

Week 3

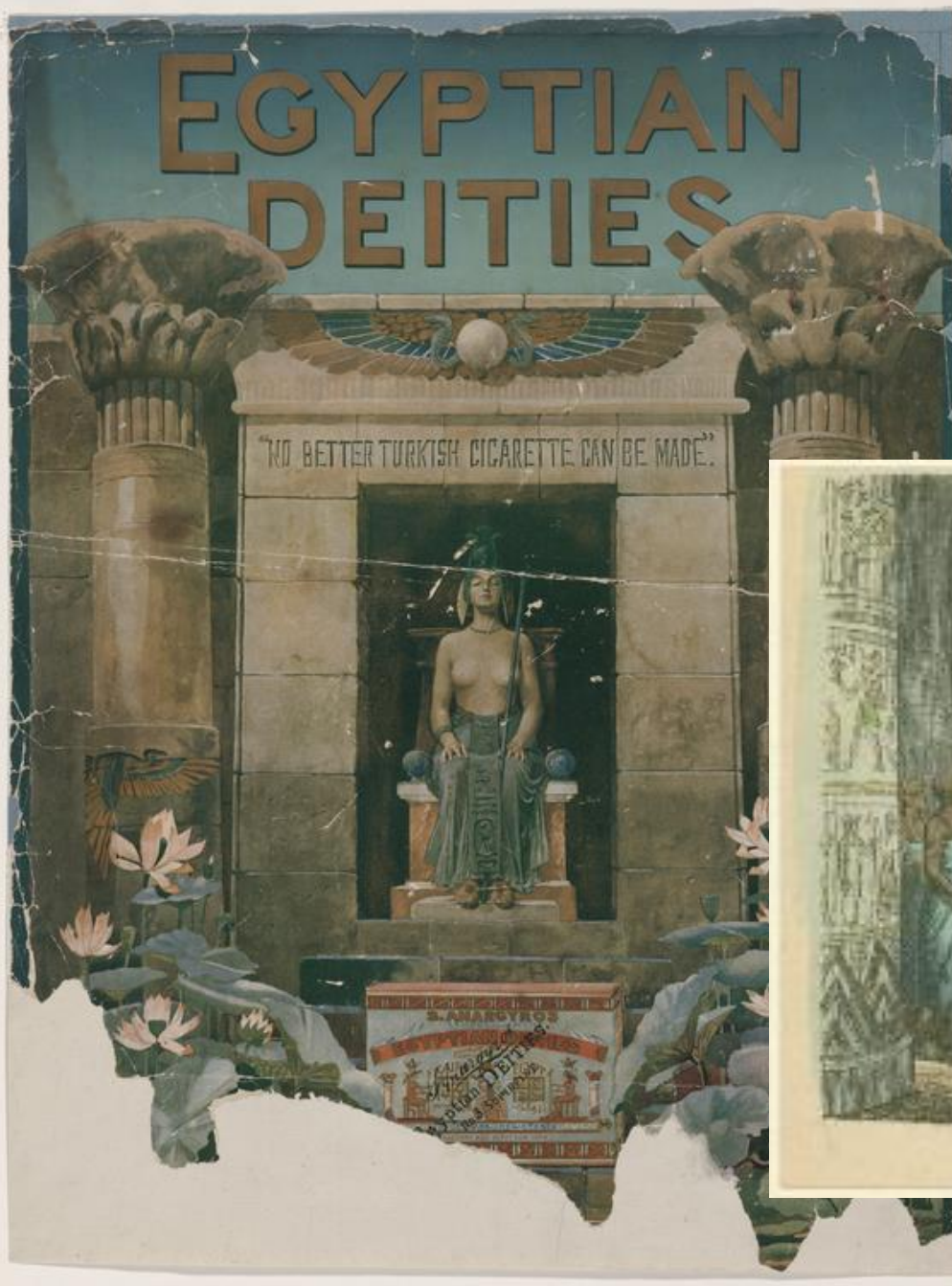
The pantheon: concepts of god and Theology

