

Week 3, Monday

A4

Comparative case studies:
Ancient China (TJ) and Ancient
Egypt (KZ)

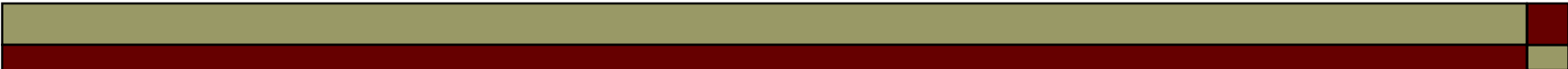
HPAH5006

**Ancient Civilisations: Comparative
Analysis and Critical Perspectives**

Dr Katharina Zinn

Nile and Desert





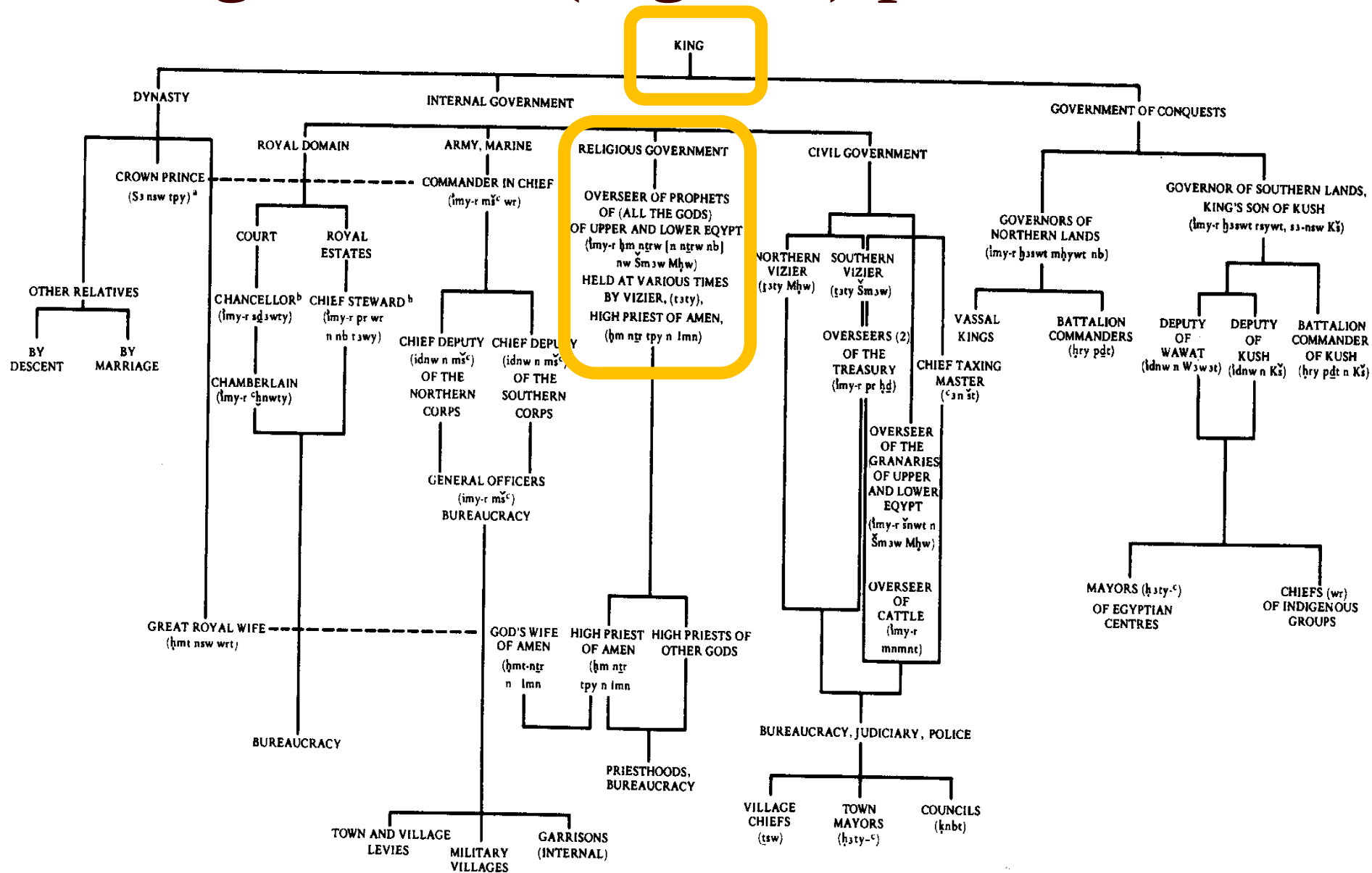
Religion in ancient Egypt

- ❑ explained the mysteries of the universe and acted as a “social glue”
- ❑ priesthood helped preserve old traditions that underpinned Egyptian culture and its hierarchy helped keep order within society
- ❑ religion and priests were central to everyday life in ancient Egypt. The long history of the priesthood meant that it played a crucial part in maintaining religious institutions, old traditions and the social structure

Ancient Egyptian Religion as integral part of all aspects of Egyptian society

how-was-the-country-governed
king
scribes
priests
royal-court
vezir
soldiers

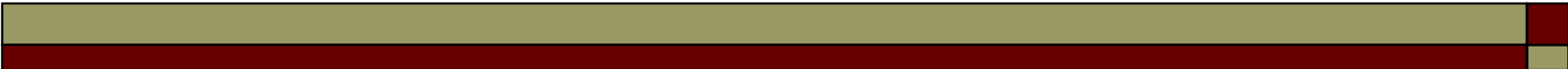
King as THE (highest) priest



The dual king:

Divine kingship and mortality

- king is by nature divine
 - he is Horus, and offspring of Ra
- also inhabiting a human body → therefore mortal
- duality of divine character and mortal constraints is the essence of Egyptian kingship



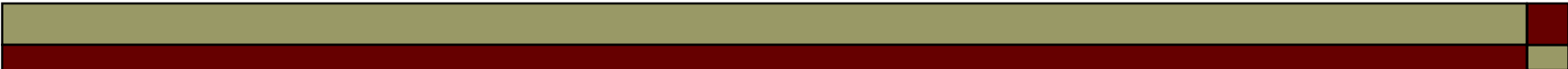
Priesthood

- ❑ Egypt as sacerdotal state in the sense, that religion helped to formulate and realise important matters of kingship and administration
