herakleopolis. The systems examined here had, in the words of Sauneron and Yoyotte, "a widespread dissemination and an influence on Egyptian religion so vast that the cosmogonical systems of the other Egyptian cities amount to mere borrowings from them."\* I have, in general, accepted two criteria in my choice of subject-matter: the basic "cosmogonic" character of the system and the temporal priority of its concepts.

Above all, I have thought it crucial to keep a critical eye on the approach with which I have attempted to study the material. I think it is essential to remember, in the midst of all the references, dissections, and interpretations made with regard to the texts, that they are first of all human productions and can only be understood as such. This is all too easy for us, who have been raised in the Hellenic/Western tradition of logical and systematically exclusive thought-processes, to forget. In looking back upon these records of early human experience at second hand, we are inclined to work within the literary and pictorial constructs alone, and so unconsciously to deny or to subordinate the human factors which produced them. It is this inclination -- often, it is true, inescapable in the normal course of study -- that I have tried to be aware of and to compensate for, as much as my own limited knowledge and experience will allow. It is no longer enough to say, with the ancient Greeks and the early Egyptologists, ἦλθον καὶ ἐθαύμασα; if we are to give any value to the contributions of the ancient Egyptians, we must add: ἦλθον καὶ ἔμαθον.

I myself could only have remained marvelling, had it not been for the help I have received in writing this thesis, and I wish to take the opportunity here of thanking those who have made it possible. I am grateful particularly for the understanding attitude and the cooperation of the faculty of St. Meinrad College, for the faith they have placed in my wholly unprofessional background, and for the advice and encouragement

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\*Naissance, p. 21.

of the professionals I have in any way consulted: Drs. John A. Wilson and George R. Hughes, of the Oriental Institute, Chicago, and Dr. Hans Goedicke of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. A special word of gratitude must be given Dr. Klaus Baer of the Oriental Institute, for the patient and generous interest he has given my work. I hope I have been able, by this thesis, to justify the time and encouragement they have so graciously granted me.

Baltimore, Erie, St. Meinrad  
October, 1966 - May, 1968

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Anc. Egypt                      Ancient Egypt. Journal of the British School of Archeology in Egypt. London, 1914-1934.
- ANET                                J.B. Pritchard (ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (2nd ed.). Princeton, 1956.
- Ann. Serv.                        Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte. Cairo, 1900 --.
- BAR                                 J.H. Breasted, Ancient Records of Egypt, V vols. New York, 1962. Quoted by volume and paragraph.
- BD                                    E.A.W. Budge, The Book of the Dead. University Books, New York, 1960. Primarily a publication of BML0470, the Papyrus of Ani. Citations of "Chapters" in the Book of the Dead refer to the numbering first given by Lepsius, now universally accepted.
- Before Philosophy                H. Frankfort (ed.), H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen, Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man. Penguin Press, Baltimore, 1966.
- BIFAO                                Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale. Cairo, 1901 --.
- BML498                              British Museum catalogue number 498, known as the Shabaka Stone and the Memphite Theology. Reproduced in Appendix III. Quoted by line.
- BML10188                            British Museum catalogue number 10188, known as the Papyrus Bremner-Rhind. Published by R.O. Faulkner, The Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca 3); Brussels, 1933. Quoted by column and line of the papyrus. Citations in this work refer directly to the excerpts in Appendix IIC.
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- Brugsch, Dict. géogr.                H. Brugsch, Dictionnaire géographique de l'ancienne Égypte. Leipzig, 1879-1880.

- Brugsch, Gr. Oase H. Brugsch, Reise nach der grossen Oase el Khargeh in der Libyschen Wüste. Beschreibung ihrer Denkmäler und wissenschaftliche Untersuchung über das Vorkommen der Oasen in den altägyptischen Inschriften auf Stein und Papyrus. Leipzig, 1878.
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- Greven, Ka L. Greven, Der Ka in Theologie und Königskult der Agypter des Alten Reiches. Ägyptologische Forschungen (hrsg. von A. Scharff) 17. Glück-

- stadt-Hamburg-New York, 1952.
- JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society. Boston, Baltimore, 1849 —.
- JEA Journal of Egyptian Archeology, London, 1914—.
- Jéquier, Considérations G. Jéquier, Considérations sur les religions égyptiennes. Neuchâtel-Suisse, 1946.
- JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies. Chicago, 1942 —.
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- MVÄG Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Ägyptischen Gesellschaft. Leipzig, 1896 —.
- Nachr. Göttingen Nachrichten aus der königlich Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Göttingen.
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- OLZ Orientalistische Literatur-Zeitung. Berlin, 1898-1908. Leipzig, 1909 —.
- P. Berlin 3048 Berliner Museum catalogue number 3048. Published by W. Wolff, "Der Berliner Ptah-Hymnus" in ZÄS 64 (1929), pp. 17-44. Cited by column

and line of the papyrus.

P. Berlin 13603

Berliner Museum catalogue number 13603. Published by Erichsen-Schott, FMT (q.v.). Cited by column and line of the papyrus.

P. Harris I

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P. Leyden I 350

J. Zandee, De hymnen aan Amon van Papyrus Leiden, I, 350. Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden. Leyden, 1948. Cited by column and line of the papyrus.

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A. Piankoff, Le "Coeur" dans les textes égyptiens. Paris, 1930.

Piankoff, Shrines

A. Piankoff, The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon (ed. by N. Rambova). Bollingen Series 40: Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations, II. New York, 1955.

Piehl, Inscr. hiér.

K. Piehl, Inscriptions hiéroglyphiques recueillies en Europe et en Egypte, III parts, each containing 1 volume of plates and 1 volume of text. Stockholm-Leipzig, 1886-1903.

Pirenne, Histoire

J. Pirenne, Histoire de la civilisation de l'Égypte ancienne, II vols. Neuchâtel-Suisse and Brussels, 1961.

PSBA

Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archeology, 40 vols. London, 1879-1918. Before 1879 as Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archeology (TSBA).

Ptahhotpe

Z. Žába, Les maximes de Ptahhotep. Nakl. Českosl. Ak. Ved. Prague, 1956. Quoted by the consecutive line-numbers of the papyrus (P. Prisse), first formulated by E. Dévaud.

Pyr.

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- 1-80).
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- Theb.T. K. Sethe and O. Firchow, Thebanische Tempelinschriften. Urk. VIII. Leipzig, 1957. Cited by text-number.
- TSBA See PSBA, above.
- Untersuchungen K. Sethe (ed.), Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens. Leipzig.  
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

CREATION AND EXPERIENCE

The most significant fact about the ancient Egyptians is that they were men who lived in the ancient world. As undoubtedly simple as that fact is, its importance cannot be overrated. Modern research has all too often proceeded on the assumption (conscious or unconscious) that the only distinction between ourselves and the ancients lies in the fact that they preceded us in time, and the results of that assumption are all too evident in some of the theories modern interpretation has produced. For we cannot attempt to read modern concepts into ancient thought without invalidating the products of that thought in the process. If all we know of a man is contained in the concrete evidence his labors have left us, we cannot approach such evidence from our point of view and hope, at the same time, to discover the significance it held for its author; it is neither just, nor is it possible, to understand the mind of a man by reading our own values into the results of his intellect's labors. All too often, as John A. Wilson notes, it is true that "our own standard of life is the one which we apply to others, and on the basis of this standard we find them wanting."<sup>1</sup> If, then, we shall endeavor to understand the thought of the ancient Egyptian, as left to us in the documents he has produced, we can never lose sight of the basic fact that his frame of reference was a world removed from ours in more ways than merely the temporal, and our interpretations of his thought will have validity only to the extent to which we approach that thought from his point of view.

The mind of ancient man is closely akin to that of primitive man, as can be observed from similarities in the customs of both peoples. This fact has long been realized, but it was not seriously applied to a study of the Egyptian mind until the work of Frankfort and Wilson. These men were the first to

make full use of the understanding that, unlike the religion of post-Hellenic man, the Egyptian's religion was at the very base of his thinking; it formed, in fact, his philosophy, and determined the actions and the institutions of his life.

Basic to this frame of mind is the ancient Egyptian's approach to the phenomenal world, diametrically opposed to that of modern man. Where we view the world with "scientific" -- that is, with essentially objective -- eyes, the ancients did not separate themselves from the experience of it; for primitive and for ancient man alike, "the realm of nature and the realm of man were not distinguished."<sup>2</sup> Man and nature were conceived as one, both participants in the order of existence and both subject to the same phenomena of birth, growth, and death. Because of this unity between man and nature, it was natural for the ancient Egyptian to interpret all the phenomena of his world in terms of human experience; and, as the fundamental human experience is the personal, it was all the more natural that the Egyptian should see the whole of the natural order in terms of the personal, not as an "It" but as a "Thou". Such a relation to the world is completely sui generis, a unique outlook combining the direct, emotional, and inarticulate "undergoing of an impression" with the emotionally indifferent articulateness of intellectual knowledge. The latter element, however, differs from the objectivity of the modern Weltanschauung. "Thou" becomes articulate for the ancient Egyptian not as a result of active investigation on his part, but because "Thou", as a presence, reveals itself.<sup>3</sup> The whole of the external world is understandable only insofar as it manifests itself, just as the personal, because it is ordered to a unique individual, cannot be the subject of an impersonal understanding. "Thou", as an individual, therefore reveals itself only in personal and immediate confrontation; and this revelation extends not only to the nature of "Thou" but -- because it is individual -- to its will as well.<sup>4</sup>

This "I-Thou" approach to the natural phenomena is a

clue to the form which shall be occupying our attention throughout this thesis. Since the phenomena of the natural order were "Thou's", with an individuality and a will of their own, they impressed the Egyptian as personalities rather than as impersonal causes. Moreover, because of the obviously extended context of their individuality in contrast to that exercised by man, they were impressive as personalities greater than the human: they were divine personalities, or gods. It is misleading to speak of the Egyptian gods as "personifications" of this force or of that element, since a personification implies a conceptualizing of something in terms of something else (in most cases, in terms of the human person), and this fact is obviously at variance with the feeling of uniqueness, individuality, which surrounds the Egyptian view of the divine.<sup>5</sup> For example, to the Egyptian Nūt did not personify the sky or stand for it; she was the sky, and vice versa, and it was equally possible to say of the sun that it "passes through the sky" and that it "sails through Nūt" (Pyr. 543a: a parallel phrase) without any essential change in meaning.

If, in the confrontation of man with living nature, the god or "Thou" contributes insofar as it manifests itself, it is apparent that the world of the ancient Egyptian became known to him as a series of revelatory events. Paul Tillich defines a revelatory event as one which "points to the mystery of being, expressing its relation to us in a definite way."<sup>6</sup> Necessary to such an event is its unique reception in a unique way by a particular person or persons. Revelation is, in fact, contingent upon uniqueness, and this contingency imparts to revelatory events the quality of mystery. The uniqueness of the event also requires that revelation be "given", and it is in the experience of revelation that the mystery of "Thou" becomes transparent. In the confrontation of "I" with "Thou", the inarticulate and emotional becomes articulate "knowledge" in addition to being a direct and emotional "reception of an impression."

Nonetheless, the language which is used to make the experience of revelation articulate points to the universality of the event. This is so because revelatory narration, though based on the unique experience of an individual, must contain what Alfred North Whitehead calls "the implicit suggestion of the concrete unity of experience."<sup>7</sup> The record of ancient man's confrontation with "Thou", therefore, necessarily takes the form of myth, for it is only in myth that the images of a concrete, unique situation can be recorded in a manner which stresses their universality.<sup>8</sup> It is this fact which has caused Frankfort to style ancient and primitive man "mythopoeic".<sup>9</sup> The ancient Egyptian, then, had this in common with all pre-Greek man: he recorded his observations on the nature of the universe not as a series of abstract, scientific statements but in the form of a highly personal, highly unique story, a record of a series of events in which the actors, because of the unique and individual character of the natural elements, were gods.<sup>10</sup>

As we have just noted, it is the paradox of revelation that, despite the uniqueness of its reception and the concreteness of its images, it nonetheless has the quality of eternal validity. Revelatory events are more than mere disclosures; they are efficacious, with a significance beyond themselves: "In the history of religion, revelatory events have always been described as shaking, transforming, demanding in some ultimate way."<sup>11</sup> The language of myth, therefore, has the extended purpose of providing a means whereby all who hear or read the account are enabled to participate in the original event. Such an attitude justifies itself, for myth is more than the account of what one particular man has experienced; it is also, and primarily, the revelation, the manifestation, of the person of some higher "Thou".

This quality of myth -- efficaciousness leading to participation -- is interesting, for it implies several attendant concepts. In an understanding of both efficaciousness and

participation are included ancient man's conception of act and ritual, of the power of Word, and above all of the nature of time. Each of these concepts has an important bearing on the place of creation in ancient Egyptian thought, and our understanding of the latter will be qualified by our appreciation of their significance.

The fact that each man who experiences myth also experiences the original confrontation it records recalls what we said at the beginning; namely, the realm of man and the realm of nature were not distinguished by the ancient. For him, man participated in the cycle of nature, in the birth, growth, and death of its elements, as he witnessed the same phenomena in himself. The mythopoeic mind, however, has this curious quality: it is struck much more forcibly by the unity in nature and in natural events than by the uniqueness of their elements. Each thing is felt to possess significance not as a unique individual, but in virtue of its membership in a continuous species.<sup>12</sup> There is a paradox here, too, in the fact that it is unity which is significant but it is the very uniqueness of personal confrontation which allows man to experience this unity. We can best understand this phenomenon of primitive thought by observing its functioning in the mythopoeic conception of time.

Mythopoeic man's approach to time is highly important, for it qualifies greatly his use of myth. If, for him, the future is normative, myth will serve only as an account of past revelation, its significance resting in its historical efficacy. Conversely, if the past is normative the efficacy of myth will directly affect the present. As a matter of fact, it was the latter frame of mind in which the ancient Egyptian moved, and its significance for his whole thought cannot be underestimated.<sup>13</sup> When the past is normative, time cannot be viewed as a linear progression to a future different in essence, and revelation is not simply a step in this change; rather, time becomes cyclic, and revelation takes on tremen-

dous importance, for it reveals not simply a past event -- as efficacious as that event may be -- but the events of present and future as well. In this way, myth functions for the ancient Egyptian in a manner similar to modern scientific formulations -- it reveals a condition which embraces eternal validity. It becomes impossible to envision a future which is in any way different from the past; eschatology becomes cosmogony.<sup>14</sup>

The Egyptian felt, then, that time was a succession of significant phases. Moreover, each phase was significant only because and insofar as it referred to -- repeated -- a normative event. This is of ultimate importance to the subject of this thesis, for if all time is conceived as a cyclic repetition of normative events, those events which have the highest significance will be those which occurred before all others, namely, the events of creation.<sup>15</sup> Time, therefore, is but the recurrence of what took place at the creation -- at the "first occasion", as the Egyptians called it. Such an attitude does not deny a future or even an end to time, but it looks to the future with the eyes of the past.<sup>16</sup> Creation initiated the present order, and it was inconceivable to the Egyptians, because of the ultimate value of that act, that the future should comprehend anything which should deny that value. Frankfort's insights into the value of the creation accounts are profound enough to warrant direct quotation:

References to the creation turn up with great frequency in Egyptian texts; a large number of creation stories were current; to all appearances, the concept played a very much larger part in Egyptian thought than in that of most other peoples. This is due to the Egyptians' view of the world. In a static world, creation is the only event that really matters supremely, since it alone can be said to have made a change. It makes the difference between the nothingness of chaos and the fullness of the present which has emerged as a result of that unique act. Consequently the story of the creation held the clue to the understanding of the present and it was for this reason that accounts of the creation

were commented upon and elaborated with unvarying interest ... In Egypt the creation stories displayed, with a clarity which actual conditions often lacked, the articulation of the existing order and the inter-relation and significance of its component parts.(17)

The accounts of the creation are thus the highest form of myth, for they are the "articulation of the existing order" and consequently the expression of man's ultimate experience of "Thou". But their significance does not end there: were they simply theoretical explanations of the origins of the existing order, they would not have had the eternal value which they did have in Egypt. It was their quality of eternal validity which made them so important to the Egyptians.