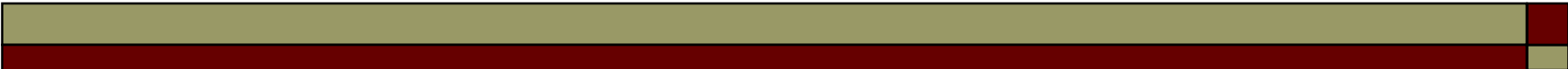
HPAH7015

Ancient Egyptian Religion

Dr. Katharina Zinn

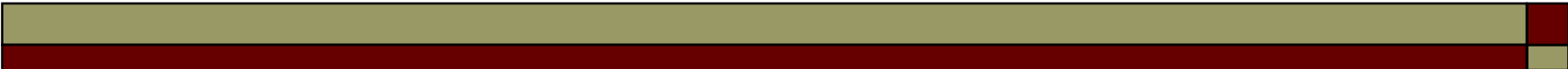
Concepts of Egyptian gods





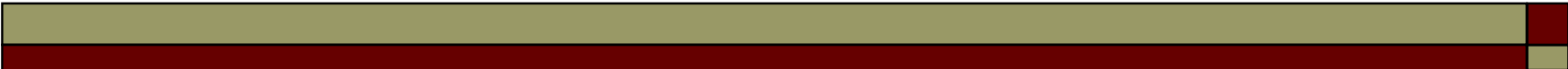
Reading

- ❑ Wilkinson, R. H. 2003. *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames&Hudson.
- ❑ Shafer, B. (Ed.) 1991. *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*. Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Pr.
- ❑ Hornung, E. 1983. *Conceptions of god in ancient Egypt; the one and the many*. London: Cornell Univ. Pr.
- ❑ Allen, J.P. 1988. *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*. Yale Egyptological Seminar.
- ❑ Assmann, J. 2001. *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- ❑ Redford, D.B. 2002. *The ancient god speaks: A guide to Egyptian religion*. Oxford: OUP.
- ❑ Budde, D. 2010. Child Deities. In: J. Dieleman, W. Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles



The nature of religion

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



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: rituals and cult

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

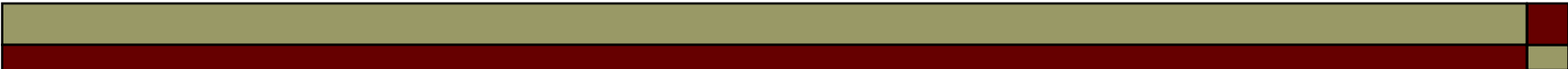


Clothing of the statue
(Pharao Seti I. before Amun, Osiris-Temple, Abydos)



Aspects of Egyptian religion - gods

- ❑ More than 2000 gods / goddesses → like religion = permeating every aspect of Egyptian life
 - some more important
 - ❑ included in cosmogonies and cosmologies
 - ❑ state level (state religion)
 - ❑ Includes divine kingship
 - Some importance on local level
 - Some not much more than demons and genies, or living creatures chosen by ordinary Egyptians to be their personal gods
- ❑ Some of them received a cult, others were included in cults for different gods, further did not receive anything at all in a formal way



Cult of the gods

- ❑ deities required food, drink, clothing, and rituals of purification to sustain them
- ❑ then could act as protectors of mankind against the forces of chaos
- ❑ needs met via rituals performed before a cult statue of the god
- ❑ statue functioned as abode or residence for the deity's soul
- ❑ → daily cult ritual – ideally to be conducted 3x a day

Statuette of Amun

MMA 26.7.1412

Dynasty 22 (ca. 945–
715 b.c.)

Gold

H. 6 7/8 in. (17.5 cm)





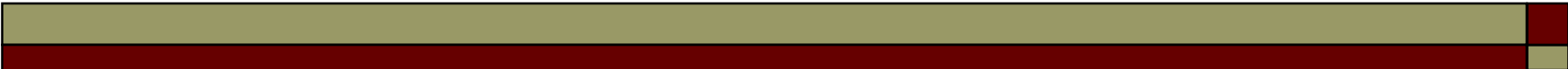
Munich ÄS 6080



- *Cult image of a crocodile (god) – Sobek?*
- Middle Kingdom, 12th dyn.
- About 1800 BC
- Copper / Silver
- Fayum?

