

Session 4 – week 1, Fri

**Maat and Netjer:
An overview of ancient
Egyptian religious thought
and order**

HPAN5046/6046 Religions in Africa

Dr Katharina Zinn

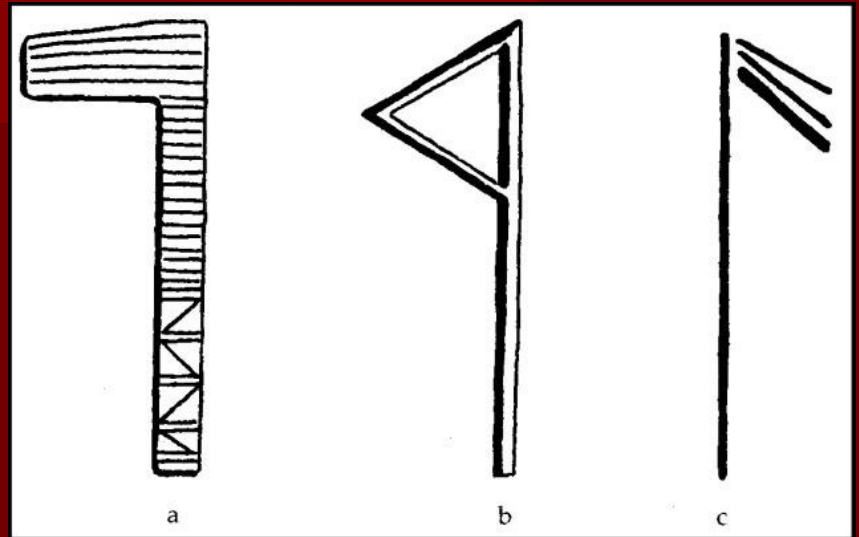
Associate Professor in Egyptian Archaeology
and Heritage

The “divine” in ancient Egypt

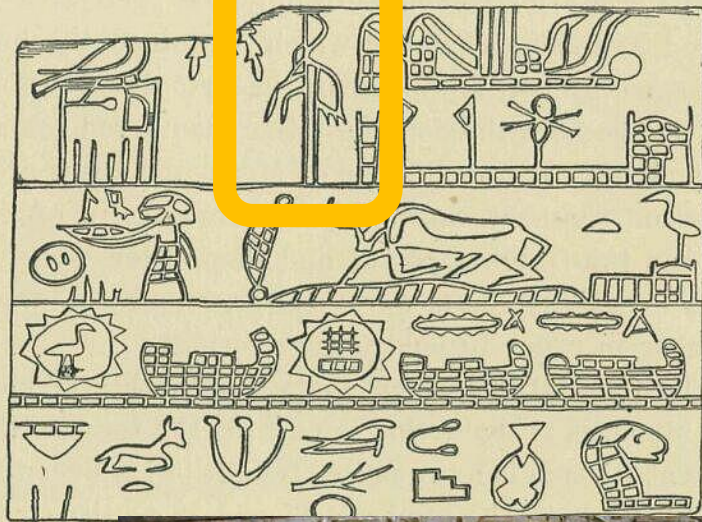
- understood through a “pantheon” of gods, goddesses + divine beings
 - representing natural forces and abstract concepts
 - being immanent in the world around them
- Key aspects of the divine in ancient Egypt:
 - Polytheism – social group of gods / divine beings
 - Deified Nature (nature as religion, religion in nature)
 - Immanence – divine present within nature, shaping world around them
 - Creation Myths
 - Divine Triads
 - Royal Divine Descent as son of Ra → divine power and legitimacy
 - Communication with the Divine through rituals, prayers, and offerings
 - Afterlife
 - Representation – human and animal forms



Fetish, sanctuary, shrine, temple?