The significance of the creation was carried over into the order of daily life, whether that of man or that of the universe as a whole. Nor did the Egyptians content themselves with recognizing this conviction in the practices and processes of their life; precisely because it was a conviction, it was concretized by them into what has been called the first abstract term in history -- "Ma'at". Ma'at is the order which informs the static nature of reality; it is the cardinal principle of the normative past, because it is the order of nature as established at the time of the creation.<sup>18</sup>

We spoke above of the need the ancient Egyptian felt -- as his primitive counterpart feels today -- for uniting his activities, his aspirations, his whole life with the life and the order of nature. This need is apparent in the use of the term "Ma'at", for besides its designation of the order in nature, "Ma'at" also expresses the order in man's life, in society, as well.<sup>19</sup> The significance of the "first occasion", therefore, is not only that it saw the creation of Ma'at, but also that it was the period in which the normative function of Ma'at was first established:

Ma'at came from heaven in that time and joined with those upon the earth. The land was overflowing, bellies were full, there was no shortage in the Two Lands; no walls collapsed, no thorns pricked ...

there was no wrongdoing in the land, nor carrying off by crocodiles, nor biting by serpents -- in the first time. (20)

This late text, representative of a multitude of others, describes, in its series of negative images, the conditions which were felt to correspond in every age with the normative order of the creation. The importance of the quotation here, however, lies in its expression of the union of man (who can "do wrong") with nature (whose "thorns prick", "serpents bite", etc.), and this union recalls one of the chief functions of myth: its efficaciousness leading to participation in the original experience it records.

It is significant that myth should have been felt to be efficacious, for efficaciousness is one of the salient concepts of primitive thought. In fact, just as primitive man approaches the world from a subjective viewpoint alone, experiencing rather than knowing it, so too does his intellect recognize only one category of relation -- the effective. Material-formal, essential-accidental, real-imaginary relationships all reduce in his mind to the one criterion of effective-ineffective.<sup>21</sup> Practical examples of this intellectual trait are legion. There is no distinction in the primitive mind between the real and the imaginary, because both may be effective; a dream produces a reaction (emotion or action) just as effectively as does a real occurrence. Symbols thus mean much more to mythopoeic man than they do to the modern mind. The picture, the name, the representation of a thing can be just as effective as its very reality, and can thus be interchanged with that reality; it is useless to accuse ancient man of idolatry, when he himself recognized no distinction between transcendent and immanent deity.<sup>22</sup>

If we consider this basic approach of the ancient Egyptian to reality, we will be in a position, finally, to understand not only the most fundamental of the conceptual peculiarities in the creation accounts, but the very reason for the

efficacy of the myths themselves. Because of his one category of the effective, the ancient Egyptian could accommodate a logic which appears to us totally illogical. As the basic tenet of the Egyptian's logic is the category of effectiveness, its basic operation is what Frankfort has called the "multiplicity of approaches."<sup>23</sup> Wilson has characterized the operation in this way: "Within Egypt the most divergent concepts were tolerantly accepted and interwoven together into what we moderns might regard as a clashing philosophical lack of system, but which to the ancient was inclusive."<sup>24</sup> To deny a system to the Egyptian's logic is, as Wilson realized, to miss the point, for all intellectual associations require some element of community, no matter how much the criteria for community may vary from man to man. The logic of the ancient Egyptian, therefore, is just as valid as that of the ancient Greek or that of modern man; the difference lies in the fact that the Egyptian required only the criterion of effectiveness to justify the association of two concepts, whereas the ancient Greek -- and his modern heir -- require much more.

In the practical sphere, the multiplicity of approaches has many intellectual applications; three of these, however, appear most often in the creation accounts, where they have possibly their most important use. Applied to the concepts of space and time, the multiplicity of approaches results in a conceptual phenomenon known, respectively, as coalescence in space and coalescence in time. We may observe the first attitude in regard to the cosmogonical feature called the primeval hillock, a mound of earth thought by the Egyptians to have been the first feature arisen from the waters of chaos. Because of the multiplicity of approaches, the Egyptian could not only describe the hill in a variety of (to us) incompatible terms, but each Egyptian city could claim, with complete intellectual ease and in a total lack of intermural rivalry, that the original hillock rested in its own main temple; and, be-

cause of the peculiar quality of Egyptian logic, none of these descriptions and none of these claims were regarded as false. The Egyptian approached time in a similar manner. Each major temporal event coincided with the first occurrence of that event; each dawn, and especially each New Year's Day, was equivalent to the first dawn on the day of creation; and, conversely, because each day began with the rising of the sun, it was obvious that the day of creation had begun in the same manner, with the first rising of the sun.

One of the most important and most readily observable examples of the multiplicity of approaches concerns the Egyptian's speculations on the nature and the activities of the creator. The first mover could be conceived as the sun, Rē', as the ram-god Khnum, or as the anthropomorphic Atum or Amūn or Ptah, gods whose specific characteristics all included a specific approach to the first act. Besides the simultaneous acceptance of each of these gods as valid conceptualizations of the creator, the Egyptian could discuss the creator as a composite of any two or more of these gods, as it became convenient to his train of thought, and we are faced in the creation accounts and elsewhere with such apparent intellectual mostrosities as the god Amon-rē'-Atum. It is usual to describe such combinations as syncretistic, but the connotation of political conflict implied in that term is misleading, since it denies the philosophical-religious basis which is the true origin of the concept.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, the evidence, when rightly interpreted, points to the strong possibility that the ideas underlying these different descriptions of the creator were uniform throughout Egypt.<sup>26</sup> The true importance of the cosmogonical systems of the three major Egyptian theological centers -- Hermopolis, Heliopolis, and Memphis -- thus lies in the fact that "they presented, to the country at large, not alien doctrines but clarified insights in which the potentialities latent throughout Egyptian polytheism were rea-

lized."<sup>27</sup> This alone justifies the concentration of this work on a simple exposition of the premises on which the three theological systems are founded, as seen in their earliest known stages and -- in general -- without concern for the changes which successive ages produced in them.<sup>28</sup> The process is due not merely to expediency, but to the plain axiom that we cannot understand the accidents without first attempting to appreciate their substance.

Undoubtedly the largest single application of the multiplicity of approaches is the efficacy of myth itself. It is because of this intellectual attitude that the recounting of an "I-Thou" confrontation can be the same -- that is, can be as effective -- as the experience of the confrontation itself; and this understanding is the key to the function of myth in the intellectual world of ancient man. Once viewed with the coherence of mythopoeic logic, this attitude should appear to us no more surprising than our own conviction that the truth of intellectual discoveries, when recorded as scientific statements, can be transmitted through the written or the spoken word. The difference is that, in the one case, the experience is subjective and emotional, while in the other the experience -- perhaps of the very same natural phenomenon -- is objective and "intellectual". In the long run, therefore, it makes no difference whether speculations on creation are recorded as mythical stories or as scientific observations and conclusions. Once we understand that it is merely the approach to the subject and the manner of recording that differ in each case, it becomes clear that both types of account are describing the same human operation -- man's approach to a problem outside himself and his attempt, through internalization of the problem, to answer it.

We began this introduction by referring to the impossibility of understanding the works of any man without an understanding of the frame of mind which produced them. This contradiction may indicate to many a contradiction in thought,

and it may be objected that we can never wholly or truly understand the mind of any man. This may seem, moreover, especially true in the case of the ancient Egyptian, in view of the fundamental difference which exists between his approach to the Other and ours. Even if we can, to some extent, appreciate the significance which his intellectual productions had for the Egyptian, it appears that we still cannot reduce this appreciation to concrete understanding. Frankfort, in speaking of the difficulty in translating ancient Egyptian terms into modern language, has formulated the dichotomy:

We must ... grasp the mood, and translate in abstract terms the expectation which the images embody. In doing so, we destroy the directness and the emotional complexity which form the force and beauty -- in fact, the raison d'être -- of these images ... The relevancy of the natural phenomena to human problems is a matter of direct experience, not of intellectual argument. It is an intuitive insight, not a theory. It induces faith, not knowledge.(29)

Despite this fundamental dichotomy, however, it is not unreasonable to assume that the conclusions which Frankfort has reached on the thought of ancient man lead, in a manner which is impressive for its logic, to a rational explanation of the difficulties presented by ancient thought. Why this is so may be seen by an analogy with the field of chemistry. In any conceptual construct dealing with chemistry, we may never be able to understand exactly what it is that lies at the base of matter, but that theory seems best to us which can most rationally explain the reason for those properties we can readily observe. As Frankfort himself puts it:

I do hold that a viewpoint whence many seemingly unrelated facts are seen to acquire meaning and coherence is likely to represent a historical reality; at least, I know of no better definition of historical truth. But each new insight discloses new complexities which now demand elucidation, while at all times a number of facts are likely to remain outside any network to be established.(30)

While this Introduction does not pretend to exhibit all

the conclusions of Frankfort's theories, I have nonetheless accepted them practically in toto, for the reason just given. It is this same reason, moreover, which justifies the work presented in this thesis. We shall be operating, therefore, on the same premise on which Frankfort validates his own work; namely, that "ancient thought can be comprehended once its own peculiar coherence is discovered."<sup>31</sup>

PART I. THE HERMOPOLITAN SYSTEM



## CHAPTER ONE

### HERMOPOLIS AND THE OGDOAD

The city commonly associated with the group of gods known as the Ogdoad, and generally accepted as their birthplace and their home, goes today under the Arabic name el Ashmûnein. Like most Egyptian cities, it has had a variety of names, all directly reflective of its long history. Modern scholars refer to it by the name it received in Ptolemaic times -- Hermopolis, "City of Hermes" -- a name which reflects the Egyptian "House of Thoth" and "Place of Thoth" but which, in general, is not representative of the Egyptian names of the city.<sup>1</sup>

Hermopolis is first known in Egyptian texts as Wnw, "Hare-(city)", a name it shares in common with the nome of which it is the capital.<sup>2</sup> Toward the middle of the Old Kingdom, Hermopolis appears with a new name -- Hmnw, literally, "Eight-(city)"; the earliest known instance of Hmnw is in Dynasty V, but the name itself is known throughout history: under the Copts, Hmnw became Shmoun, the direct ancestor of the modern el Ashmûnein.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to say what relation Hmnw bears to Wnw; both continue as names of Hermopolis until late times, and if they are indeed separate locales, they are so near each other that it is impossible to distinguish between them.<sup>4</sup>

The distinguishing archeological feature of Hermopolis is the area first excavated by Roeder in the 1930's and named by him the Urzeit-Bezirk. This compound is in the middle of the ancient site of the city, in an area bounded by a wall approximately 495 by 627 yards, and appears to have been the liturgical focal point of the city; several smaller compounds seem to have been located in its southwest corner.<sup>5</sup> Roeder himself excavated several temples in the compound. Approximately in the center stood a temple built in Ptolemaic times and dedicated to Thoth, "Lord of Hermopolis"; this was probably the temple in which Pi'ankhi made offering to the "Lord of Hermopolis" after his conquest of the city in the XXVth Dynasty.<sup>6</sup> A much earlier

structure is the temple of Seti I Meneptah (Dynasty XIX), against the southern part of the west wall; the major part of the temple's construction appears to have been done under Ra'messe II, although the dedication indicates that it was founded under Meneptah, probably in the last years of his reign.<sup>7</sup> The Temple itself was built on virgin soil and dedicated to the Ogdoad.<sup>8</sup> About one hundred yards to the southeast of Meneptah's temple, Amenhotpe II (successor of Thutmose III) had built a "great entrance at the gates of the temple" consecrated to "his father Thoth, Lord of Hermopolis" and to the gods of Hermopolis.<sup>9</sup> The temple to which Amenhotpe's inscription refers stood approximately fifty yards to the southeast of the Seti-temple, and was built in the earlier part of the XVIIIth Dynasty. Inscriptions mention a temple built by Hashepsowē for the Ogdoad, and remains have been found of a smaller chapel built by Akhenaton (as Amenhotpe IV). These buildings were probably the temple in question; however, they seem to have been in general disrepair by the reign of Ra'messe II (some seventy years later), since blocks from Akhenaton's chapel were found incorporated in the temple of Seti I Meneptah.<sup>10</sup> In addition to these structures, the Egyptian texts mention a hwt-ibtt, "Temple of the 'Bird-snare'," which, if it is not a separate structure, is probably to be identified with the temple of Seti I Meneptah or with a part of that temple.<sup>11</sup>

The most significant structure of the compound remained, at least for Roeder, undiscovered. As reconstructed from the texts, this structure, which probably rested in the middle of the "Great Park" (š-') of the compound, contained the "Lake of Knives" (mr-nh;wy) in which lay the "Isle of Flames" (iw-nrsr).<sup>12</sup> On this hill, or near it, rested a temple of Rē containing the bark of the sun-god and the shell of the cosmic egg.<sup>13</sup>

Far from being mere archeological curiosities, these buildings are highly expressive of the sort of mentality we have just discussed in the Introduction. To the Egyptian,

there was no essential difference between the initial appearance of the sun over the primeval hill and the ritual "appearance of the god" in the temple at Hermopolis. For his purposes, the egg-shell which rested in the temple of Rē' was the same shell that had contained the sun at the dawn of time; his "Isle of Flames" was "the Hill which is in Hermopolis."<sup>14</sup> The emphasis is thus on Urzeit more than Bezirk, and, as Roeder noted, the temples within the compound, though built in the New Kingdom, are all expressive of cosmogonic concepts of a much earlier origin.<sup>15</sup> The examination of these concepts will be the task of this first part.