- ❑ Priests were responsible for mythology and theology with king as highest priest, but also administrative officials in all matters of the temple society
- ❑ Not a class with distinctive lives: most work in temple = routine performance of well-established rituals or pure administration of commodities and personnel



Temples as institutions

- ❑ Economic role: temple owns productive sources (land, farmer, personnel) to produce offerings, renting out land (high proportion soldiers and women!)
- ❑ Spiritual contribution: shelter for divine image and gods with regular sustenance (food offerings)
- ❑ Bolstering monarchy as symbiotic relationship (theological, strengthen king's role, economical) – exchange goods and ideas (temples get prisoners of war to work for them), Khato-land (owned by king, administered by temples)

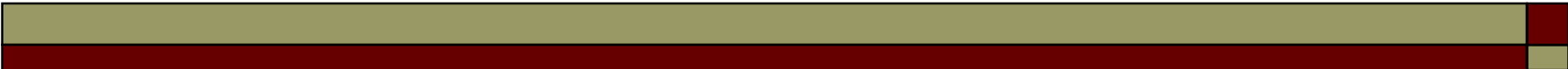


The nature of religion

- ❑ The myth(odology) (and theology)
- ❑ The cult
- ❑ Gods and Goddesses
- ❑ Temples
- ❑ Festivals and Processions
- ❑ Kingship
- ❑ Afterlife beliefs

The nature of religion

The religious side of nature



Aspects of Egyptian religion

- Most should be traced back to people's observation of environment
 - Fundamental – love of sunlight: (daily, seasonal, annual) solar cycle + wellbeing brought by the regular rhythms of nature
 - and the agricultural cycle surrounding the rise and fall of the Nile.