Cult of the gods

- Theory: king approached the sanctuary where the statue as highest priest three times each day
 - Actually: high priest of temple, accompanied by temple singers + ranks of other priests
- cult statue washed, anointed with perfumes, dressed in clothes and necklaces; food + drink given for divine sustenance
- important feature of the cult: processions in temple or during festivals
 - statue removed from sanctuary + placed in portable shrine on a boat



Classifications of gods

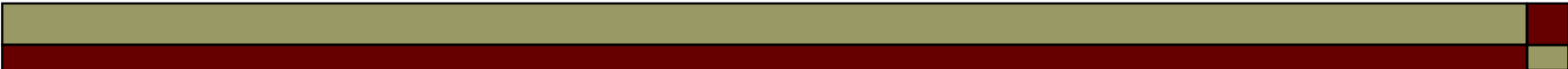
- each = specific area of divinity as one sacred and independent part of existence by Egyptians
- Grouping according Egyptian sources:
 - Creation

Classifications of gods

- each = specific area of divinity as one sacred and independent part of existence by Egyptians
- Grouping according Egyptian sources:
 - Creation
 - several different and equally vivid metaphors for creation in writing
 - Annual Nile flood in late summer, in autumn: riverbanks coated with black mud → powerfully repeated experience = principal motifs for expressing mystery of creation.
 - before creation
 - the creator emerges
 - from Ra to Osiris and Horus
 - other forces of creation

Classifications of gods

- each = specific area of divinity as one sacred and independent part of existence by Egyptians
- Grouping according Egyptian sources:
 - creation
 - location of place of worship
 - writings and personal names indicate main god at nearest large town = central part of religious life for individual
 - religious map of Egypt changed over time
 - cult of Amun: MK restricted to Thebes
 - cult of Isis not prominent in temples before the fourth century BC



Classifications of gods

- ❑ each = specific area of divinity as one sacred and independent part of existence by Egyptians
- ❑ Grouping according Egyptian sources:
 - creation
 - location of place of worship
 - ritual
- ❑ Urgent need to understand religious context of each divine entity!
 - dictionary-style A-Z guide to the gods and goddesses may good for overview, BUT can obscure the context → responsible for being seen worthy of being separated → comprehend names along with their contexts



Classifications of gods: Assmann, J. 2001. *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*. Ithaca.

- three ways of relating to divinity:
 - the cosmic dimension
 - relating to the 'cosmos', the universe
 - the political dimension
 - anchored in the main city of each province (as in 'politikos' means 'of the city' in Greek)
 - the mythical dimension
 - relating to words and the verbal expression of divinity - including, but not only, in long narratives or 'myths'

Triads: Osiris, Isis, Horus (Louvre)

Divine families!

=grouping gods by 3: triad consists of a god, his spouse and one child

1. Theban triad: Amun-Re, wife Mut, son Khonsu
2. most popular: Osiris, Isis and their son Horus
3. Memphite triad: Ptah, Sekhmet and Nefertem
4. Not always a son: triad of Elephantine – Khnum, Satet, Anuket