The cosmogony of Hermopolis centers on the group of gods known as the Ogdoad, four divine couples whose most common and most representative epithet is "the fathers and the mothers who made the sun."\* Pictorially, they are represented as a company of frog-headed men and snake-headed women, indicative of their chthonic connections.<sup>16</sup> Their participation in the events of the creation is clearly indicated by other epithets such as "the first primeval ones," "the ancestral gods," and "the eldest gods";\* a more complete epithet leaves no doubt as to their priority: "the eldest gods, the first corporation, who came in- to being anteriorly."<sup>17</sup>

We know of the creative activities of the Ogdoad almost exclusively from inscriptions of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods of Egyptian history, but it is certain that the origin of the group is much earlier.<sup>18</sup> Of the various periods postulated for the inception of the Ogdoad as a group, general opinion seems to favor the early or middle Old Kingdom, and with good reason, since the appearance of the name Hmnw for Hermopolis in the Vth Dynasty points to the existence of the group at that time.<sup>19</sup> The "political school" of interpretation places the birth of the Ogdoad contemporary with that of the Heliopolitan Ennead (early Old Kingdom), as a political reaction against

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\*cf. Appendix I

the power of Heliopolis.<sup>20</sup> Jéquier points out that the earliest representation of the gods as a group dates from the time of Amasis ('Aḥmose II Sinēit, Dynasty XXVI), but postulates a predynastic origin for the Ogdoad, in agreement with Garnot.<sup>21</sup> The gods themselves, with the exception of Nun and Naunet, are unknown to the Pyramid Texts; their first collective mention comes in the Coffin Texts from the First Intermediate Period.<sup>22</sup>

The history of the group itself is, of course, a direct clue to the function of its members in Egyptian cosmogony; unfortunately, however, much of that history is uncertain.

Hermopolis apparently first venerated the hare (wnw) and the baboon, and it is fairly certain that the primeval hillock played an important part in the city from the beginning.<sup>23</sup> Jéquier notes that the baboon assumed importance in Hermopolis later than the hare, and during the Old Kingdom was venerated in Upper Egypt only at Hermopolis.<sup>24</sup> The baboon seems closely associated with the early phase of the Ogdoad's history, and the members of the group appear commonly as baboons, especially in later times.<sup>25</sup> The reasons for this association are not immediately evident; two basic interpretations have been offered, represented by the opinions of Jéquier and those of Bonnet. Both men agree that the Ogdoad itself is concerned with the rising of the sun and in ministering to the sun; Bonnet follows the older belief that the baboon became associated with the rising of the sun (and thus with the Ogdoad) because it was observed to "greet" the sun with loud cries every dawn, whereas Jéquier believes the association with the Ogdoad was fostered through the simple geographic proximity of the two "cults".<sup>26</sup> Jéquier's interpretation has merit, but on a deeper (and earlier) level, the question is one of the reasons behind the veneration of the baboon in the first place. As Frankfort has noted, the worship of animals in Egypt centered principally on their ineffable otherness, and was immediately (temporally and conceptually) related to divine manifestation -- so that, in the case of the baboon and the Ogdoad, the formulation of the

latter's cosmogonic functions immediately involves the manifestation of its members in the baboon, as Bonnet indicates.<sup>27</sup> In any case, the association of the two is clear enough; Jéquier, in fact, has pointed to the "animal" determinatives of kkw and tnmw in the Coffin texts as indicative of the relationship.<sup>28</sup>

Possibly the first representation of this association, in a partially destroyed bas-relief from the funerary temple of Pepi II (Dynasty VI), has been examined by Jéquier. The relief depicts four baboons seated behind the -shrine and in front of the pr-wr shrine of Upper Egypt; if Jéquier's reasoning is correct, this is the earliest representation of the Ogdoad as a group.<sup>29</sup>

As we have noted above, the appearance of Hmnw in the Vth Dynasty suggests the appearance of the Ogdoad as a group at that time. It seems surprising, therefore, that fourteen Dynasties intervene before the Ogdoad itself appears in texts, and twenty-one before it is depicted. Until the XIXth Dynasty, in fact, the group appears as a Tesserad, if it appears at all. The names in the Coffin texts indicate the situation clearly enough, but the history behind the appearances is less clear. A major problem in that history is the puzzle of the wr-diw, a phrase whose significance may or may not have an important bearing on the role played by the Ogdoad before the XIXth Dynasty.

Wr-diw, apparently "great one of the five," already appears next to the name of Thoth in a list of gods from the altar of Pepi I (Dynasty VI) now in the Turin museum.<sup>30</sup> Various explanations of the phrase have been advanced; predominant among them is the interpretation of the words as the title of the high-priest of Hermopolis, similar to the wr-m;w in Heliopolis<sup>31</sup> or the explanation that they are the title of a god.<sup>32</sup> Evidence supporting each of these interpretations is strong. On the one hand, such phrases as "the great god among the five gods," "the first of the five gods," and "the five great gods which came forth from Hmnw" suggest that the phrase does signify five gods, of which one is called the "great(est)".<sup>33</sup> On

the other hand, the vizier is called wr-diw m pr dhwtj already in the IVth Dynasty, and the evidence of the late period suggests that the title derives from the fact that the high-priest of Hermopolis was the head of a college of five.<sup>34</sup> In general, it seems incontrovertible that the Pentad is a group of gods; nor does the equally obvious title of the high-priest compromise this interpretation, since the high-priest may be "the great one of the five" without negating the fact that there is a god who is "the great god among the five." Jéquier has even suggested the reading "Great Five", which would explain why the "great one" never seems to have a proper name.<sup>35</sup> This explanation, however, seems doubtful in the face of such phrases as "the great god among the five gods" and "the first of the five gods."

Who, then, are the "five great gods who came forth from Hermopolis"? The usual interpretation is that the Pentad is composed of the "original" Ogdoad (the Tesserad of four males) with an additional "first of the five gods." This is conceivable, especially in view of such references as: "these five great gods who came forth from Hermopolis before they were in the sky, before they were on earth, before the sun shone for them."<sup>36</sup> The important (and unsolved) question is thus one of the identity and the nature of the fifth member.

Of the various candidates, the god Thoth has met with the most general acceptance, in spite of the arguments of Sethe to the contrary.<sup>37</sup> The appearances of the name wr-diw m tp sht after that of Thoth in the two sources cited above\* may be in the nature of an epithet of Thoth rather than as a separate god; and several scholars have flatly stated that Thoth was the head of the Ogdoad as Atum is head of the Ennead of Heliopolis.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, there are those who hold that Thoth has nothing to do with the Ogdoad, in particular where the creative activities of the group are concerned.<sup>39</sup> We shall adduce

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\*p. 19 and n. 30 to this Chapter.

reasons later in this chapter to indicate that the latter view is probably the correct one; for the moment, however, we may proceed on the assumption that Thoth is for the most part unconcerned with the wr-diw; the same may be said for Amūn, with reservations, as we shall suggest in the next chapter.

Jéquier, in his examination of the bas-relief from the temple of Pepi II discussed above, puts forth the theory that the "Great Five" are the male members of the Ogdoad and the Hermopolitan Wnwt, a hare-goddess whose common epithet is "Mistress of Wnw"; the relief, in fact, shows the partially destroyed figure of a woman standing behind the pr-wr shrine of Upper Egypt, and Jéquier restores the figure as that of the hare-headed Wnwt.<sup>40</sup> The reasons behind Jéquier's theory are closely allied with his reconstructed "history" of the Ogdoad. His hypothesis is an important one, and deserves some consideration at this point.

As pointed out above, the earliest objects of religious veneration in Hermopolis appear to have been the hare and the baboon. Jéquier suggests that at some point in predynastic history, presumably just before the Unification, a cosmogony developed around the baboons, according to which they gave birth to the sun on a primordial hillock risen from Nun; due to the peculiar needs of the Egyptian mentality, a female element necessary to the procreation of the sun was added to the Tesserad, producing the wr-diw -- Wnwt and her four "husbands", the male members of the Ogdoad. In later times, however, the Pentad was rejected in favor of the Ogdoad, in which the original four males received female counterparts in place of Wnwt; finally, Thoth was added as the head of the group.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the apparent facility with which Jéquier's theory accounts for the available evidence, however, there are several reasons for believing that the situation was not as clear-cut as Jéquier makes it out to be. Alluring as the evidence of Pepi II's bas-relief may seem, the role Jéquier assigns to Wnwt is difficult to accept. Throughout history, Wnwt is an ex-

tremely minor deity, and epithets such as "mother of the sun," which we would expect to find assigned to Wnwt as they are to Hathor, Nūt, and other goddesses in a similar situation, are completely lacking; moreover, the ploygamous situation which forms the second stage of Jéquier's "history" is so unlike any other Egyptian religious construction that its validity is highly suspect. In moving from the wr-diw to the full Ogdoad, Jéquier further fails to account for the continued existence of the first group throughout history, and his assertion that the "Great Five" were replaced by the full Ogdoad is at variance with the practices of Egyptian religion.\*

All things considered, therefore, the identity of the fifth member of the wr-diw is, at best, ambiguous. We have mentioned above the sometime case made for Thoth. This, however, is in connection with the Ogdoad and not with the wr-diw, and Jéquier notes that the appearance of Thoth at Hermopolis is later than that of the wr-diw.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Thoth has little to do with the Ogdoad itself; although Hermopolis was home ground for both Thoth and the Ogdoad, the distinction between the two was kept even in relatively late times. Pi'ankhi recorded his triumphal services in Hermopolis in the XXVth Dynasty in a text which underscores the distinction: "His Majesty entered the Temple of Thoth, Lord of Hermopolis and gave offering to his father Thoth, Lord of Hermopolis, and to the Ogdoad in the Temple of the Ogdoad"; Roeder has shown that the temples in question were the separate temples of Thoth (the Ptolemaic structure) and that of Seti I Menepthah.<sup>43</sup> There are also instances of priests who bear the rank "Prophet of the Ogdoad" but who have no connection with Thoth.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, a fairly good case might be made for the sun itself as the "great one of the five." The epithet m tp sht, which accompanies even the earliest instance of the wr-diw, is reminiscent of another epithet sometimes given the sun:

\*Cf. Introduction n. 16, and pp. 9-10, above.



Fig. 1. The Ogdoad of Hermopolis

i:d m sht;<sup>45</sup> moreover, the sun often appears as the "head" of the full Ogdoad, almost as the ninth member of a "Hermopolitan Ennead" (fig. 1). From the XVIIIth Dynasty on, there is, in fact, a rather obscure Hermopolitan god Shepsē ("August") who bears the epithet "he who is among the Eight" and appears to exercise a function as "head of the Ogdoad."<sup>46</sup> Passages such as the following are representative of the god's function:

The Eight ... who made their place in Hermopolis under their father Shepsē;

The Eight ... whom Shēpsē bore in Luxor.<sup>47</sup>

We shall observe in a later chapter that this role of the sun is but part of a larger picture; for the present, it will be enough merely to note that the sun has a much better claim to the fifth position in the wr-diw than either Wnwt or Thoth.

The wr-diw, of course, continues to appear throughout history alongside the full Ogdoad, which, as we have seen, was probably formed in the early Old Kingdom. Apart from the natural conservatism of the Egyptians in religious matters, the reasons for this continuance are unclear, and the distinction between the two groups does not seem an easy one to make. It is likely that the basic distinction lies in the roles of each group, and a hypothetical delineation of these roles is possible. The wr-diw could well be the four male baboons and the sun they worship every dawn, while the Ogdoad itself, with its female members, is concerned primarily with the rising of the sun at the first dawn. Our examination of the individual members of the Ogdoad in the next chapter will point out their personification of the elements of chaos and darkness, and the

Coffin Texts clearly show that the male members of the group personified these elements already in the First Intermediate Period. It was these elements which gave significance to the daily birth of the sun, and since significance is closely related to cause in the Egyptian mind, it is a simple step from the daily birth of the sun to its birth at the dawn of creation; as we shall see in Part II, cosmological concepts seem to predate their cosmogonical corollaries in Egyptian religious thought, just as the wr-diw preceded the Ogdoad itself in Hermopolis. References to the wr-diw in a cosmogonic context are rare,\* while it is a certainty that the Ogdoad, the "fathers and mothers of the sun," is an artificial creation, the doubling of an original Tesserad, presumably to perform a cosmogonic function (procreation of the sun) which the original group could not, as such, carry out.<sup>48</sup> Frankfort has noted that the Egyptians interpreted "came into being" in terms of begetting and conceiving, and an Egyptian text on the origin of the Ogdoad expresses that tendency: "there came into being eight gods ... as four (pairs): a male and a female for each one."<sup>49</sup>

One final distinction with regard to the Ogdoad needs to be made before we may proceed to an examination of the separate members. The distinction is one observed by Sethe in the writing of the group's name, based on an observation first made by Brugsch.<sup>50</sup> The name of the Ogdoad apparently had two distinct forms: a common one designating the number of the members, hmnw, and a rather rare variant form hmnt, a collective noun "Ogdoad" similar to the Heliopolitan psdt "Ennead".<sup>51</sup> In addition, Sethe distinguished a derivative form hmnyw, "the Hermopolitans (those of Hmnw)," which appears very often in the New Kingdom and later. Sethe did not attempt to distinguish between the uses of the two commoner forms hmnw and hmnyw, and he considered the latter a simple variant of the former. A distinction, however, does appear to lie in the fact that hmnw

\*The passage quoted on p. 20 (n. 36), above, is one of the few.

is used almost exclusively in creation contexts, while hmnyw has a much broader application.<sup>52</sup>

Wainwright notes that almost all major gods were worshipped in Hermopolis, and such minor creation-gods as Khnum, Heket, Renenutet (Renent), and Meskhent often appear in general Hermopolitan texts.<sup>53</sup> These gods, and the others worshipped in Hermopolis (including, perhaps, the Ogdoad itself), are quite possibly those signified under the name hmnyw, "Hermopolitans", while the full Ogdoad by itself is the hmnw. Hmnyw appears to be used in exactly that broad sense; they are "the Hermopolitans who are in Hermopolis at the Hwt-ibt,"<sup>54</sup> and they tell Seti I: "Thou hast [built] the House of Amun of Meneptah, and the gods of Hmnw rest in it."<sup>55</sup> One significant text describes an offering made "to the Hermopolitans: to Khnum in his forms; to Heket, Renent, and Meskhent, united to build [man]; to Nehma'we and Nehbet-ka."<sup>56</sup> Thoth is then simply head of the "Hermopolitans", as his title "Lord of Hermopolis" suggests, and not of the Ogdoad. In fact, in most of the Hermopolitan temple inscriptions, Thoth speaks first, followed by the hmnyw; the lines preceding the speech of the hmnyw to Seti I quoted above describe Thoth as "content together with the hmnyw"; Ramesses III, for instance, describes what he has done "for my father Thoth who is in Hermopolis," but the deeds he lists are constructions of chapels, etc., for gods different than Thoth.<sup>57</sup> It is obvious from all this that Thoth, as "Lord of Hermopolis" and "He who is in Hermopolis", assumes a ritual command over all that concerns his city, a role which fits well with a position as head of the hmnyw.