Geography and climate determine religion



Egypt and the sun



TEMPLE OF DUSH,
PARIS OASIS, EGYPT



Ancient Egypt and the sun: nature forms (natural, social and religious) landscapes

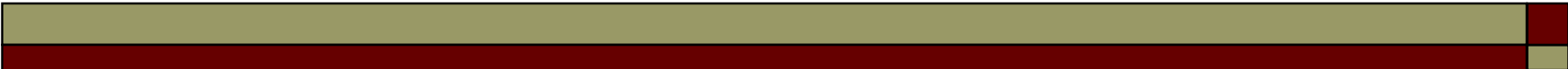


Karnak

W ← → E

N

S



Aspects of Egyptian religion

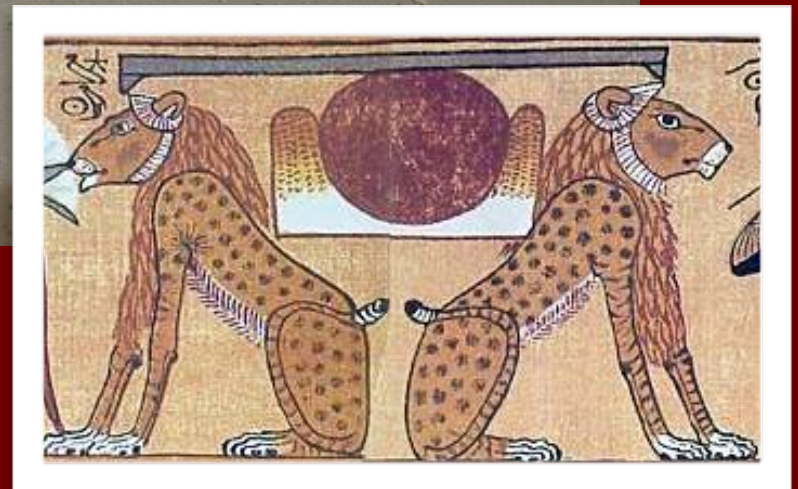
- Most should be traced back to people's observation of environment
 - Fundamental – love of sunlight: (daily, seasonal, annual) solar cycle + wellbeing brought by the regular rhythms of nature
 - and the agricultural cycle surrounding the rise and fall of the Nile.
- Egyptian **theology** attempted to explain natural and cosmic but incomprehensible phenomena
 - Development of series of understandable metaphors based upon natural cycles and understandable experiences.

Theological motivations for choosing the site of a new capital - Amarna

- Topography

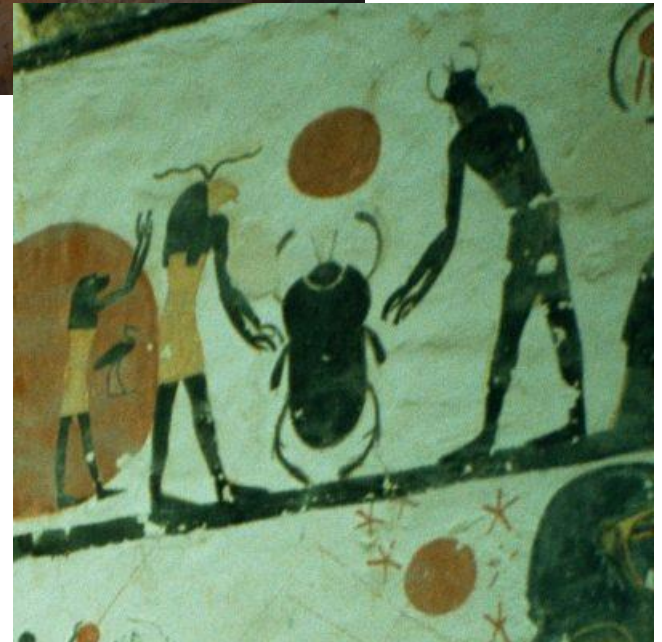
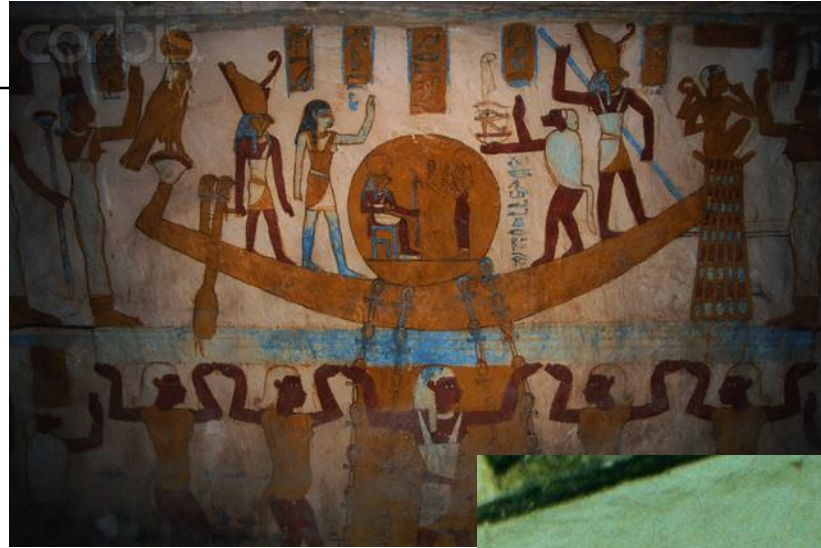
- large, flat area in the desert; plenty of room to build
- close to Nile and farming