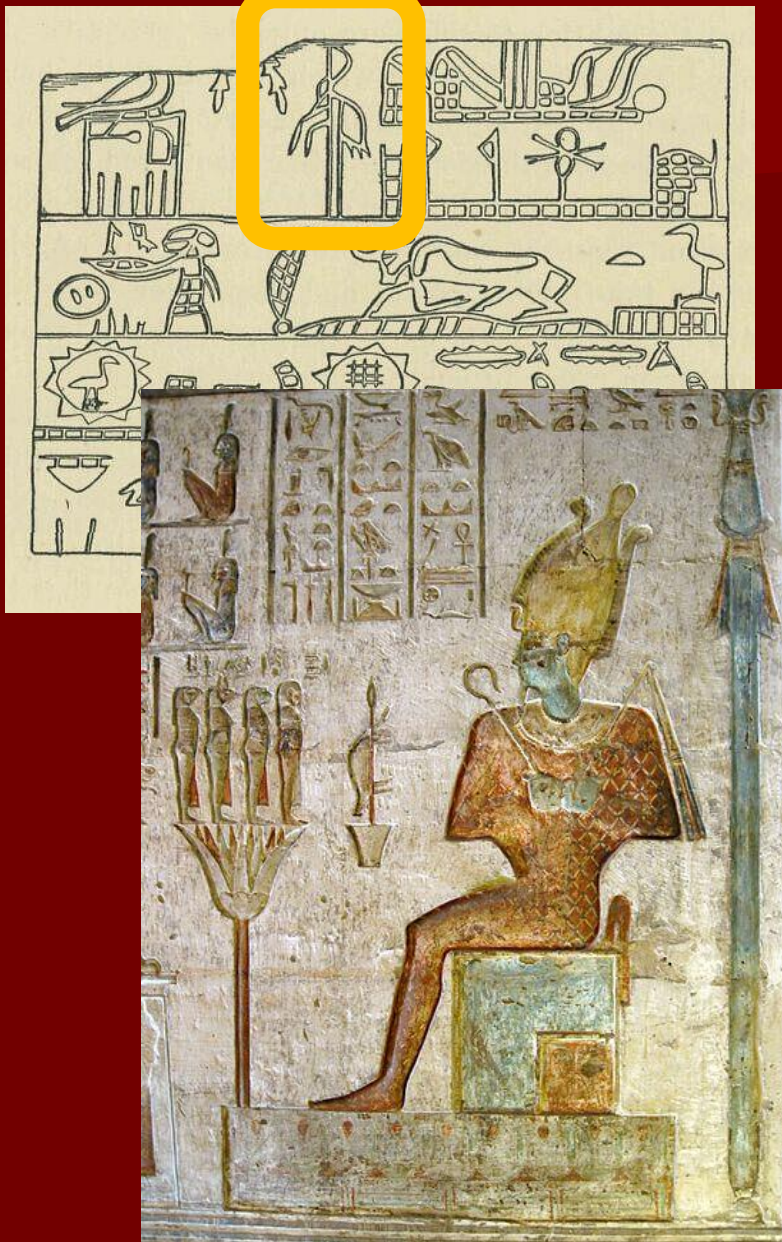
god	
	nr /'na.tə/
NOYTE	/'nu.tə/



Imiut - fetish



Imiut - fetish

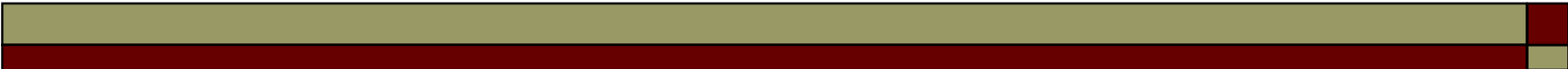


Connected
with
underworld
/afterlife?



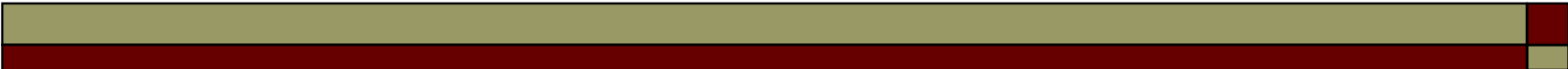
Tracing the divine in ancient Egypt

ASPECTS OF THEOLOGY



The nature of religion

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



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

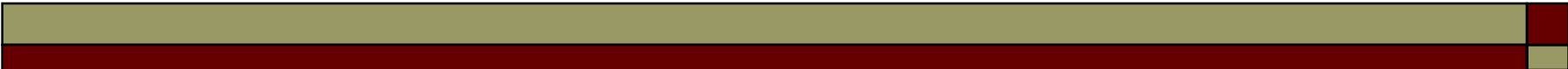
the study of the nature of God and religious belief.