The distinctions which have been made in this chapter have been several, but they allow us to trace the history of the Ogdoad and its functions in a much clearer manner. It seems likely that the wr-diw, the four male baboons and the sun, were venerated in Hermopolis in very early times; this group embodied a concise cosmology in which the sun, which "rises from

the primeval waters every day,"<sup>58</sup> was venerated by the elements which gave his rising significance -- the elements of chaos banished by the dawn. Probably very early in the Old Kingdom, a cosmogony developed from the wr-diw, in which the function of veneration changed to one of initial procreation, a change accompanied by the appearance of the female complements of the male members. Thus two groups existed side by side throughout Egyptian history: the cosmogonic Ogdoad and the cosmological wr-diw, whose representations can be seen in the "sunrise" scenes in the Book of the Dead. Moreover, by the time of the New Kingdom the other gods worshipped in Hermopolis began to be called the hmnyw, a society to which the Ogdoad itself may have belonged.<sup>59</sup>

It is a puzzling fact, as we have noticed, that the great majority of texts describing the activities of the Ogdoad date from late times, although the group itself first appeared in the early Old Kingdom. The reasons for this phenomenon are unknown, but several factors may have contributed to it. On the one hand, the apparent affinity of the Hermopolitan formulations with Greek concepts of matter and chaos may have led to an emphasis on the cosmogony of the Ogdoad in a time of extensive Greek contact and dominance; to the Egyptians, on the other hand, the importance of the Ogdoad was far more in its personification of the "anti-solar" elements -- a function more cosmological than cosmogonic -- than in its part in the first dawn, a subject apparently sufficiently handled by the formulations of Heliopolis and Thebes, which concentrated on the sun itself. Most of all, the hmnyw, the role of Thoth, and the general constitution of the Urzeit-Bezirk give the impression that Hermopolis was first of all concerned with ritual rather than with straight theological thinking such as that of Heliopolis -- which could well be the major reason why the majority of texts in which the Ogdoad figures date from the late period, and then primarily from Thebes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FOUR PAIRS OF THE OGDOAD

The epithets applied to the Ogdoad of Hermopolis, several of which were discussed in the last chapter, make it very clear that the group was bound in the most intimate way with the cycle of creation, the events that led to the first dawn. In this chapter we shall attempt to discover just how the Hermopolitan theologians approached the creative act, the manner in which the Ogdoad's function as personifications of the elements of chaos is related to their role as creators of the first light. The textual intricacies fostered by the Egyptians' associative approach to logic will make the process necessarily a somewhat lengthy one, but the information to be gained from it is indispensable to an understanding of the group's significance.

#### A. Nun and Naunet

Among the gods of the Ogdoad, Nun and his complement Naunet are the most clearly cosmogonic; the truly speculative nature of their characters is emphasized by the fact that, although they are perhaps the most widespread of the creation deities, they themselves have no proper cult: their true significance lies in the cosmology of the first occasion.<sup>1</sup> Nun is the personified abyss, the pre-creation chaos, the "great beginning, who came into being in the beginning of himself, who was not born."<sup>2</sup> The Egyptians themselves expressed the priority of Nun in an epithet which assumed almost the quality of a cliché: "father of the gods." The priority of Nun extended even to the creator, who is himself called "father of the gods". There is a difference, however, between the paternity of Nun and that of the creator. The creator is a father in the truest sense: he begets his progeny, whether by imparting to them his own life, as does Atum of Heliopolis, or by actually creating them, as do Amūn and Ptah. Nun, on the other hand, is the

"father of the gods" in the sense that he has priority over them, as Leucippus might be said to be the "father" of modern atomic theory. Nun never appears in the accounts of creation as the creator of the world; that role belongs specifically to the creator, whether he is called Atum, Ptaḥ, Amen-rē', or any of the other gods assigned that role at one time or another in Egyptian history. The creator, in fact, "comes forth" from Nun to initiate creation; it is said of him that he existed before creation within the primeval waters and that he "awoke" within them at the beginning.<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of the primordial chaos are common in Egyptian texts, and they all follow a basic pattern:

before the sky had come into being, before the earth had come into being, before the two firmaments had come into being;

before the sky had come into being, before the earth had come into being, before men had come into being, before the gods had been born, before death had come into being;

before the sky had come into being, before the earth had come into being, before the ground and (its) creeping things had been created in this place;

before the earth and the sky had come into being in the primeval waters;

before the sky, the earth, and the Duat had come into being;

(this island) arose from the flood, coming into being aforetime, before anything had come into being in it, while the earth was still in darkness and night.(4)

The last passage in this series preserves an significant image in its description of the state of the pre-creation chaos, in that it depicts the primordial universe as a "flood". The "flood" is, in fact, a synonym for Nun himself, as a passage from the Osiris-ritual of later times makes clear:

Homage to thee, Nun, in thy name of Nun;  
Homage to thee, Flood, in thy name of Flood.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of (primordial) water is inseparable from that of Nun, since the god was conceived not merely as "chaos", but as the primeval flood, almost in the same manner as the Greek

Okeanos.<sup>6</sup> Together with his counterpart Naunet, Nun is the water that surrounds the whole world, top, bottom, and sides, and all the processes of existence take place within that envelope of waters. Where modern man knows that the earth "floats" in space, the Egyptians, like most primitive peoples, viewed the earth's surroundings as waters; the earth is "between Nun and Naunet" and P. Harris I speaks of "Ta-tjenen ... who founded the earth ... and surrounded it with Nun."<sup>7</sup>

The illustration below gives a fairly accurate representation of the Egyptian conception of the universe (fig. 2). At the top is the usual sign for the sky (personified as Nūt); under the sky lies the earth (Gēb), and between the two is the atmosphere (Shu). At the bottom of the picture lies the sign for "anti-sky" or the like, a role which Naunet seems to play.<sup>8</sup> However, Naunet's role is not as clear as that of Nun; at times the goddess appears to be conceived as the underworld counterpart of Nūt;<sup>9</sup> but the "water"-determinative which follows her name indicates that her nature is fluid rather than aerial. Altogether, Naunet's appearance as a subterranean Nun seems most likely, despite Bonnet's contention that such a role is "only a priestly invention";<sup>10</sup> the goddess is obviously a counterpart of Nun, as her name makes clear, and the fact that her name bears the "anti-sky" determinative is probably only reflective of her relation to Nun (☩ as against ☩ for Nun, who is "over the earth").<sup>11</sup>

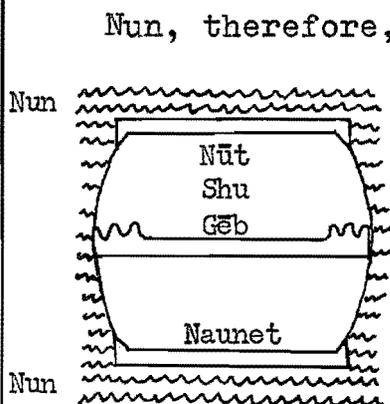


Fig. 2. The Egyptian Concept of the Cosmos

Nun, therefore, was conceived as the primeval waters stretching throughout the pre-creation universe and completely surrounding the world after the creation. The fact Nun is chaos, not-being outside the being of the cosmos, would lead us to assume that Nun surrounds the cosmos in three dimensions, infinite in expanse (this is the meaning of Ḥuḥ-Ḥauḥet, whom we shall examine next), and that

Nun must have extended everywhere before the world came into being. Many of the texts contain explanations of the creation which do imply this conception of Nun. The creator is often pictured as "inert", floating within the primeval waters,<sup>12</sup> and Shu, the atmosphere in the Heliopolitan system, describes himself as "that space which came about in the waters: I came into being in them, I grew in them, but I was not consigned to darkness."<sup>13</sup> Equally common, however, is a conception of Nun as infinite in three dimensions but surfaced. This viewpoint is especially apparent in the texts which speak of the primeval hill,\* and we need not search far to find an explanation for it. We have noted above Nun's close association with the waters of the earth, and particularly with the Nile.<sup>+</sup> In Egypt the yearly recession of the Inundation uncovers the high points of the landscape before all else, and the sight of a mound of freshly fertilized earth above the otherwise unbroken expanse of the flood-waters convinced the Egyptians that a similar occurrence must have produced the first mound of earth at the beginning of time.<sup>14</sup>

The name of Nun is derived from a verb which is often used in connection with the waters of the Inundation; Nnw is participial from the verb nni, "to be inert, weary,"<sup>15</sup> and is commonly predicated of water, especially of the Nile as it overlies the land during the Inundation; in this last use it appears to have the meaning "stagnant" as well as the connotation of incipient life, or life-giving power. That it was the Nile-waters which permitted the cultivation of the land along the banks of the river did not escape the attention of the Egyptians, and it is reasonable to assume that they read the life-giving power of the Nile into the quality of water per se. In any case, Nun, the source of all water, was felt to possess the power of life: "He brings the Nile from its cavern (source); he makes the plants on which men live to flourish, and makes

\*See Chap. 4, sub. A.

<sup>+</sup>pp. 28-29, above, and n. 6.

the sustenance which comes forth from him -- in his name of Nun the Elder."<sup>16</sup> A phrase commonly predicated of the Nile in Inundation reveals the connection between Nun and the concept expressed by the verb nni: "It (the Nile) is inert in its name of Nun";<sup>17</sup> the deceased in the Coffin Texts claims: "I am Nun; I am inert."<sup>18</sup> The claim of the deceased, in his hope of rebirth, to equation with Nun as nni, "inert", is a clear indication not only of the correspondence between Nun and the quality of nni, but also of the fact that Nun as "inert" has the power of incipient or potential life. It is the possession of this last quality which accounts, in part, for Nun's equation with the creator himself, who is the giver of all life.<sup>19</sup>

Nun is thus the primeval waters not only as simply chaos, but as not-being awaiting the creation of the cosmos, or being; it is his potentiality which gives meaning to the actuality of the cosmos. It is especially in this way that he is "father of the gods." It is somewhat puzzling, however, that he appears both as the pre-creation chaos and as a member of the Ogdoad, personifications of that chaos. The texts relate how the Ogdoad produce Light "in the darkness of father Nun";<sup>20</sup> in fact, the members of the Ogdoad are themselves "formed in Nun."<sup>21</sup> Since the original validity of the Ogdoad is as personifications of qualities of the primeval waters, the answer seems to lie in the distinction between quality and qualified. Nun is the primeval waters, but as a member of the Ogdoad his role -- originally -- was probably simply as nnw, "inertness."<sup>22</sup> Egyptian literature sometimes makes the distinction between "Nun the Elder, father of the gods" and "Nun of the Ogdoad";<sup>23</sup> the fusion of the two names is probably simply a matter of confusion between the name of the qualified and the personification of the quality. In any case, the two were never very far apart conceptually.<sup>24</sup>

The real importance of Nun's occurrence in the Ogdoad is as nni, that broad concept which we have noted as embracing both "inertness" and "incipient life." It is hardly valid to

read into Nun the role of "matter" or "Urstoff", as some have done,<sup>25</sup> since the texts which speak of creation "from Nun" always relate to his inertness as such, and not to any materiality on his part. To apply a modern term to the Egyptian concept, it is closest to the original to say that Nun is potentiality personified, for this term embodies the idea of incipient motion as well as the notion of "inertness" in itself. Nun is exactly that, whether he is viewed as "father Nun", the primeval waters, or as nni personified: he is the incipient, the potential which gives significance to the existence of the cosmos. The next two pairs of the Ogdoad, Huh-Hauhet and Kuk-Kauket, serve to emphasize that potentiality even more precisely.

#### B. Huh-Hauhet

The name of the second god of the Ogdoad appears in a variety of writings, as do the names of most of the eight gods. By far the most common is the simple  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑}$ , which appears in variant forms with different phonetic complements. Depending on the derivation in the mind of the writer, the name can also appear as  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$  or  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑}$ ; the name of Hauhet, the feminine complement of Huh, shows the same sort of variation.<sup>26</sup>

These variant writings are important, since they indicate that the derivation of the name was not considered uniform. In the examples above, the writing with the "legs"-determinative, indicating "motion", recalls the verb  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$  hhi, meaning "range afar" or secondarily "seek, search for."<sup>27</sup> Hhi is often used in connection with water, where it displays the writing  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒} \text{𓆓}$  or  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ ; the writing  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒} \text{𓆓}$  indicates not only the connection of the verb with  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$  but with the water as well. The meaning in this last relation is clear enough -- "surge, well up" -- and the form is actually a reduplication of another common word  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒} \text{𓆓}$  hwi, "to well up, to flood";<sup>28</sup> the Pyramid Texts, in fact, preserve a substantive  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒} \text{𓆓}$  hy, "flood" (Pyr. 1146a). Another common Egyptian derivation of "Huh" is represented by the writing  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑}$ ; this is actually an abbreviation of



(hhi, "range afar"), in expanse of water (hhw, "well up, flood"), in time (nhh, "eternity"), and so forth. It is enough to note here, however, that the sense of the word which is the root of the name of Huḥ is carried through in the role of the god Huḥ in the Ogdoad -- the personification of the infinitude of the primeval waters' expanse, what Sethe characterizes as "a quality of the water personified in the god, something like the infinitude, the infinite Ausbreitungsfähigkeit which allows the water to rise and to well up in every corner it can reach."<sup>33</sup>

Huḥ and Hauhet have one of the most prominent roles in the cosmological wr-diw, in connection with the rising and the setting of the sun, a role that was perhaps their original function:

Huḥ, who raises the sun in the morning and makes his night in Medinet Habu; Hauhet, who seeks the sun in the Netherworld, in order to bring light into being after darkness.<sup>(34)</sup>

The role is purely secondary to the function of the gods in the Ogdoad, but it is a good index of their significance: Huḥ and Hauhet, in their personification of the spatial infinity of chaos, emphasize the comfortable finitude of the actual cosmos.

#### C. Kuk-Kauket

Unlike the second pair of the Ogdoad, the name of Kuk and his complement Kauket bear an immediately obvious relation to the role of the gods in creation. Kkw is one of several common Egyptian words for "night", "darkness", or "gloom", as the rarely-omitted determinative 𓆎 indicates.<sup>35</sup> Kkw, moreover, appears to be the earliest of the three terms in common use; the word grh, which occurs after the Old Kingdom, properly means "night", and is derived from the verb grh, "come to an end, cease" -- when the day comes to an end, there is night; the word which occurs simply as snk in later texts is more completely snkt or snkkw, a derivative of kkw, and its basic meaning is "obscurity."<sup>36</sup> Of the three, only kkw is properly dark-

ness per se, as the absence of (all) light, and is thus a difficult concept to render accurately, since it applies in the first sense to the primeval waters, upon which no light shines:

The king was conceived at night and was born at night ...  
King N. was conceived in Nun and born in Nun (Pyr. 132).