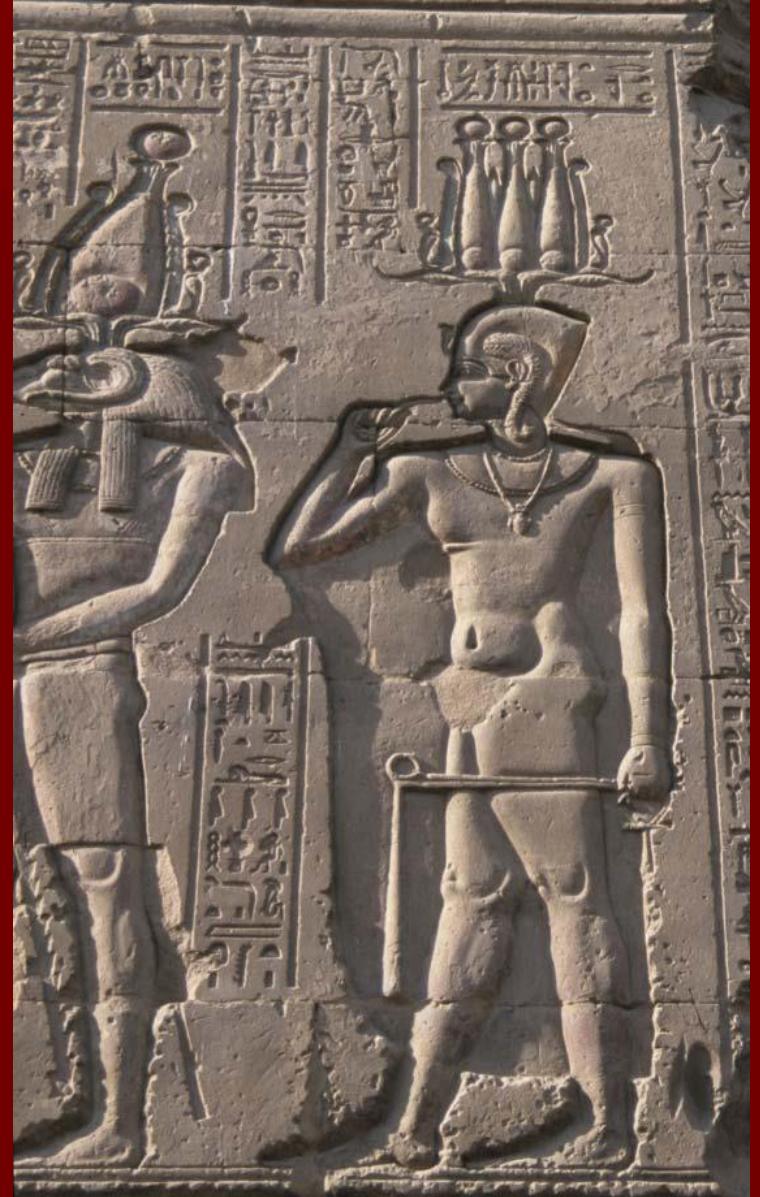
King and queen (left) in front of the divine family triad of Edfu (Horus, Hathor, Ihy)



child deity Heka-pa-khered
("Heka-the child")

ritual scene, Temple of Esna
epithets :

"The perfect youth, sweet of
love, who repeats the births
again and again." → Heka-
pa-khered promises the king
a long reign and physical
regeneration



Iconography

ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE

Amun

- Stela with Amun in various forms (Man, goose, and ram). Sandstone. Abydos. 25th dynasty, c. 700 BC



Iconography - gods and goddesses in formal Egyptian art

- deities often have mixed human and animal form
 - head identifies the theme
 - form of the body depends on the activity depicted
 - Example 1: king shown as supernatural power + his personal identity as ruler → depicted with body of a lion and the head of a man wearing the headcloth and rearing cobra unique to kingship → sphinx



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 - Example 1: king shown as supernatural power + his personal identity as ruler → depicted with body of a lion and the head of a man wearing the headcloth and rearing cobra unique to kingship → sphinx
 - Example 2: goddess with head of a lion → show fury OR head of a cow → show maternal love; but with body of a woman, if she is holding a sceptre
- Due to proportions and canon – inherent possibility to create harmonious hybrid forms

Iconography - gods and goddesses in formal art

□ Iconography

- pictorial material relating to or illustrating a subject
- traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject (religious, legendary)

□ **ICONOGRAPHY AS VISIBLE RELIGION**

- imagery or symbolism of art

□ Description

- account – what do you see?
- Explanation – how do we have to understand this?
- Narrative – what are the cultural ideas behind that?