"a theology degree"

- religious beliefs and theory when systematically developed.

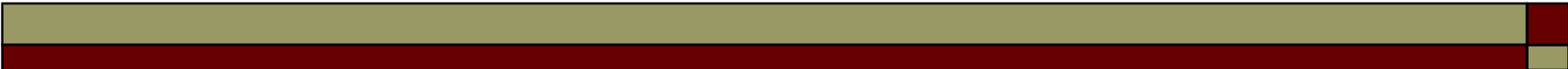
plural noun: **theologies**

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



Egyptian theology?

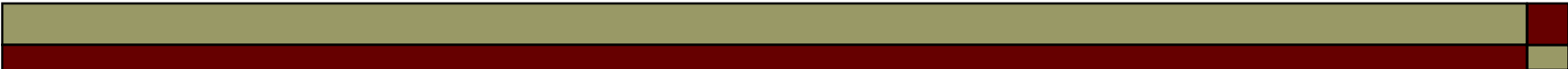
- ❑ beliefs and rituals now referred to as "Ancient Egyptian religion" as integral part of every aspect of Egyptian culture
- ❑ But: language possessed no single term corresponding to the modern European concept of religion
- ❑ not a monolithic institution, but consisted of a vast and varying set of 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?

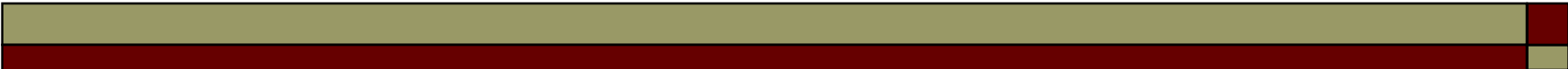
- When expressed systematically = theology

- 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

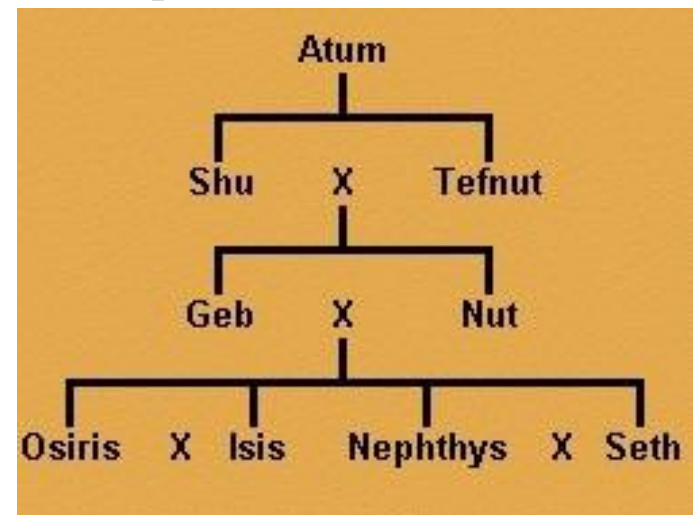
- Created by priests
- formation of a number of **enneads**:
 - groups of nine gods and goddesses, organized into families
 - number nine was a sacred and symbolic number that could also stand for 'all' gods