The fact that kkw was used in general Egyptian literature to signify simply "darkness" does not destroy the argument, since this is a derived application; in fact, to convey the sense of the darkness that is embodied in Kuk the Egyptians found it necessary to compare it to grh, "night": "This manifestation (or emanation) of Kuk is Night."<sup>37</sup> It might even be said, in light of this text and others, that Kuk is the source of all darkness as Nun is the source of all water, but the association in the case of Kuk is much less certain than is the case with Nun.<sup>38</sup> All that we can safely say -- and this with a good deal of textual support -- is that Kuk represented the inexplicable darkness which is coterminous with the primeval waters, a darkness never broken by the light of the sun:

(This island) arose from the flood, coming into being aforetime, before anything had come into being in it, while the earth was still in darkness (kkw) and gloom (sm!wy). (39)

Like Huh and Hauhet, Kuk and Kauket also have a prominent cosmological role, in connection with the birth of the sun at dawn and (by extension) with its setting at night:

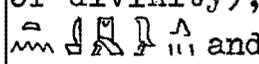
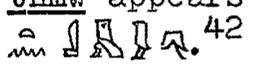
Kuk, who makes light and brings the dawn into being.  
He causes RĒ'-Atum-Khopri to set in the West. Kauket,  
who makes night and brings the sun into being;

Kuk, the elder god, who came about in the darkness.  
He makes clear the path of the light, dispersing darkness before men with the rays of his emanation (the sun). (40)

In the case of Kuk and Kauket, however, their cosmological function is striking and immediately obvious: as personifications of darkness, they give an absolute significance to the light of the sun. In the Ogdoad that function becomes cosmogonic: the absolute darkness of chaos, in giving meaning to the first dawn, is somehow felt to cause the first rising of

the sun. Together with the first pair of the Ogdoad, Kuk and Kauket are commonly used together to describe the state of the primeval waters; it is said of the creator that he made the Netherworld, "dark and limitless," while Chapter 175 of the Book of the Dead describes the chaos as "very deep, very dark, completely limitless."<sup>41</sup>

#### D. The Fourth Pair

Unlike the first three pairs, the fourth pair of the Ogdoad has neither a consistent role in the creation nor, indeed, is it always the same two gods who exercise that role. In the Coffin Texts of the First Intermediate Period, where the male members of the Ogdoad first appear together, the fourth position is occupied exclusively by the god Tenēmu; Tenēmu appears only in the Coffin Texts, and is thus without a feminine complement. The meaning of his name (and his nature) is not immediately apparent (indeed, it is not clear whether Tenēmu is a god at all; his name never seems to have the determinative of divinity); tnmw appears in two forms in the Coffin Texts,  and <sup>42</sup>. The latter seems to have the meaning "darkness, gloom, obscurity," while the former has a verbal form tnm with various translations: "turn aside, go astray, err, deflect, be confused."<sup>43</sup> In its basic sense, tnmw seems to signify "obscurity" or the like; most scholars have read the connotation "disappearance" into the word.<sup>44</sup> The last interpretation seems to have some support in the Pyramid Texts, where the dead king, personified as the setting sun, is addressed: "Thou disappearest (tnmΔ·k) from their sight like Rē'" (Pyr. 1695c). It is difficult in all of this to find a concrete expression for the quality Tenēmu personifies. In general, the god's nature seems to capsulize some sort of intangibility about the primordial chaos; perhaps the closest approximation to the original Egyptian lies in the word "obscurity", where it is not the darkness of the chaos itself that it qualified, but the whole of the pre-creation state.

When the full Ogdoad first appears, in the XXVith Dynasty, Tenēmu has been replaced by the god Niu and his consort Niut, and throughout the late period, from which most of the Hermopolitan texts derive, these two gods are the most common occupants of the fourth position. The significance of Niu's nature is every bit as obscure as that of his predecessor. The stem of niw, ni, seems to be the same as that which appears in the verb ni, "drive away, rebuff, avoid, repel, parry." The original sense of the verb is perhaps more basic than these translations indicate; in the Pyramid Texts, the sun is said to ny (niw 44, Pyr. 891), and the radical is often translated "deny" or "negate".<sup>45</sup> In light of the verb's intransitive use in Pyr. 891, it seems likely that the root sense of ni involves some sort of negation of existence -- the sun "disappears" (ny) by going out of sight,<sup>46</sup> and a thing is "avoided, rebuffed," etc., by being moved out of the sphere of the observer's existence. Like Tenēmu, Niu is predicated of the chaos itself, and in that context the god perhaps signifies the separation between the cosmos (existence) and the waters of chaos (not-being); again, a somewhat difficult concept to express in modern terms.

At times, in the late period, the gods Amūn and Amaunet occupy the fourth place in the Ogdoad; the first such instance dates from Dynasty XXVI, in the earliest days of the Ogdoad's appearance in the texts.<sup>47</sup> It is significant, however, that Amūn's relations with the Ogdoad are in a highly irregular capacity. The god appears to be a stranger to the Hermopolitan group, and his association with it usually calls for some alterations in its composition.<sup>48</sup> In the Ogdoad, Amūn always occupies the fourth position, usually as a substitute for Niu; at times, however, he replaces Nun, in which case the order is Ḥuḥ-Kuk-Niu-Amūn; only in one instance does the god Ḥuḥ seem to be omitted in favor of Amūn.<sup>49</sup> Very often, Amūn and Amaunet are included in an Ogdoad of more than eight members: P. Berlin 13603, for example, names the eight gods of the "orthodox"

Ogdoad (fig. 1) and then relates how "Amūn and Amaunet ... united themselves with those who have united themselves, in order to make ten names," and an inscription of Ptolemy IV Philopater (221-205 B.C.) names as "the Ogdoad" two groups of three pairs each:

Nun-Naunet	Huh-Hauhet
Amūn-Amaunet	Kuk-Kauket
Niu-Niut	Hemse-Hemset. <sup>50</sup>

In the majority of instances, however, Amūn appears not as a personification of some quality of the primeval waters but rather as the creator qua creator. Even when he appears in the Ogdoad, he is often described as the "father of the fathers" of the group; his appearance as a creator is sometimes in union with Nun, for reasons expressed above,\* and there are several instances in which the Ogdoad itself appears merely as a manifestation or embodiment of Amūn.<sup>51</sup>

Amūn's appearance in the Ogdoad as creator points to the looseness of his association with the group, whose other members are clear personifications of chaos, and brings to the fore the question of the reasons behind the association. Sethe devoted much space to an attempt to establish Amūn as the original occupant of the fourth position, despite the lack of early evidence and the later indications to the contrary; the god's later association with the Ogdoad is thus, for Sethe and his followers, simply the reflection of his original role.<sup>52</sup>

The evidence against this interpretation, however, is much too strong to be explained away by Sethe's theory. Besides the indications of the preceding paragraph, the god's historical situation argues against his origin as a member of the Ogdoad. Amūn first appears in Hermopolis in the XVIIIth Dynasty, long after the Coffin Texts of the First Intermediate Period; his first relationship with the city is as hry-ib Wnw, a phrase best translated as "visiting in Wnw," and the first Hermopolitan temple dedicated to the god was founded in Dynasty XIX on

\*See pp. 27, 31, and n. 19 to this chapter.

virgin soil.<sup>53</sup> All together, the most reasonable explanation of Amūn's appearance as a member of the Ogdoad probably lies in his role as Pantokrator, and his relationship with the group is simply as a creator in a cosmogonic context; this relationship will be examined more fully in the next chapter. Such an explanation does not discount the fact that there may have been a common quality in the natures of Amūn and Niu which contributed to the association. As we shall see in Chapter 3, Amūn's name means "hidden", and the god was often viewed as "hidden in the wind," a quality that may have contributed, in part, to an association between Amūn and the "obscurity" personified in Niu.<sup>54</sup> The explanation is often given that the names may have been interchanged simply because they each express a negative concept, or a personification of the same element of chaos.<sup>55</sup>

As for the original occupant of the fourth position, the bulk of the evidence points to Tenēmu. However, the Memphite Theology, which is probably to be dated to the end of Dynasty II,\* preserves the name of the goddess Niut (ni;t) in a list of cosmogonic deities and describes her as "she who gave birth to the gods."<sup>56</sup> In view of the fact that Niu-Niut does not appear again until Dynasty XXVI, while Tenēmu's name occurs in the first collective mention of the male members of the group, it may be that the fourth member was called Tenēmu in the original wr-diw and the expansion of the Tesseract to the cosmogonic Ogdoad replaced that name with Niu and Niut.

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\*See Chapter 15, below.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ROLE OF AMŪN

The god Amūn, as noted in the last chapter, is not directly connected with the Ogdoad as such. Nonetheless, he appears quite often in Hermopolitan texts, and his role as one of the major creator-gods is important enough to warrant examination in this context.

Amūn first appears in the Pyramid Texts, in contexts which suggest his conception already in the Old Kingdom as a king (Pyr. 1712b) and as a creator (Pyr. 446c). The god's first geographical connections are with the city of Thebes; at the beginning of the First Intermediate Period, after the end of the VIth Dynasty, the nomarch Reḥuy relates how he delivered provisions to the temple of Amūn at Thebes during the years of famine, and later in the same period, an official who served under an unnamed king, perhaps Inyōtef I (Dynasty XI), states that his master performed services for Amūn and other gods at Thebes.<sup>1</sup> Barguet even maintains that "already at the end of the IIIrd Dynasty, Karnak was doubtless a place consecrated to Amūn," but the statement is undocumented.<sup>2</sup> From the time of Inyōtef I, Amūn's association with Thebes is clear, but it is difficult to say whether the city had always been the god's home.<sup>3</sup> After the First Intermediate Period, Amūn is firmly established in Thebes, and the city remains his home until the end of the Egyptian religion.

Part of the uncertainty over Amūn's geographical origin stems from the fact that his original character shows strong connections with Min, the god of the nome of Koptos, next to Thebes.<sup>4</sup> The early Egyptologists were fairly uniform in their belief that Amūn was no more than a Theban development of Min, and Wainwright has made extensive studies to support the interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Amūn does appear to have borrowed his form and

many of his characteristics from Min -- perhaps even his name -- and it is probable that his first relations were with Min; the limestone chapel of Senwosre I (Dynasty XII) at Karnak shows Amūn in human form wearing the šwty-plumes, and in more than two thirds of the representations in the chapel he appears in the ithyphallic form -- two of the most basic of Min's characteristics.<sup>6</sup> In one of Amūn's earliest appearances, in the Pyramid Texts, he seems to replace Min, and the evidence of these texts suggest that, if he did indeed derive from Min, he first began to diverge from that god in Dynasty V.<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not Amūn had the same origin as Min, his basic role very early departed from that of the Koptite god. One of the prime indications of the separation is in the name of Amūn. In its consonantal structure imn employs the same radical as that of the verb imn, which means "conceal" and "be hidden"; the determinative of the verb varies, but the most common are the picture of a man concealed behind a wall  and a shorter form <sup>8</sup>. The Pyramid Texts usually employ the determinative of negation  or simply an empty space after the word.<sup>9</sup> That the significance of Amūn's name rests on the concept of the verb imn is readily discernible from the many texts which concentrate on the "secrecy" or the "mystery" of the god's existence:

Amūn, who came into existence at the beginning. None knows the manner of his emergence. No god came into being before him. There was no other god with him to tell his forms. He had no mother for whom his name was made. He had no father who begot him and said: "It is I." Shaping his own egg. Force, mysterious of births, creating his beauties. Divine god, coming into existence of himself: all gods came into being after he began to be.(10)

It is said of Amūn: "Thou concealest thyself as Amūn the Elder."<sup>11</sup> In fact, an extremely common writing of his name -- perhaps the complete form -- is imn-rn·f, "He who conceals his name"; and when we recall the Egyptian feeling toward the name

of a thing, this form takes on special significance.<sup>12</sup> In exposition of this feeling we may quote the common epithet of the god, "He conceals his name as Amūn," and relate it to the equally common variant "He conceals himself as Amūn the Elder"; a line from Thebes shows that the two thoughts are parallel: "He who conceals his name: his Self is unknown."<sup>13</sup> The god is "He who conceals himself unto his children; he who secretes himself, his nature is unknown"; nor is it only "his children" (men) to whom the essence of the god's existence is closed, but the gods -- the natural forces -- as well: "Thou art Amūn, who conceals himself unto the gods," "the sole Amūn, who conceals himself unto them: he who secretes himself unto the gods, he whose appearance is unknown."<sup>14</sup> Amūn's relation to the wind, as "hidden", is also in evidence, but it is doubtful that his immanence in the wind was the original source of his "hidden" nature.<sup>15</sup>

Amūn's connection with the wind, however, does point to a significant quality in the god's nature. Of Amon-rē', the creator-sun, it is said: "Thy external appearance is light (inw·k šw), but thy body is the wind at every nose; one breath breathes of thee in order to live"; Amūn is "the august god who came into being in the beginning, the wind which pervades all things (mn m ht nb) and of which one lives forever" and his complement Amaunet is called "the North Wind which creates the Ka's and sustenance through her action."<sup>16</sup> The important thing to note in the relation is Amūn's appearance not as a "creative wind" but rather as a wind which gives life to all things. Possession and bestowal of the "breath of life" is, in fact, a common attribute of all the creator-gods, and if Amūn seems to be more closely allied with the wind than most, it is perhaps simply because he is the creator par excellence. He can hardly be said to have personified the wind as a chaotic element, since one of his epithets is ir-t;w, "wind-maker": "the god, the wind-maker, hidden of form, who secretes himself

unto his children."<sup>17</sup>

Amūn's connection with the breath of life in the wind suggests the power of his role as Pantokrator (reigning creator), and his usual epithets confirm it: "King of the gods," "Lord of the gods," "Chief of all the gods," "Ruler of the Enneads," a god whose dominion extends over "heaven, earth, the Netherworld, the waters, the mountains" -- in short, over all facets of the cosmos.<sup>18</sup> As creator, he enjoys the common title hpr m h't, "he who came into being in the beginning," and is often referred to as "the primeval one" or more specifically as "the first primeval one."<sup>19</sup> It is significant, however, that among the various creator-gods of Egypt, Amūn is regarded not only as the most important but also as the embodiment of all the major creators:

Amūn ... (he is) Rē' himself, bodily united (with him). He is the Elder who is in Heliopolis (Atum). He is called Ta-tjenen (Ptah). Amūn, who came forth from Nun. He guides all men. Another of his forms is the Hermopolitans. The primeval one who begot the primeval ones. He gave birth to Rē' and completed (tm) himself as Atum (itmw), with whom he is one. Three are all gods: Amūn, Rē', and Ptah; their seconds are not. Concealing his name as Amūn. To him is Rē' as face; his body is Ptah. (20)

Of the various equations in this passage, perhaps the most significant is that of Amūn with Rē', the sun-god, since it is in the union Amon-rē', rather than as simply Amūn, that Amūn rose to national importance and sovereignty in the Middle Kingdom and after. The union of the two gods, which seems to have occurred sometime during the First Intermediate Period, is often explained as the result of geographical moves or of political factors, but the most obvious explanation lies in the natures of the two gods themselves.<sup>21</sup> Both Amūn and Rē' appear earliest, in the Pyramid Texts, as kings; Pyr. 1712b already speaks of the "throne of Amun," and a personal name in the XIth Dynasty, when Amun first begins to assume prominence, shows his claim to power: Š'ankh-Amūn Šekhementowě.<sup>22</sup>

Amūn's union with Rē' is extremely important in our con-

text, for it is the key to the god's complicated relations with the Ogdoad and its creative activities. As the creator, Amon-rē' is often identified with the other creator-gods of Egypt. Thus in Memphis he is naturally associated with Ptaḥ-Tatjenen, the Memphite form of the original creator; one text clearly speaks of Amūn's "taking his other form of South-of-His-Wall," using a frequent synonym for Ptaḥ.<sup>23</sup> Amūn's identification with Atum of Heliopolis is much less common, and is almost always made through the medium of some other god, usually one of the "sun-gods". In this way, Amūn is identified in some texts with "Rē' Ḥarakhtē Atum" or with "Atum Ḥarakhtē"; association through Rē' alone is most common, as in a line from the Theban tomb of Amenemḥēt: "Amon-rē' Atum, Lord of what exists."<sup>24</sup> In most such cases, Atum was probably conceived only as the sun, as was common in later times.<sup>25</sup>

In Thebes, Amūn as creator is often equated with the Kematef serpent of the Grecian period, a being that appears very often in texts concerning the Ogdoad. The name Kematef, in Egyptian km-!t.f, means "he who finishes his moment," and is perhaps a reference to the creator's completion of creation, just as the Ogdoad is said to "complete its time" by initiating the first rising of the sun.<sup>26</sup> The temporal aspect implied in the name is probably reflected in another "serpent-manifestation" of Amūn, the 'h'y nfr ḥpr m h't.<sup>27</sup> The name 'h'y is difficult to translate into English; it comes from the word 'h'w, which means "lifetime" or "period, space of time."<sup>28</sup> A literal translation such as Sethe's "lifetime-serpent" conveys little of the name's significance; in the last analysis, the name is probably an emphasis on the creator's pre-creation existence in the void.<sup>29</sup> Amūn's connection with this being is evident in a text which tells how Amūn "created himself as the 'h'y-serpent, unique in his form, whose equal is not."<sup>30</sup> The serpent itself is probably simply another form of Kematef.