□ Artefact

Iconography - gods and goddesses in formal art

- iconography as guide not to names but to themes:
 - any goddess related to the power of the sun and creator may wear a sun-disk with rearing cobra
 - any goddess with the power of fury can be depicted as a lion or with a lion head
 - head of a cow, to show her maternal love, but with the body of a woman, if she is holding a sceptre

Sekhmet Kom Ombo



Hathor as cow headed goddess



Ra / Re

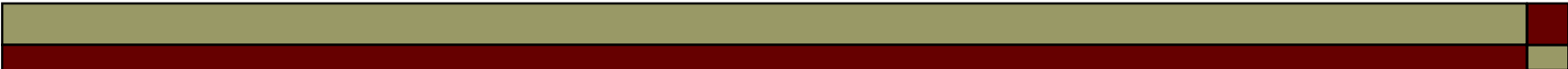
- ❑ identified as sun, most often depicted as sun's disk itself, or falcon-headed man wearing a sun-disk on his head
- ❑ “chief” / state god of OK → part of royal titulary (s3 Ra), sun temples 5th dyn.
- ❑ chief cult centre was Iunu (Greek name Heliopolis - City of the Sun)
- ❑ manifests himself in several other forms: Atum (evening sun); Khepri (morning sun, depicted as a scarabaeus or dung-beetle); Horakhty (represented by the Great Sphinx at Giza).



Ra

- ❑ was the supreme judge of the dead
- ❑ closely connected with the king, who for much of Egyptian history was known as the 'son of Re'.
- ❑ Re (in manifestation as Atum) = head of a group of nine gods → known jointly as the Great Ennead:





Religious Syncretism

- ❑ **process by which religious elements are assimilated into others
→ resulting in a change / adaptation in the fundamental tenets or nature of those aspects**
- ❑ Originally a political term to describe joining together of rival Greek forces on the Isle of Crete in opposition to a common enemy
- ❑ Understood as union of two or more sometimes even opposite ideas
→ synthesized form is a new thing incorporating important characteristics of both originals
- ❑ not a total fusion, but combination of separate segments that remain identifiable compartments
- ❑ associated with the process of communication

Syncretistic forms of Ra: Ra-Horakhte and Amun-Ra





Syncretism: Fissioning and fusing of gods and their names

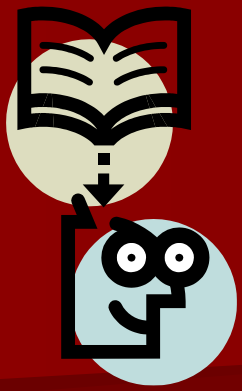
- each name identifies an area of divinity → division and fusing
 - Example division: Horus (as area of divine power) divided into
 - Hor-wer 'Horus the elder': a power at full potential
 - and Horpakhered 'Horus the child' (Greek 'Harpocrates'): power yet to be realised → vulnerable potential



Syncretism: Fissioning and fusing of gods and their names

- each name identifies an area of divinity → division and fusing
 - Example fusing (syncretism):
 - Amun as creator and invisible divine power everywhere fused with Ra (sun) as source of all light and energy + ultimate creator
 - → composite god embracing both aspects of divinity - Amun-Ra as fused character, containing features of both as a new entity

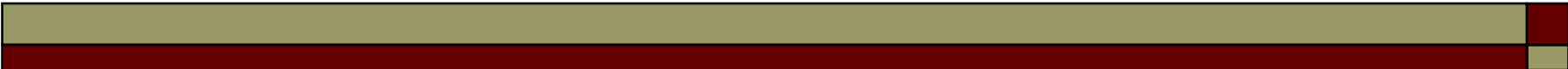
Amun-Ra



- "In Egyptian mythology, Amon-Ra is considered the king of all gods. The Temple of Amon-Ra was believed to be the first temple to ever plant a mono-culture vineyard to produce wine for the citizens of the temple. The eye on the label is the all-seeing eye of Horus - a powerful Egyptian symbol of protection. It is represented as a figure with six parts, corresponding to what Egyptians regard as the six senses - touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell and thought. Ben created Amon-Ra Shiraz to appeal to those senses."