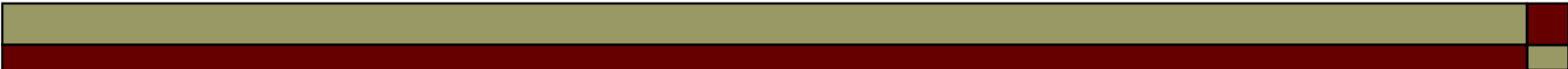
Social hierarchy of gods in theology

- 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

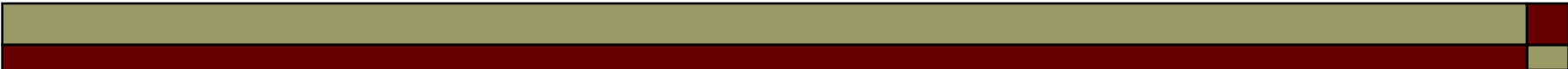
- Created by priests
- formation of a number of **enneads**:
 - groups of nine gods and goddesses, organized into families
 - number nine was a sacred and symbolic number that could also stand for 'all' gods
 - therefore, 'nine' should not always be taken literally → ennead of Thebes consists of fifteen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





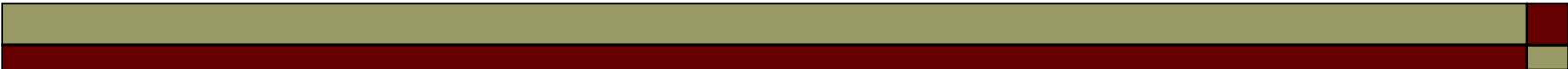
Case Study 2: NK solar religion

- ❑ 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



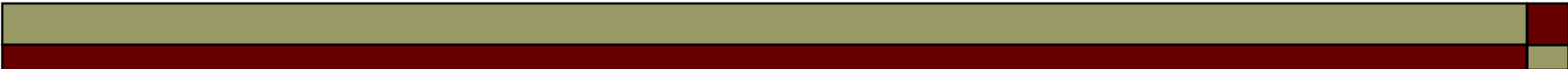
Case Study 2: NK solar religion

- 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



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 – concepts of the divine (what is that, what does it cover?)

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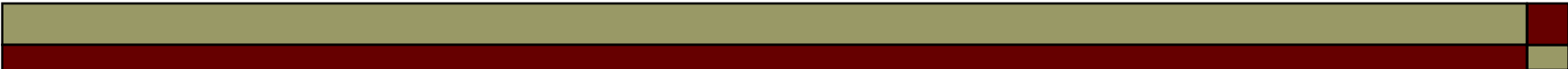
The Canon vs. the Cult

(see Schmid. 2012. The Canon and the Cult)

- Characteristics of religion(s) – description of the divine
 - The canon – as book-religion (most monotheistic religions)
 - The cult – as “cult(ic)-religion” (most polytheistic religions)
- Discussed especially in mid 20th cent. AD - traditional distinction (Siegfried Morenz, Siegfried Herrmann)
- “fallen out of vogue” as alleged to favour literacy over orality (???) + growing out of a theological, evolutionary model (YES)
- BUT Egypt proves that the model can be applied to explain the divine, because it has traits of both
 - ritual coherence
 - textual focus – sacred texts (enforced in cult activity)

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 - ritual coherence – **religion, religious experience**
 - Textual focus – sacred texts (enforced in cult activity) – **religion, theology**