The Kematef-serpent itself is a form of Amūn as creator,

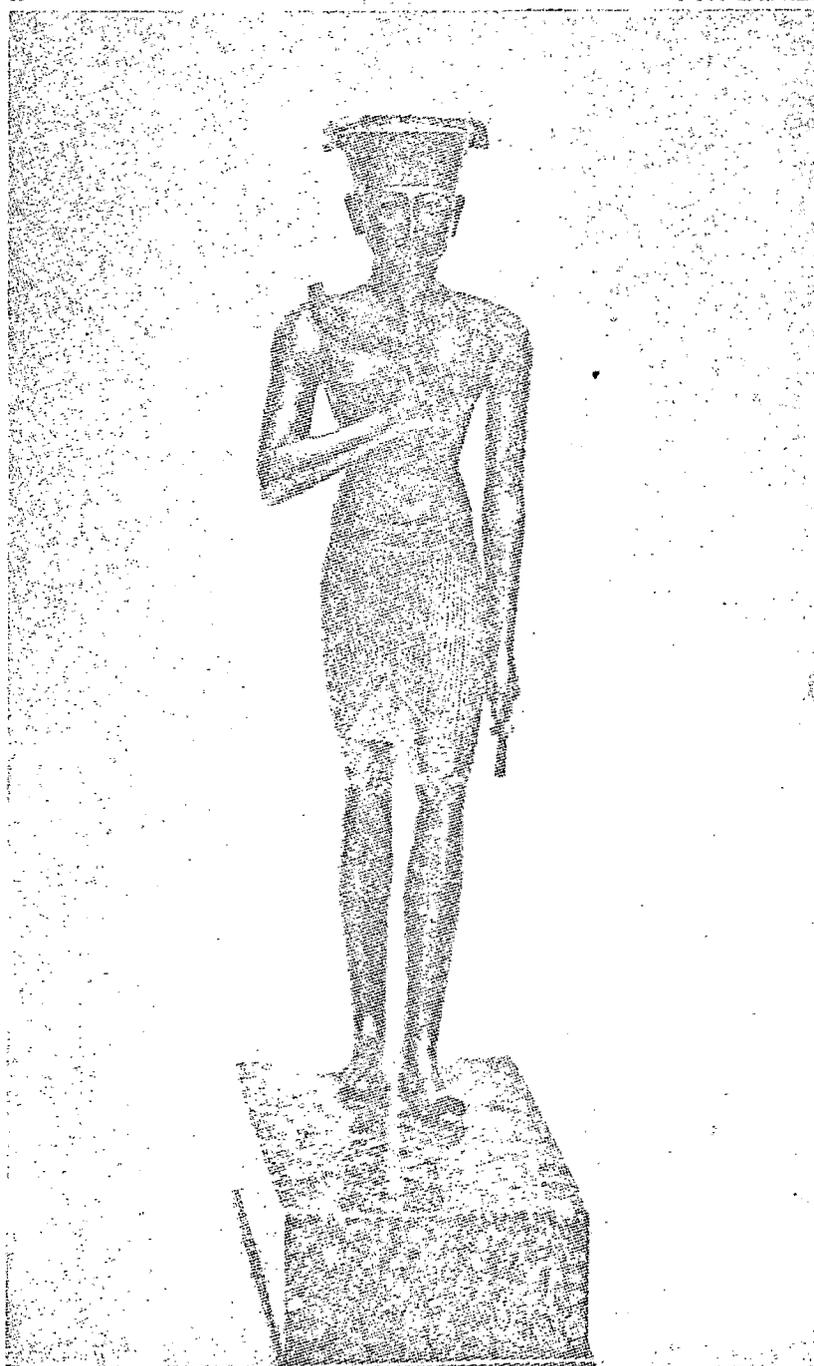


Plate I. The God Amun

as many texts make clear.<sup>31</sup> In the usual version of the myth surrounding Kematef, the serpent-god exists from all time in pre-creation eternity. At the beginning of the creation, Kematef creates a second serpent, the first being, whose name is ir-tḥ, "Land-Maker". It is this second serpent who is the actual creator, and thus a sort of demiurge of Kematef: "It is Kematef who was the father of Land-Maker, who initiated creation, before land had come into being."<sup>32</sup> Land-Maker, however, is identical with Ptaḥ of Memphis, under the latter's association with Ta-tjenen, the "Rising Land". Ptaḥ-Tatjenen is called "Land-Maker (ir-tḥ), who created the primeval time"; and since Ptaḥ is himself identical with Amun, Land-Maker is also Amūn: at least one text writes the name of the serpent-god with the determinative for "Amūn".<sup>33</sup>

The associations outlined in the preceding paragraphs are important, for they are the key to one of Amūn's most frequent relationships with the Ogdoad, a relationship expressed in his common epithet "father of the fathers of the Eight."<sup>34</sup> To understand the meaning of this phrase, we need to recall that Amūn was often identified with Ptaḥ-Tatjenen. The latter god appears in the texts of the late period as the creator of the Ogdoad; he is called "father of the Eight" and they are referred to as his children.<sup>35</sup> The role of "father of the Ogdoad" is also assigned to the god Shepsē,<sup>\*</sup> an anthropomorphic or falcon-headed sun-god who appears in Hermopolis from Dynasty XVIII on, but it is Ptaḥ-Tatjenen who appears most commonly in the role.<sup>36</sup> Ptaḥ's fatherhood, however, is qualified to the degree that he himself has been created by Amūn: "He created Ptaḥ at his word, to give birth to the Eight," "he created Ta-tjenen who formed the Eight."<sup>37</sup> It is for this reason that Amūn is called "father of the fathers of the Eight," and it is in that position that he is most often associated with the Ogdoad, at times almost as the head of a Hermopolitan (or Theban)

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\*See p. 23, above.

"Ennead" on the model of Atum and the Heliopolitan Ennead.

It is important to remember, however, that although Amon-rē' is the creator, he is also the sun itself. Because of this one fact, he often appears in Hermopolitan texts in a second role, as the sun, the end-product of the Ogdoad's creative activities. A Cairo ostrakon calls the sun "he who came forth into the sight of men from a hidden egg, as a youth of the Ogdoad," and this image of the sun as a child (newly-born) gives rise to an epithet of Amon-rē': "divine youth who is in Hermopolis, the august child of the Ogdoad."<sup>38</sup> It is true that the rising sun is most often unnamed in Hermopolitan texts, and there are instances in which the sun has qualities very similar if not identical to those of the Heliopolitan Khopri.\* In a late demotic text, the lotus-blossom<sup>+</sup> emerges "in the form of a (hpr)-beetle, with a ram's head," while a Theban temple-inscription describes the emergence of Land-Maker from the egg<sup>+</sup> as the appearance of a serpent "with the face of a (hpr)-beetle."<sup>39</sup> However, it is certain that Amon-rē' himself (as Khopri) is behind these images; we have seen that Land-Maker was identified with Amūn, and the beetle "with a ram's head" recalls the ram, with which Amūn is often associated.<sup>40</sup>

The whole process of associations discussed above is difficult to bring into a coherent whole without the realization that Amon-rē' was both the sun and the creator at the same time; once this is understood, it becomes relatively simple to see how the associations came about in the first place, why they developed as they did, and what their true significance was. Moreover, the god's intricate relationship with the Ogdoad is only understandable in light of his two qualities of creator and sun. These explain, for instance, not only the apparent contradiction involved in his appearance as both the "father of the fathers of the Eight" and the "august child of the Ogdoad," but also the fact that the late period associates

\*See Chapter 10, below.

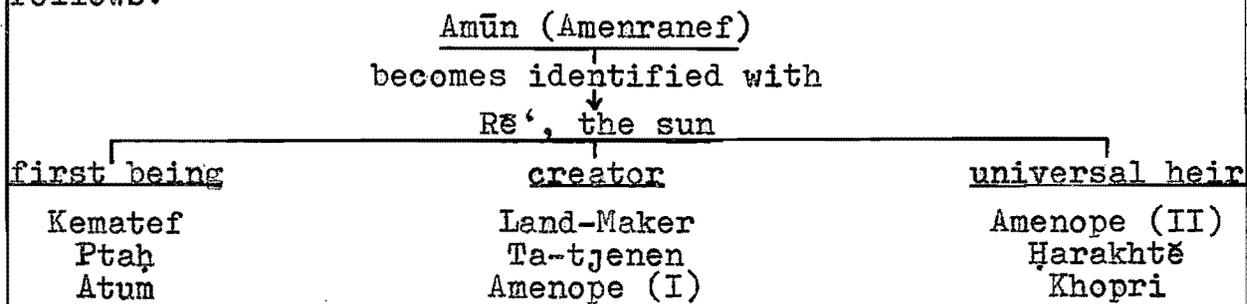
<sup>+</sup>For the image, see Chap. 4, below.

the Ogdoad not only with Hermopolis but with Thebes, Memphis, and Heliopolis -- the homes of Amon-rē', Ptaḥ-Tatjenen, and Atum and Rē' -- as well. A late text outlines the whole process succinctly:

The Eight: formed in Nun, the fathers and the mothers who made light. Born in Thebes, they opened their mouths (pth) in White-Wall (Memphis) and brought forth the sun in the great waters of the beginning. They journeyed with him upstream to the place of their birth, to receive the kingship for Wind-Maker. Afterwards, they journeyed downstream to Balance of the Two Lands (Memphis) so that he might rule (on) the throne of Land-Maker. They completed their time in their sanctuary ... at Medinet Habu.(41)

Further than this, the two functions of Amon-rē' account for almost all of his characteristics. As a universal god, Amūn is revered throughout Egypt as Amon-rē' and Amenranef (imn rn.f) and in specifically Theban situations as Amenope, more fully Amen-en-operēs (Amān of Luxor) and Amenopendjēme (Amūn of Medinet Habu). The last form of Amūn, Amenope, also appears as the new-born sun, the "heir of the Ogdoad." Sethe, in fact, has distinguished between "Amenope I", the "father of the gods" who is often equated with Ptaḥ, and "Amenope II", the "universal heir" who is equated with Horus (Ḥarakhtē), the Heir par excellence.<sup>42</sup>

Analysis of all the various forms under which Amūn appears thus reveals that each of his forms falls into one of three categories, according to which aspect of his full character is emphasized: (a) the first existent (hpr m h't, it ntrw, etc.), (b) the functional creator, and (c) the sun-god who rises as a result of the creation. The whole scheme can be diagrammed as follows:



It is usually hazardous to assign to an Egyptian construct a framework devised by modern methods which, of necessity, embody modern conceptual foundations. Nonetheless, the categorizations diagrammed here correspond well and often enough to the roles played by Amūn in his different forms to be valid in most cases, and they can be justified by the tendencies which the Egyptians themselves manifested in their literature. As an example, most of the "Amūn family" listed above can be seen in an inscription from the two sides of a Ptolemaic pylon at Medīnet Habu,<sup>43</sup> in which two "Ogdoads" are composed in a manner which would suggest a recognition of the three basic functions of Amūn and their application to the Ogdoad:

NORTH

Amūn-Amaunet

Kuk-Kauket

Amenope, "Heir  
of the Eight"

Amon-rē': "great god  
of long ago, primeval  
one of the Two Lands,  
Kematef who came into  
being in the beginning"

SOUTH

Nun-Naunet

Huḥ-Ḥauḥet

Mont-rē'-Ḥarakhtē,  
"child of the Eight"

Mont-rē': "Atum in  
his body, Amūn in  
his body, Kematef"

The whole inscription incorporates not only the eight gods of the Ogdoad (Amūn-Amaunet in place of Niu-Niut), but their creator (Amūn, Amon-rē', Mont-rē', Kematef, Atum) and their "heir" (Amenope, Mont-rē'-Ḥarakhtē) as well.

On the whole, we can say of Amūn of Thebes that he is a bāēnd of the major cosmogonic characteristics developed by the different religious centers of the country. And just as in Thebes Amūn's various functions and forms are gathered together geographically, so are they all brought into one meaningful whole through his association with Rē', so that as Amon-rē' he is both "hidden" creator and immanent sun, "Lord of the Two Lands."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CREATION IN HERMOPOLIS

In the Theban texts of the Ptolemaic period -- which, as we have seen before, must be considered the basic literature of the Hermopolitan system -- the actual creative activity of the Ogdoad begins with its journey "downstream" after its "birth" in Thebes. The destination of the journey varies within certain limits, according to the provenance of the text in question, but the end is always the same -- the initiation of creation. The general tenor of the texts as a whole is that whatever the specific locale, the Ogdoad's creative act begins on the primeval hillock.