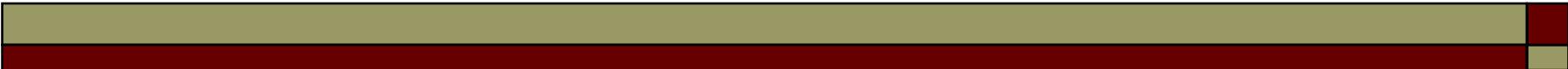


ASPECTS OF THEOLOGY



The nature of religion

- ❑ **The myth(odology) (and theology)**
- ❑ The cult
- ❑ **Gods and Goddesses**
- ❑ Temples
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What is theology?

- ❑ comes from two Greek words that combined mean “the study of God”
- ❑ Christian theology = attempt to understand God as He is revealed in the Bible
- ❑ no theology will ever fully explain divine realm

theology

/θi:ˈplədʒi/ 

noun

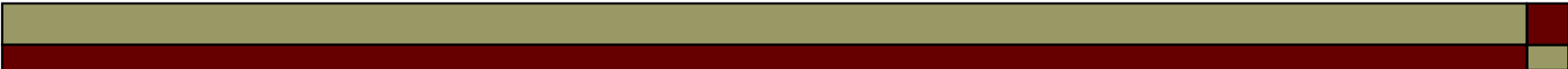
the study of the nature of God and religious belief.

"a theology degree"

- religious beliefs and theory when systematically developed.

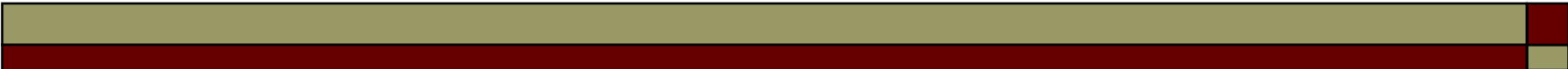
plural noun: **theologies**

"in Christian theology, God comes to be conceived as Father and Son"



Egyptian theology?

- ❑ beliefs and rituals now referred to as "Ancient Egyptian religion" as integral part of every aspect of Egyptian culture
- ❑ But: language possessed no single term corresponding to the modern European concept of religion
- ❑ not a monolithic institution, but consisted of a vast and varying set of beliefs and practices, linked by common focus on the interaction between the world of humans and the world of the divine
- ❑ When expressed systematically = theology



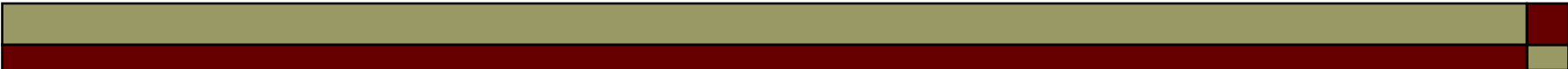
Egyptian theology?

- When expressed systematically = theology

- Case studies: (to follow in week 4, 8 and 9)
 - Cosmogonies
 - (NK) solar religion
 - Atenism

Case Study 1: Cosmogonies

- ❑ different creation accounts as **competing theologies**
- ❑ each associated with the cult of a particular god in one of the major cities of Egypt:
 - Hermopolis
 - Heliopolis
 - Memphis
 - Thebes
- ❑ also represent different aspects of the process of creation (following natural and religious landscape)