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 – case study Abu Simbel

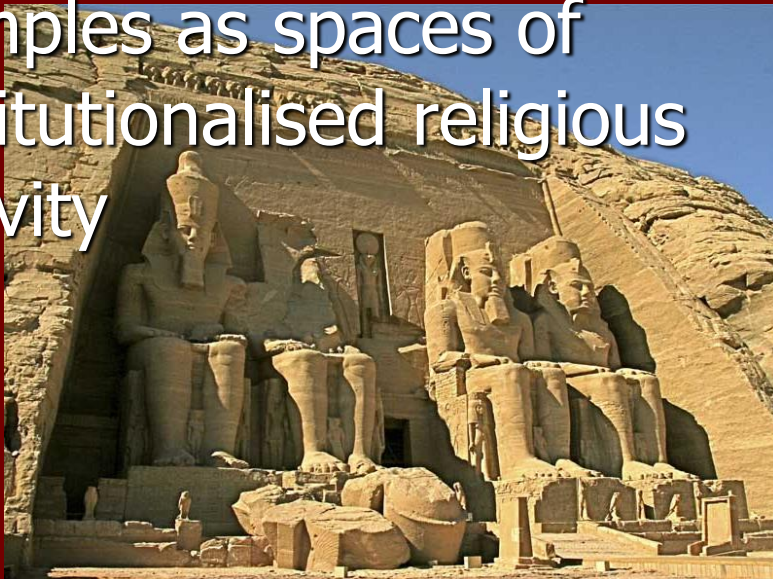
■ Religion



■ Pantheon → conceptions of gods

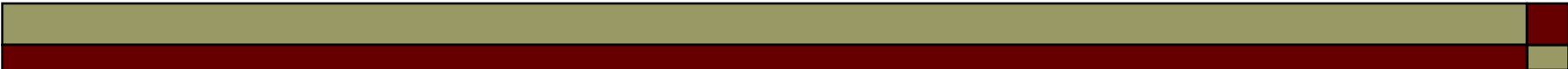


■ Temples as spaces of institutionalised religious activity



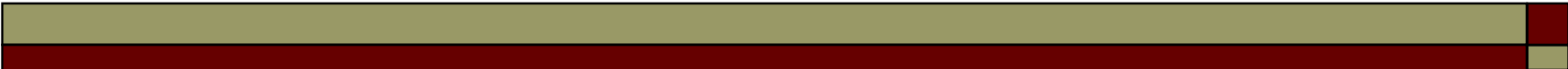
■ Mythology and creation myths (cosmogonies)





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



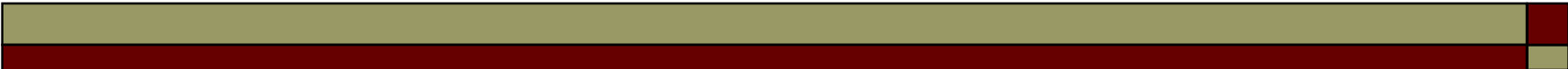
The concept of the divine

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



The divine world:

pantheon
ritual
cult
reciprocal interaction
kingship



The dual king: Divine kingship and mortality

- Discussion
- Katja Goebis: King as God and God as King

The dual king:

Divine kingship and mortality

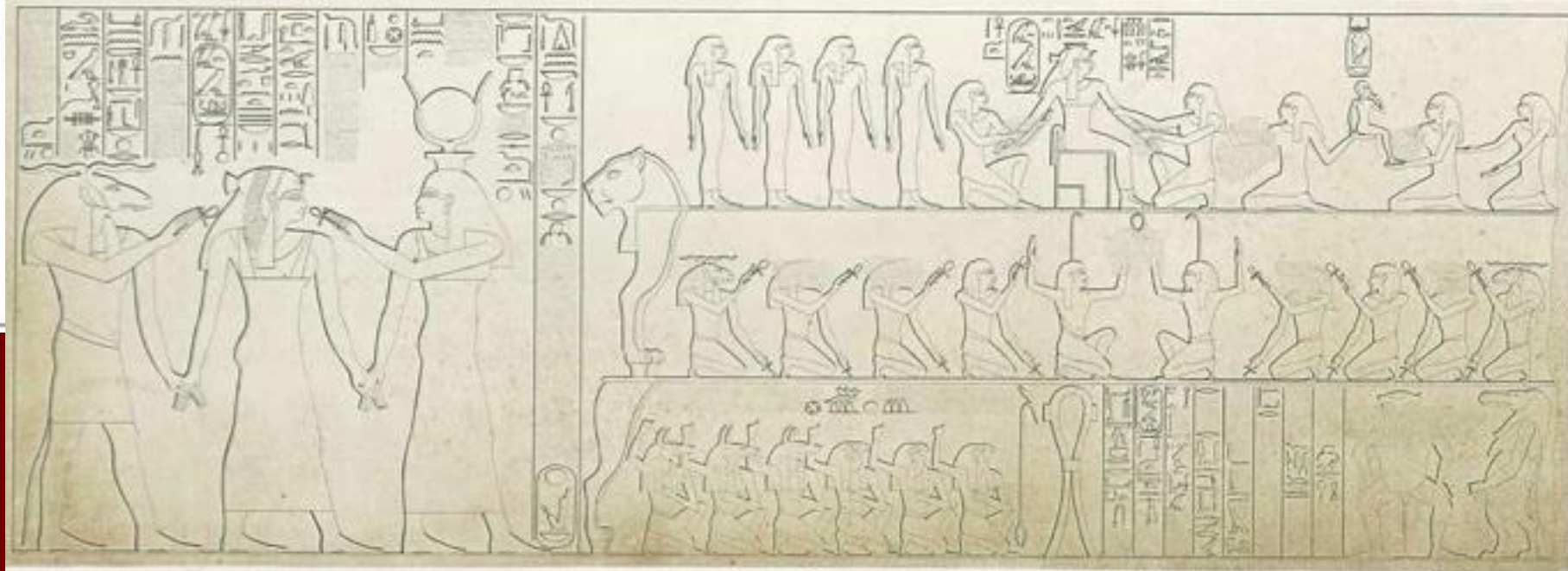
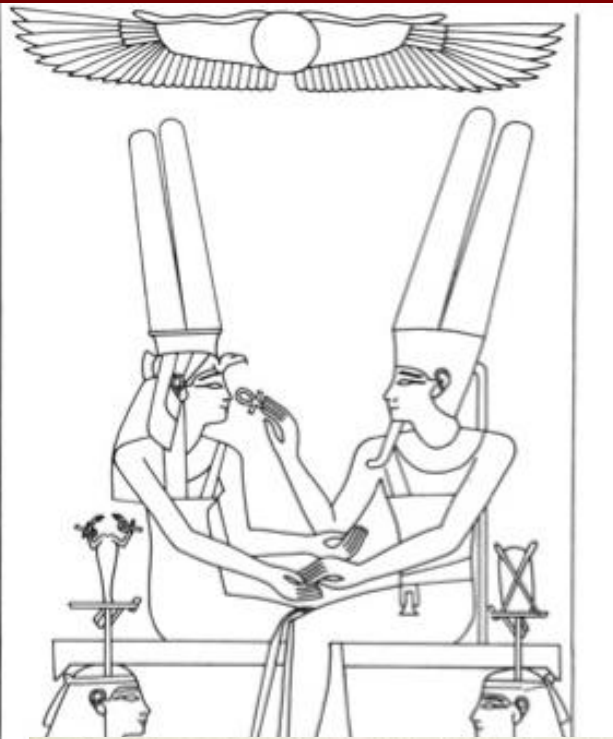
- king is by nature divine
 - he is Horus, and offspring of Ra
- also inhabiting a human body → therefore mortal
- duality of divine character and mortal constraints is the essence of Egyptian kingship

Khnum forms the newborn and his ka on the potter's wheel



- thought that the creator god Khnum created a person's **Ka** (one of the soul aspects) when he created the person on his **potter's wheel**
- Applicable for the king as well as other people
 - Here Amenhotep III, Luxor Temple