#### A. The Primeval Hillock

The theme of the primeval hill, the first "feature" of creation in many accounts, is an extremely common one in the body of Egyptian religious literature. Each major temple claimed to be erected on the very spot where the hill had emerged, and each -- because of the special logic of the Egyptians -- was actually viewed as such.<sup>1</sup> In Heliopolis, the major center for the worship of Rē', Atum, and the Ennead, the specific form of the hill was the ben or benben, a conical stone whose influence can be seen, in a stylised form, in the shape of the Pyramids and the obelisks.\* Within the temples themselves the hill figured in ritual as the š'y-k'y, the "Sand Hill", which actually was a pile of sand.<sup>2</sup> In Memphis, the hill was personified as Ta-tjenen, the "Rising Land", while in Thebes the city itself was called "the hillock which was placed over Nun in the beginning."<sup>3</sup> The hill itself was not an exclusively Hermopolitan theme, nor did it concern only the Ogdoad; it appears in connection with temples which have little or no connection with the group. The temple at Dendera, for

\*See Chap. 6, below.

example, was known as "the mound of Ḥathor" and "the place where Rē' was from the first time."<sup>4</sup> Philae called itself "the beautiful city of Philae which came forth from Nun, which was raised above the flood, which was born ... when there was nothing that existed, when the world was in total darkness."<sup>5</sup> Edfu, which was called "the mound which came forth from Ḥarakh-tē," even derived its name from the primeval hill.<sup>6</sup>

Hermopolis, however, was perhaps more noted for its concern with the primeval hill than most other cities; we have already noted in Chapter 1 the existence of a complete cosmogonical complex in the city, built around the primeval hill. In any case, the hill figures prominently in the texts concerning the Ogdoad; when the particular destination of the group's post-natal "journey" is mentioned as other than Hermopolis, it is either as the "divine h'yt of the primeval time" in Memphis, where the Eight "open their mouth" and "give birth to the sun in the great waters of the beginning", or else simply as "Heliopolis", where they "finish their time" after they have "created Atum."<sup>7</sup> Most often, however, the destination of the Ogdoad is the k'ꜣ imy Ḥmnw, the "hill which is in Hermopolis."<sup>8</sup> The hill in Hermopolis always has one particular name, iwansrsr or iw-nsisi, which deBuck has shown to be specifically Hermopolitan in origin and usage.<sup>9</sup> Recognition of the origin of the iw-

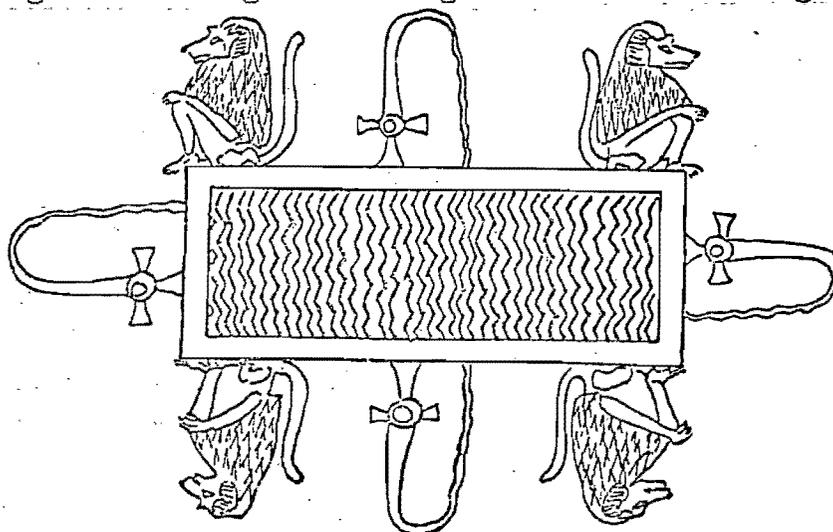


Fig. 3. The Lake of Fire (iw-nsrsr)

nsrsr is found even in Theban accounts of the Ogdoad's creation, which call it the home of the group (dmyt·sn).<sup>10</sup> The iw-nsrsr itself was pictured as lying in the middle of the "Lake of Knives" (mr-nh;wy) in a cosmogonic locale called the "Great Park",\* as a text from the time of Darius I (521-486 B.C.), which addresses the sun, makes clear: "thy place is on the hill of Hermopolis since the primeval time; thou didst reach land in the Lake of Knives and hast appeared in the Great Park from a hidden egg."<sup>11</sup>

The name iw-nsrsr is significant in itself; it means "Isle of Flames," and is probably a reference to the "fiery outburst" of the sun's first rising.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the rising of the sun at the first dawn is almost always conceived as being in connection with the primeval hill; the Isle of Flames is called "that place on which he (RĒ') was born," and another text associates it with Khopri, the sun at dawn:

Who is the god who is born today? It is Khopri, who came forth from the Isle of Flames. (13)

The actual creative act of the Ogdoad is closely connected with the concept of the primeval hill, so much so that all of their activities take place on it.<sup>14</sup> It is altogether a mythological locale, whose prime conceptual function is to give the rising of the sun at the first dawn place, and -- specifically in the Hermopolitan texts, a feature which gives the creative act of the Ogdoad a certain concreteness. We have mentioned the connection of the hill with the natural phenomenon of the Inundation,<sup>+</sup> and this might lead us to believe that the hill bore some physical relation to the earth itself. But the texts are explicit on the point that it is not the earth, or a part of the earth; it is rather "the hill which came forth from Nun before the sky, the earth, or the Netherworld had come into being."<sup>15</sup> The true significance of the primeval hill becomes evident when we recall the personifications of the primordial chaos discussed in Chapter 2. The rising of the sun has mean-

\*See pp. 16-17, above.

<sup>+</sup>p. 30, above.

ing only insofar as it produces actuality from the potentiality of the primeval waters. In providing a focal point in the midst of the infinite vastness of the waters the primeval hill thus served as an announcement of one aspect of the new actuality and was thus, at least in one conception of Nun, near to a conceptual necessity. Moreover, the hill was noted for its quality of life-giving power, for just as the physical earth was fertilized every year by the waters of the Inundation, so the primeval hill was fertilized by the waters of Nun in the beginning. It is these two qualities -- defined spatiality and germinal fertility -- that constitute the significance of the primeval hill in Hermopolitan cosmogony, for the two major approaches to the Ogdoad's creation are simply elaborations and combinations of them.

#### B. The Lotus Blossom

The actual creative act of the Ogdoad, which culminates in the rising of the sun on the first occasion, is described in almost all of the texts by the words km; šw, to "create light". If we were to depend on the majority of the Hermopolitan texts, we would be forced to terminate our examination at this point, with the Ogdoad's creation of light. There are, however, a good number of other texts, specifically Hermopolitan and otherwise, which elaborate the Ogdoad's creative effort in more detail. These texts exhibit two main themes according to the detail which figures most prominently. Common to both themes is an act of creation ascribed to the Ogdoad of Hermopolis, within the background of the primeval waters, and ending in the first appearance of the sun. It is only in their description of the apparent means of this creative act that the two themes differ.

The first of these themes is that which involves the figure of the lotus blossom; it is, of course, "first" only in a modern schematization, and this because it is the commoner of the two themes and, seemingly, the most developed. To the

Egyptians themselves both themes held an equal validity and importance; only the particular circumstances of the inscription and the requirements of the text dictated the choice of one or the other. While both themes are common to most of the Egyptian creation accounts, however, they seem from all indications to have been originally Hermopolitan productions, and this is especially true in the case of the lotus blossom. It is in the texts of Hermopolitan inspiration that the theme of the lotus is most developed, and the texts themselves often bear out the association.<sup>16</sup>

The natural origin of the lotus-concept is closely connected with the phenomenon of the Inundation and the first fertilized land: "the lotus, a water-lily which took root in the mud and whose blossom opened in the morning upon the waters in which it had been closed during the night, painted a striking picture of that which was the first life, asserting itself above the primeval mire fertilized by the waters of Nun."<sup>17</sup> So strong was this image of the lotus as the harbinger of all life that it is often described as the creator himself: "the great lotus who was first to cause the earth to be, who had existed in the past, the only unique one, without peer, who was first to cause the earth to be ... who created men and gave birth to the gods."<sup>18</sup> The idea was even personified in the god Nefer-tum, the "great lotus blossom which appeared from Nun," who was worshipped as a lotus from the earliest days until the late period: the Pyramid Texts address Unis (Dynasty V) as "Nefer-tum, the lotus blossom at the nose of RĒ'," and the ~~the~~ papyrus of Pkrer (ca. 800 B.C.) calls upon the god: "O this lotus of this form of Nefertum."<sup>19</sup>

The lotus itself, however, receives little attention or detail compared to the sun, its "product"; and this is only to be expected, since it is the newly-born sun which is the important figure. The lotus is only the means whereby the sun is enabled, conceptually, to rise from the primeval waters where, as creator, it had in fact existed before the creation in an

"inert state":

Horus: august child who rose from the lotus. This august god came into being in the Great Park and was led forth from Nun within the lotus; for his ba was the sky uplifted so that he might shine therein.(20)

The importance of the lotus lies in the fact that it was the birthplace of the sun in the beginning, and as such it is venerated by the Egyptians almost in the same way that the birthplace of Christ is venerated by Christians:

Behold the lotus which came into being in the beginning, the bouquet from which thou hast come forth in the form of a child ... this great lotus which came into being in the beginning, in the midst of whose petals thou wast put into the world.(21)

But it was not the lotus, but the sun itself, which was the important feature of the creation; even when a text supposedly concerns the image of the lotus, as in the "lotus-offering" scenes in the temple at Edfu, the thought almost invariably turns immediately to the sun:

Offering the lotus blossom: Receive this god who is dwelling in his lake, who came forth from your body, (O Eight), the great lotus which came forth from the great lake, who began the light on the first occasion ... It is your son who begets himself as a child, illumining the land with his two eyes ... I bring you the lotus which came forth from the swamp, the Eye of RĒ' who is in his swamp, he who makes (in himself) the sum of the ancestors, the one who created the primeval ones and made all that exists in this land ... Opening his two eyes, he illumines the Two Lands, he separates the night from the day ... everything has birth from him, the child who shines in the lotus and whose rays make all beings to live.(22)

The lotus finds its true value in connection with the rising of the sun at the first dawn and at every dawn thereafter.

When the god Nefertum is praised, it is most often as "Nefertum at the nose of RĒ' every day," not as the lotus in itself.<sup>23</sup>

The epithet which pictures Nefertum "at the nose of RĒ'" recalls the very common tomb-scene in which banquet-guests are depicted holding a lotus blossom or two to their noses, as if to smell the flower. Yet this seems a strange enough custom,

since the lotus itself has little fragrance to recommend it. It is rather probable that the custom is not an aesthetic but a religious one, akin to the other banquet-custom of dragging a coffin through the midst of the festivities, and with the same end. Just as the scarab-beetle (hprrr), through its graphical association with Khopri (Hpri), the rising sun, became a symbol of hope in the resurrection after death, so too the lotus blossom, through its function as "giver of life" to the newly-born sun and the cosmos, recalled the hope of the Egyptian for a new dawn of life after the darkness of death. The idea is carried through into several inscriptions, as for instance in the title of a scene from the temple at Dendera, which depicts the offering of a lotus blossom to the sun-god:

Raising the lotus towards him who shone in the lotus, so that his body might find strength in its midst and his heart may rejoice in it every day.(24)

It is significant that, almost without exception, the lotus-texts speak of the sun as a "child", in the manner we noted in the last chapter,\* for the image is an indication of the concept of "birth" (or "rebirth") and thus of the cosmogonic intent of the texts. Above this, the image perhaps derives in part also from the fact that it is the Ogdoad who create the lotus and who are thus its "fathers and mothers"; the Theban texts often speak of "the men and the women who created light ... they brought Rē' into existence within the lotus" or of "the Eight ... who fashioned the lotus in which Rē' was."<sup>25</sup> Many of the texts state explicitly that the lotus is created from the seed of the Ogdoad, thus indicating a connection between the birth of the sun and the essence of the Hermopolitan gods. A scene from the temple of Edfu has the king offering a lotus blossom to the sun-god, who is accompanied by the Ogdoad; it describes the idea plainly:

Receive the lotus which came into being in the beginning, which dispelled the darkness when no one knew it. Ye (Eight) made a seed from your efflux and poured

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\*p. 47, above, and fig. 1 (p. 23)

this semen upon it, scattering the seminal fluid; you put it in Nun, condensed into one form, and your heir had his shining birth in the form of a child. (26)

A similar scene from the same temple expresses more concretely the idea that the lotus derives from the very essence of the Ogdoad:

Offering the lotus blossom: Receive this god who is dwelling in his lake, who came forth from your body (O Eight), the great lotus which came forth from the Great Park, who began the light on the first occasion.<sup>27</sup>

The same idea is expressed also in the texts which speak of the Ogdoad's connection with Amūn. A good example is a section contained in the demotic P. Berlin 13603, in which the Eight are created by Ptaḥ (the text is of Memphite origin) after he has "taken body" in Nun, and are then synthesized into a "black bull" and a "black cow", which are themselves actually Amūn and Amaunet. The bull, Amūn, in attempting to fertilize the cow,

spilled his semen upon the water, in the Great Park of Hermopolis, which brought forth [a lotus blossom] and a lotus bud [.....]. This was the lotus blossom in the form of a beetle, with a [ram's] head. It took the form of a child whose finger [is in its mouth and who wears] a crown with a uraeus-serpent.<sup>28</sup>

The apparently impossible jumble of syncretistic figures with regard to the newly-emerged sun becomes actually simple when one realizes that this, as so many other texts, is a perfect example of the "piling up of images" noted in the Introduction.\* The lotus blossom, the source of the sun, is identified with the sun under the latter's name of Khopri ("took the form of a (hpr)-beetle"), and the sun in turn is related to Amūn ("with a ram's head"); the emerging sun can also be seen as a child, "whose finger is in its mouth" (a sign of childhood), because it is his birth which is important here; the child wears a crown because the sun is a king.<sup>+</sup> The bull and the cow, whose seed creates the lotus, are, however, actually the Ogdoad it-

\*pp. 9-11, above.

<sup>+</sup>See pp. 433 and 47, above.

self, so that, in the last analysis, the text ascribes the creation of the lotus and the sun it carries to the essence of the eight gods of Hermopolis.

We noted at the beginning of this chapter that the primeval hillock figured in every account of the Ogdoad's creative efforts. While this is certain -- the Ogdoad always "reaches the Isle of Flames" before beginning to create -- it is somewhat less evident in the lotus-texts than we might expect from our original statement. In fact, there are a number of instances in which the lotus blossom seems to arise directly from Nun rather than from the mud of the primeval hill.<sup>29</sup> From what we have said of the origin of the lotus-concept, the relation between the two images thus appears to be more a matter of conceptual similarity than of actual textual proximity, for reasons which are not difficult to discover. Both images exercise their prime validity as media for the sun's first rising above the waters of chaos, and both contain a life-principle deriving from the inertness of the primeval waters. It can have made little difference to the Egyptians, in the long run, whether the sun was conceived to have risen over the primeval hillock, out of the lotus blossom alone, or out of the lotus rooted in the primeval hill. The important fact was that the sun had risen at all, and that it had done so through a medium which was intimately connected with the fertile potentiality of the primeval waters.

### C. The Cosmic Egg

Yet another of the Hermopolitan cosmogonic themes is also connected with the fertility of the primeval waters and the rising of the sun. This is the theme of the "cosmic egg", and it is somewhat more immediately related to the concept of primeval fertility than is either of the first two themes. The title "cosmic egg" is something of a misnomer; it should be mentioned first of all that the egg does not correspond to the same theme in other ancient and primitive cosmogonies, by which the monobloc or the primordial ylem is usually conceptualized

(in "earthly" rather than strictly universal terms).<sup>30</sup> The role of the latter is played to some extent by Nun in the Egyptian accounts; the idea of the egg in Egypt is less widespread, less in use, than the generally-accepted Nun, especially for a figure that should represent such an important concept. The title is, nevertheless, apt to the degree that it emphasizes the cosmogonical importance of the egg.