Egyptian mythology and order

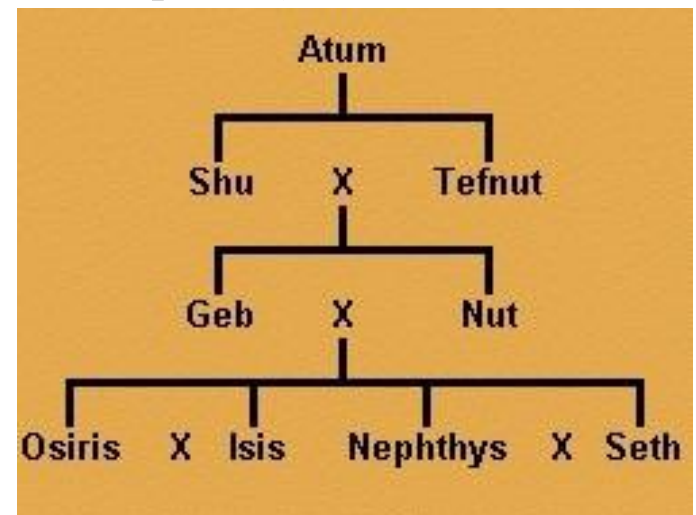
- Created by priests
- formation of a number of **enneads**:
 - groups of nine gods and goddesses, organized into families
 - number nine was a sacred and symbolic number that could also stand for 'all' gods

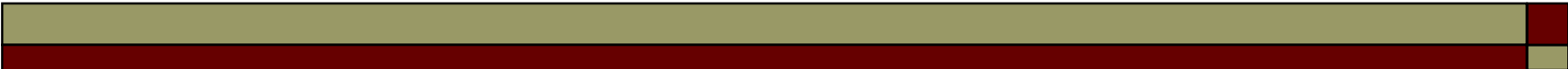
Social hierarchy of gods in theology

- Some enneads of lesser importance than others → depending on their composition
- sun-hymn of Horemheb:
 - *The great ennead worship thee
The lesser ennead exult to thee
They praise thee in they beautiful forms
With thy brilliance in the Evening-Barque,
As when the sacred apes spy thee.*

Egyptian mythology and order

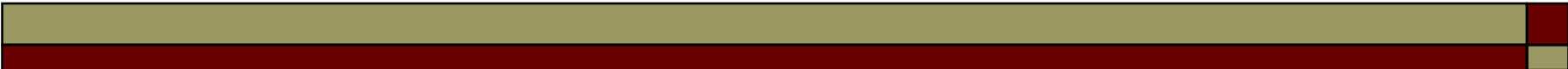
- Created by priests
- formation of a number of **enneads**:
 - groups of nine gods and goddesses, organized into families
 - number nine was a sacred and symbolic number that could also stand for 'all' gods
 - therefore, 'nine' should not always be taken literally → ennead of Thebes consists of fifteen gods; important ennead of Heliopolis (Great Ennead)
 - With addition of Horus as 5th generation





Case Study 2: NK solar religion

- ❑ EGYPTIAN SOLAR RELIGION IN THE NEW KINGDOM: RE, AMUN AND THE CRISIS OF POLYTHEISM → Jan Assmann
- ❑ IDEA:
- ❑ Behind multiplicity of deities lay the oneness of a creator god
- ❑ remained a singularity at the same time that he turned himself into all the other gods and the whole of creation
- ❑ Assmann argues that in the early New Kingdom the solar creator god, Re or Amun-Re, was increasingly portrayed as acting alone rather than in conjunction with other deities, as hitherto had been normal



Case Study 2: NK solar religion

- Amun
 - created + sustained all divine and mortal life
 - lived in every person's heart
 - determined his or her fate.
- early New Kingdom:
 - king sponsored cults to maintain cosmos by strengthening the sun and defeating the sun's cosmic enemies
 - at the same time maintaining order and upholding standards of justice (ma'at) on earth
- late New Kingdom:
 - order and success no longer equated with obeying the king
 - king and commoners alike depended on favour of creator god

Case Study 3: Atenism

- ❑ Solar religion of the mid / end 18th dynasty
- ❑ Special form of solar religion dedicated to the Aten (sun disc)



Nature of the Aten

- ❑ “Father”
(Amenhotep III?)
- ❑ Solar disk and light [“shu”]
- ❑ No divine presence other than light
- ❑ Temples are open courts
- ❑ Myth discarded; replaced with theology of light



Atenism as Monotheism?

→ wk 7