- Solar symbolism: Akhet-Aten = "Horizon of the Solar Disk"



Aspects of Egyptian religion

- movement of the sun across the sky was represented by images of
 - sun in his celestial boat crossing the vault of heaven
 - sun flying over the sky in the form of a scarab beetle



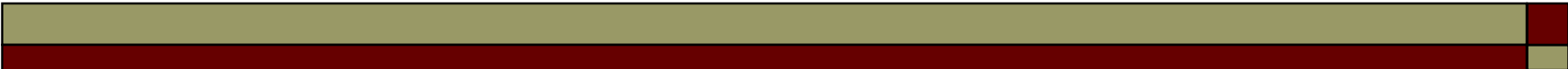
Geography, climate, Nile, sea → the (funerary) barque



Aspects of Egyptian religion

- ❑ **concept of death**
- ❑ transformed from the cessation of life into a mirror image of life
- ❑ The deceased and present gods = same material requirements + desires





Aspects of Egyptian religion - gods

- ❑ As the religious imagined landscape was influenced by nature, so were the gods
- ❑ To a great extent, gods were patterned after humans:
 - Born
 - some died (to be reborn)
 - fought amongst themselves
 - needed food, care, clothing → satisfied by daily cult ritual
 - gods' behavior resembled human behavior
- ❑ BUT: gods immortal and therefore always superior to humans

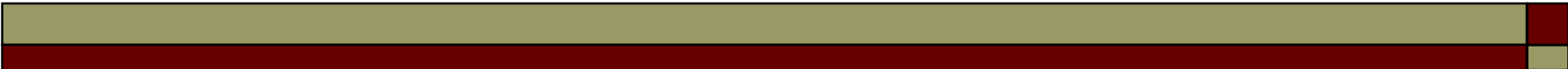
“human” care for gods

Offering of an animal, of water and incense. (Temple of Medinet Habu, 13th cent. B.C.)



Clothing of the statue
(Pharao Seti I. before Amun, Osiris-Temple, Abydos)





Aspects of Egyptian religion

- ❑ many aspects of Egyptian theology elusive to modern researchers
- ❑ results from tremendous development of religious ideas throughout the 3,000 years of Egyptian civilization
- ❑ however, only few concepts were discarded
- ❑ layered upon each other in an ever more complex and seemingly convoluted manner
- ❑ reinterpreted

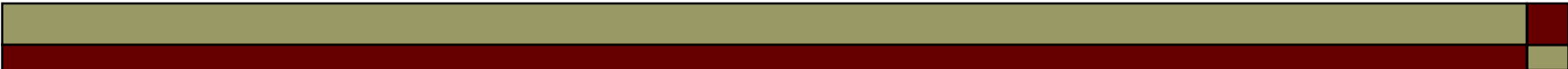
Solar religion

5th dynasty – OK – sun temples



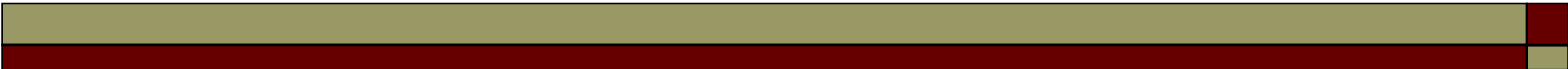
Amarna Period, 18th dyn., NK – Small Aten temple