In itself, the cosmic egg is a much more involved picture of the emergence of viable creation from primordial chaos than is represented by the theme of the lotus blossom or that of the primeval hill. Like the former, with which it is associated in some instances, the egg was claimed by many Egyptian cities, but especially by Hermopolis, which called itself "that place" where "the half of the egg (shell) is buried."<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the cosmic egg is not specifically cited in most texts as the exclusive creation of the Ogdoad.<sup>32</sup> Most often, it is the creator himself who creates the egg, and one text even describes the Ogdoad as products of the egg, rather than as its creators:

It is said that Ptaḥ created the egg which came forth from Nun ... he poured out his seed upon the egg, and the Eight came into being within it;

but this is perhaps to be looked upon more as an expression of Ptaḥ's fatherhood over the Ogdoad than as an affirmation that the eight gods were indeed produced from the egg.<sup>33</sup> There are several instances which assign the creation of the egg to the Ogdoad -- as in the Harris Magical Papyrus: "semen of the Eight" -- but it is more often the case that such a role is expressed of Amūn as creator than of the Ogdoad itself.<sup>34</sup> In common with other creators, Amūn sometimes has the epithet "he who made his own egg" -- an obvious reference to Amon-rē 'as both the creator and the sun -- while Thebes, the city of Amūn, in a more oblique, paronomastic reference to the god's "life-giving wind" calls itself swḥt pr m swḥ, "egg which came forth from the wind."<sup>35</sup>

Another source for the origin of the egg in the myths is

the primordial being called the "Great Quacker". This being is pictured as a goose, and a whole complex of myth and interpretation is built around it. Most importantly, the "Great Quacker" figures as the "creator" of the egg; in one text, the egg itself recognizes the origin: "I am the egg that was in the belly of the Great Quacker."<sup>36</sup> In the conceptual order, however, it is certain that, as far as the speculative origins of the egg myth are concerned, the "Great Quacker" is a development a posteriori to the egg rather than vice versa. It is an obvious attempt to explain the origin of the egg from the creator in a manner which can be readily grasped by the mind and translated into literary images.<sup>37</sup>

The majority of the texts which contain references to the cosmic egg are more simply content to state that it arose from Nun or from the primeval hillock, without mention of its causality; in fact, the commonest qualification of the image is as "the egg which came forth from Nun," and an "Isle of the Egg" is in evidence in some of the late texts.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever its origin, however, the egg functions in the Hermopolitan texts in the same manner as the lotus: as the "source" of the sun, the medium through which the sun rises into the cosmos at the first dawn. An ostrakon in the Cairo museum praises the sun-god with the words: "Thou has gone up on high, (coming forth) from the secret egg, as the child of the Eight," while another text describes the source of the sun's rising as "from the secret seed which the egg surrounded."<sup>39</sup> Amon-rē' appears at the first dawn "in the Great Park, from a hidden egg," and the sun in the Book of the Dead relates: "I shone in the egg which is in the secret land."<sup>40</sup> In the daily repetition of the events of the first creation, the sun is still associated with the egg: "O, He who is in his egg, who shines in his sun-disk, who arises in his horizon."<sup>41</sup>

The egg is also similar to the lotus in that it is seen as the product of the creator's semen. To the quotation on the previous page may be added a passage from the Harris Magical

Papyrus, in which the deceased, identifying himself with the sun-god, addresses the egg:

Egg of the waters, efflux of the earth, semen of the Eight; great in heaven and great in the Netherworld, within the nest in the Lake of Knives. I have come forth with thee from the water, I have come forth with thee from thy nest.<sup>(42)</sup>

The passage is important because it unites the image of the egg with the primeval waters ("egg of the waters") and with the hill ("efflux of the earth"), as well as with the sun and the Ogdoad. An Edfu text unites the egg with the lotus in specific terms: "When the secret egg was created, they (the Two Ladies) opened its interior within the lotus and Rē' was between the Two Ladies as a child."<sup>43</sup>

The egg is thus another expression of the concepts expressed in the figure of the lotus blossom, and its relation to the lotus is the same as that of the lotus to the primeval hill: as far as the rising of the sun is concerned, it does not matter whether the sun is conceived to rise from the egg alone, or from the egg within the lotus, or from the egg within the lotus upon the primeval hill, etc. But whereas the lotus is a symbol of new birth and resurrection, the egg is a more graphic symbol of the connection between seed and birth, and its appearance in the Hermopolitan texts is nothing more than an elaboration of that idea. In some instances, the egg is even a concretization of the "seed" of the creator, in particular when the word used for "seed" is bnnt rather than mtwt (which is more properly "semen").<sup>44</sup>

In the last analysis, therefore, the images employed in the Hermopolitan creation accounts fulfill a two-fold function: they are both devices by which the rising of the sun above the primeval waters can be understood and conceptual media uniting the idea of the first dawn with the potential "inertness" of the primeval waters. We saw in Chapter 2 that Nun, the primeval waters, can be viewed in two different ways, according to the account of creation in question, and, further, that these

two views were not a priori attributes of the waters but a posteriori corollaries to the accounts in which the primeval waters figured (and they figured in every creation account in Egyptian literature).<sup>\*</sup> Now if the sun is to rise above the primeval waters, whether in the lotus or in the egg or over the primeval hillock or any combination of the three, it is a conceptual necessity that the waters themselves be conceived in a two-dimensional manner. This fact does not abrogate the functions of the members of the Ogdoad, especially not that of Huh and Hauhet, who may still personify Nun's infinitude of expanse; it is merely that the infinitude is qualified (at least subconsciously) as "infinite but surfaced."<sup>45</sup> It seems certain that in these images, together and separately, we are faced with a speculative conceit, a device by which the emergence of the sun, the source of heat and light, from the darkness and "confusion" of the primeval waters into its own realm, the created cosmos, could be put into words, let alone conceptualized in thought.

More than this, the images of the lotus, the egg, and the primeval hill serve to relate the emergence of the sun to the qualities of the primeval waters which gave that emergence significance. The fact that the sun's rising involved a negation of the qualities of the primeval waters, personified in the Ogdoad, was recognized by all Egyptian literature; the Pyramid Texts recount how the creator-sun "quelled the chaos which was in Hermopolis" (Pyr. 229), an action which developed in later times to a full-fledged battle between sun and the elements of chaos.<sup>46</sup> It is this dynamic tension between the potentiality of the primeval waters on the one hand and the actuality of the created cosmos on the other, that gives rise to the Ogdoad's association with the images discussed in this chapter; it is the qualities personified by the members of the group that account for the "fertility" of the lotus, the egg, and the prime-

\*See pp. 29-30, above.

val hill, a fertility which is thus, on the deepest level,  
much less physical than metaphysical.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF PART I: BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

By this point in our examination, the philosophical character of the Hermopolitan system should be evident. Certainly there is no explanation for the origin of gods like Nun ("potentiality"), Huh ("infinity"), Kuk ("absolute darkness"), Niu ("negation"), and Tenemu ("obscurity") other than pure philosophical speculation. In the foregoing chapters we have necessarily concentrated our attention on an elucidation of these personalities in action, and the process has required us to overlook the philosophical promise of the personalities themselves. This summary, therefore, will involve not merely a recapitulation of our discoveries but also a more strictly philosophical look into the characters of the Hermopolitan gods.

It was mentioned above,\* in passing, that the Egyptians, according to the expressions that have come down to us, viewed the whole of the universe as a combination of being and not-being, or existence and nothingness (hence the title of this chapter, purloined from Sartre): the known world -- sun, sky, earth, water, horizon, etc. -- were the totality of existence; whatever could not be inscribed in this roll of tangibles was non-existence, or Nun. Nun is an extremely difficult concept to describe in modern terms; in fact, it is almost the perfect example of the gap that exists between the primitive and the "modern" mind (by which is meant the Western/Hellenic tradition of mutually exclusive thought-processes as opposed to the syncretistic tradition elaborated in the Introduction). There is, first of all, no doubt whatsoever that the character of that which is outside existence was viewed as water, a true analogue of the natural element which exists in the world. Hence, we would be tempted to conclude, non-existence was material, and

\*p. 29

this is a contradiction in terms.<sup>1</sup> For the Egyptians this was not a valid conclusion; to understand why it was not requires a patient and honest intellectual effort on our part.

There is something more involved here than just the recognition -- first mentioned in the Introduction -- that the ancient Egyptians had difficulty conceptualizing the intangible; modern man has the same trouble, but solves it through an extensive connotative vocabulary. What exactly, then, did the Egyptian mean by Nun, in terms of non-existence? He certainly did not mean by non-existence (and remember that this is a derived term, not expressly but rather inherently connected with Nun) the rather sophisticated philosophical concept of Western thought: the absence or negation of all existence ("non esse"); this much is evident from his very concretization and qualification of Nun. Nonetheless, there was obviously a difference which existed in the Egyptian's mind -- and hence in his reality -- between the "esse" of the world and the "esse" of Nun: both spheres had existence but, being mutually exclusive, what could be predicated of the one could not be said of the other. This is actually closer to the concept of Nun than the simple term "non-existence". Nun is whatever is outside that area of activity whose upper and lower limits are, respectively, the sky and the earth; he has a different kind of existence than does the world, but just what the nature of that "other existence" is cannot be expressed, since all that is known and knowable is circumscribed by the tangible. In short, we can say that Nun is not-being only when we understand being to be the whole of the phenomenal world; in this case Nun, who is outside being, can be called non-being because his existence is not that of the world's.

It is clear from the texts that Nun, despite the separate character of his existence, is connected with and related to the real world, as is evinced by the fact that the world itself, first of all, and then the waters of the world have come and do come from the primeval waters. What is important about

Nun, therefore, is not that he exists in some way to define the universe of being -- as "whatever-is-not-Nun," the correspondence being reciprocal -- but that he is connected in some way with the essence of the real world: the correspondence between Nun and the world of being is an essential and not merely a tangential one. This idea is of prime importance in understanding the Hermopolitan system.

We have been consistently referring to Nun in this first part as the primeval waters, in compliance with the usual explanation given the name. The explanation is not an arbitrary one, since the true significance of Nun is in the context of creation, even though his function continues in the daily repetition of the events of that first dawn. Without resorting to a repetition of the arguments of Chapter 2, we can say further that in the creation cycle Nun is potentiality: Nun "the Elder," the primeval waters proper, is potentiality because he is that which is potential, while Nun "of the Ogdoad" (nni) is potentiality because he is that which the primeval waters are, namely, potential. The distinction is a narrow one, as the Egyptians themselves realized, but the thought itself is clear enough. Nun is potentiality because he is life-tô-come. Here again we are using modern terminology to designate Egyptian concepts, and we must be aware of the qualifications which specify our usages. Nun is not the Scholastic potentiality, prime matter awaiting impetus and information to be put into act, but he is potentiality because, as the primeval waters, he is that which the world is to come to be; as Jéquier put it, "it is a case of a primordial mass, inert but susceptible of giving birth to the whole of the world."<sup>2</sup>

Here we are sounding a note already touched upon in the preceding chapters, and which is the keynote of the whole Hermopolitan system: contrast. The primeval waters exercise their potentiality in contrast to the actuality which is the created universe; moreover, the realization of this raison d'être, when

applied to the other pairs of the Ogdoad, provides us with the same outlook which informed the thoughts of the first Hermopolitan speculators.

Modern research has accepted the deities of the Ogdoad as concretizations of certain qualities of the primordial chaos; R.T. Rundle Clark, for instance, says that "at Hermopolis ... there was a doctrine that the idea of the abyss could best be conveyed by saying what it was not, by enumerating a list of negative characteristics."<sup>3</sup> But in this acceptance, one fundamental question has been overlooked. If the Ogdoad enumerates the negative qualities of the void, why does it concentrate its full attention on the four -- potentiality, infinity, darkness, and obscurity or "confusion"? We cannot, of course, say why the Hermopolitans listed only these four, or why they did not list more, but working within the construct they have provided us we can see why they listed the ones they did: contrast.

We have seen that the existence of Nun was an existence different from that of the created universe. Now that we have noted further that this existence was specified by the one idea of contrast, we are equipped to understand the full significance of each of the members of the Ogdoad. Nun is potentiality in contrast to the actuality of the world. In the same way, Huh is infinity because the world is comfortably finite, its sphere being determined by the visible bounds of earth and sky (bottom and top). Kuk is darkness because the world is given light and life in the presence of the sun, and the fourth pair represents "obscurity" or "negation" because the elements of the world are clear and tangible.

The relation between the two spheres and their "existences" is not as completely defined as it may appear from just the last paragraph, but it is important to recognize that the relations expressed there are the key to an understanding of the manner in which the two spheres of existence essentially correspond. To put the actual relationship into words is, as

we might expect, rather difficult. We have on the one hand a world of actuality, limited and finite, and on the other a sphere which, while it also has existence and being, has them in a manner totally opposite that of the created universe. The being of the phenomenal world is tangible and thus understandable; that of Nun is infinite, intangible, and hence incomprehensible. Nonetheless, the two are in a real and realizable correspondence, since the sphere of Nun has given rise to the sphere of reality. The relationship between the two is centered in the gods of the Ogdoad, and is perhaps best expressed by Jéquier's rather brilliant characterization of the group as the "source initiale de toute possibilité."<sup>4</sup>

There is, as we noted in Chapter 2,\* a striking similarity to the Biblical description of chaos in the personifications of the Ogdoad, even though the correspondence is not exact. But despite the differences between the two accounts, the fact stands out that both employed an ethos which is much more coherent than it is dissimilar. Wilson concluded that "primeval man everywhere would try to conceive of a formlessness before form was made" and that "this formlessness might have much the same terms anywhere," but the fact that the same sort of tradition occurs in the same context in two cultures separated by time and distance (albeit with a common base) must lead us to the conclusion that the tradition itself was fundamentally philosophical (thus appealing to the understanding of all minds) rather than primarily mythological, centered in the culture and tradition of one civilization and understandable only in that context. "Here, surely," says Frankfort, "is speculative thought in mythological guise."<sup>5</sup>

As fundamentally philosophical as the Ogdoad is, the proper worth of its members, as we have noted many times, lies in their active role in the birth of the sun, whether on the "first occasion" or day by day (as the wr-diw). Even the images of their creation accounts are simply devices to aid in the

\*Chap. 2 n. 38

conceptualization of the sun's rising from the inaccessibility of the primeval waters. After all, if the limited and lighted actuality of the created cosmos is to come into being within the unlimited and unlighted, there must be something to determine the bounds of the congruity; whether this "boundary" is conceived as the limits of the physical universe or as an area determined by the extent and influence of the primeval hillock is dependent only upon the pertinent conception of the primeval waters themselves. If we must use modern terms (and we must), the Hermopolitan system revealed, in the persons of the Ogdoad, the qualities of the primordial chaos which, through the causality inherent in the contrasts they embody, brought about the event in which the potentiality of the pre-creation chaos was translated into act, the act in and through which the creation began.

The wording of the last sentence is deliberate. The Hermopolitan system is an explanation of how the creation began. The process by which the creation unfolded itself, the end it reached, and the means by which it reached them, were not the immediate concern of Hermopolis: it was the property of the Heliopolitan system to explain. How the philosophers of Heliopolis envisioned and related the processes of the creation are the subject of Part II.

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