Aspects of Egyptian religion

- ❑ sometimes dismissed as signs of a primitive culture or of the Egyptians' confusion about their place in the universe
- ❑ BUT: seemingly contradictory beliefs better interpreted as extended metaphors used to explain the intangible
- ❑ Coped better with the explanation of the world than many other civilisations to come
- ❑ Example – creation: different theologies
 - Ptah – by force of thoughts
 - Khnum – on his celestial potter's wheel
 - Atum – used spittle or semen



The concept of the divine

- “Finding the Sacred in Space and Time”
(Quirke. 2015. chapter 2)
 - Holiness
 - Sacredness
 - Ideal
 - Divinity
 - Sanctity of the human (bodily integrity and inclusion in time and space)
 - Cycle of life: beginnings and ends of human lives

The concept of the divine

□ Becomes apparent in

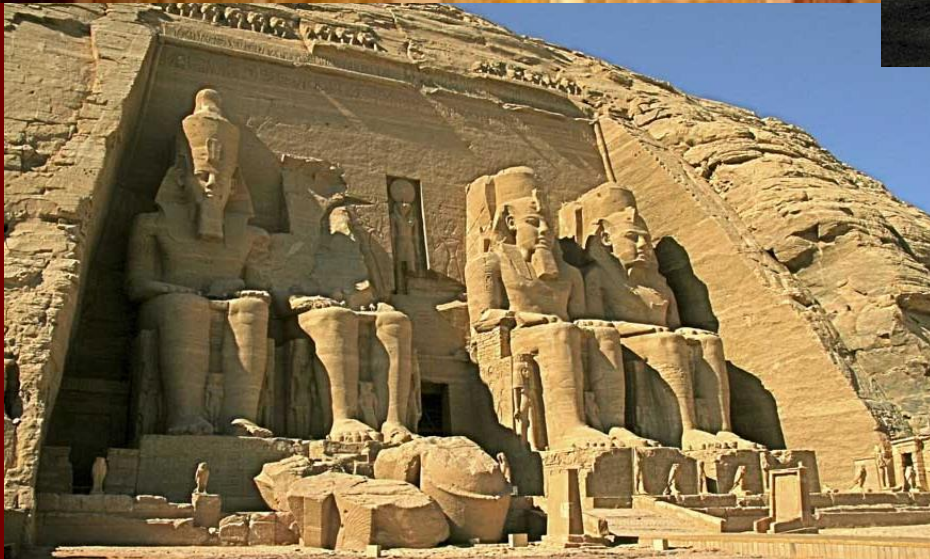
■ Religion

- state religion as interaction between gods and king on behalf of the Egyptians (humans)
 - → (divine) kingship
- Personal piety as direct interaction of humans to gods/divine entities/demons

■ Pantheon → conceptions of gods

- Temples as spaces of institutionalised religious activity
- Mythology and creation myths (cosmogonies)
- Afterlife beliefs

The concept of the divine –



The concept of the divine

- Becomes apparent in

- Religion

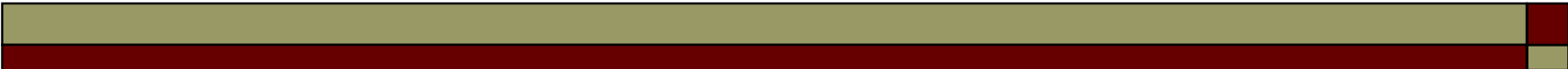
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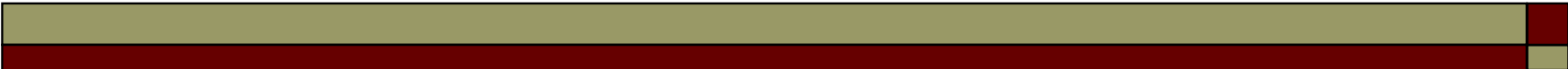
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The concept of the divine

- Modes of human-divine relationships
 - Encounters
 - Approaching
 - Worldly requests
 - Conduct of life (devotion and ethics)
- (personal) devotion as expression of human anxiety and need to establish a privileged relationship with the world of invisible and imaginary



The concept of the divine

- → leads on state level to SACRALIZATION OF POWER
 - Royal power as sacred power
 - Means: of divine origine
 - To establish the right order Maat
 - Usage of royal / religious propaganda as ideology



The divine world:

pantheon

ritual

cult

reciprocal interaction

kingship