Cycle of divine birth – divine conception and birth

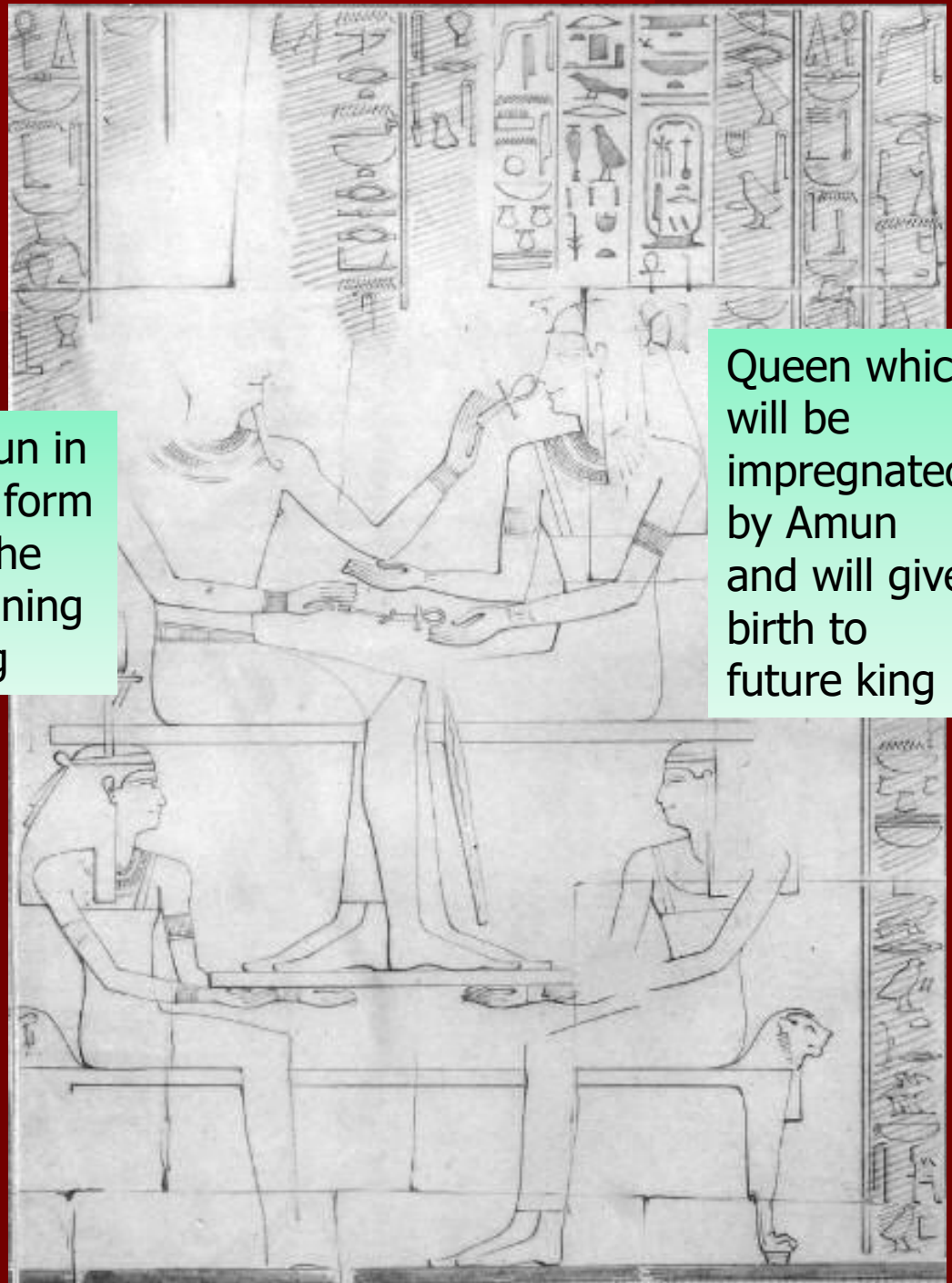


Scenes of “divine birth”

- Deir el-Bahari: Hatshepsut
- Luxor: Amenhotep III

Amun in the form of the reigning king

Queen which will be impregnated by Amun and will give birth to future king



The dual king:

Divine kingship and mortality

- **The Divine Birth Cycle in Egyptian art**
- cycle of figurative scenes narrating the divine birth of the king: shows creator-god Amun-Ra taking human form to impregnate queen chosen to give birth to the future king
→ as human vessel within which purely divine seed of creator can grow → Thoth (god of knowledge/writing) appears reveal the queen that she will give birth to son of creator
 - Deir el-Bahari for Hatshepsut (18th dyn)
 - Luxor for Amenhotep III (18th dyn)
 - in temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods → where the birth of the god Horus is the subject

The dual king:

Divine kingship and mortality

- Also earlier informal literary version (one copy on a papyrus: Papyrus Westcar, now in the Egyptian Museum, Berlin)
- copy dates to the Second Intermediate Period;
- tale relates the birth of three Fifth Dynasty kings to a woman named Ruddjedet, wife of a priest of Ra in Lower Egypt, during reign king Khufu (4th dyn)
- birth is assisted by goddesses Isis, Nephthys and Heqet, with the god Khnum as their porter

The dual king:

Divine kingship and mortality

- What are the implications of these narratives?
 - the king is same substance as creator - not human, but divine
 - no such thing as 'royal blood' or a royal family – only the direct descent from sun-god
 - human women are not easily 'sons of Ra' - the sun-god is male, and so his offspring is most naturally also male
 - Nevertheless: several cases where a woman claimed kingship: Hatshepsut (18th dyn), Sobekneferu (12th dyn), Tausret (19th dyn)
 - although the king male, all others in close connection with kingship are female
 - human women in direct physical contact with the sun-god to produce the next king → 'king's mother'
 - Wife of reigning king → 'king's wife'

The dual king:

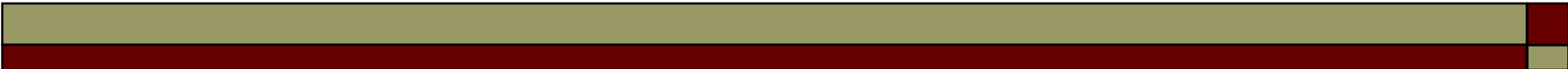
Divine kingship and mortality

- *king's mother* + *king's wife* = all-important religious positions in court
- higher than *king's daughter* and *king's son*
- no *king's father* existent, as that is the sun-god
 - We have a *god's father*, but this is priestly / court title
- Exceptional case to create divinity: sun-god chooses a woman who is not wife of the reigning king, her husband is given the title 'god's father' when the child becomes king

The dual king:

Divine kingship and mortality

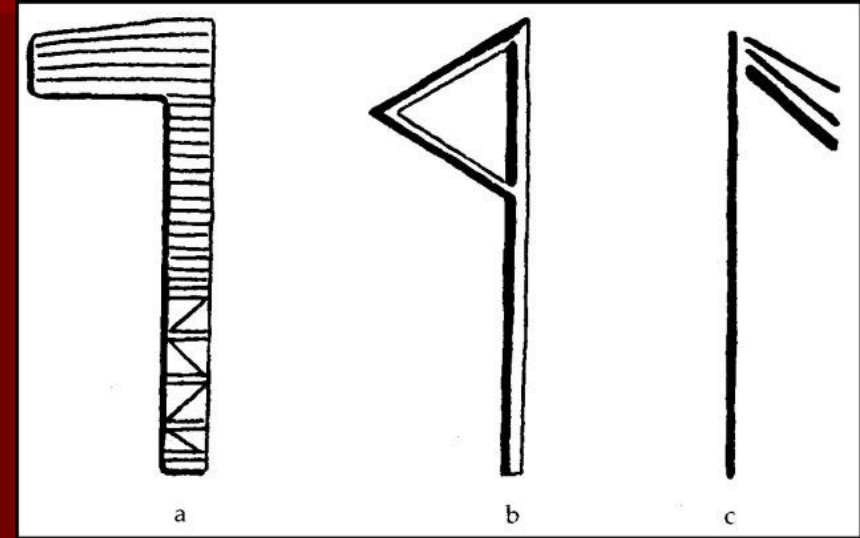
- ❑ **Questioning the divinity of the king**
- ❑ Never any expression of opposition to the belief in divinity of king
- ❑ but mortality of human body occupied by king during his reign on earth → opportunities for attitudes other than reverence
- ❑ such expression principally in literature: narrative tales may depict a king with qualities inconsistent with behavioural norms
- ❑ Indicated in sources on political history: conspiracies against kings (murder of Ramses)
- ❑ Such events seem not to have disrupted the structure of kingship and belief in the divinity of the king: human beings have unlimited capacity for adaptation, and devout believers are able to destroy what seems, externally, central to the belief system.

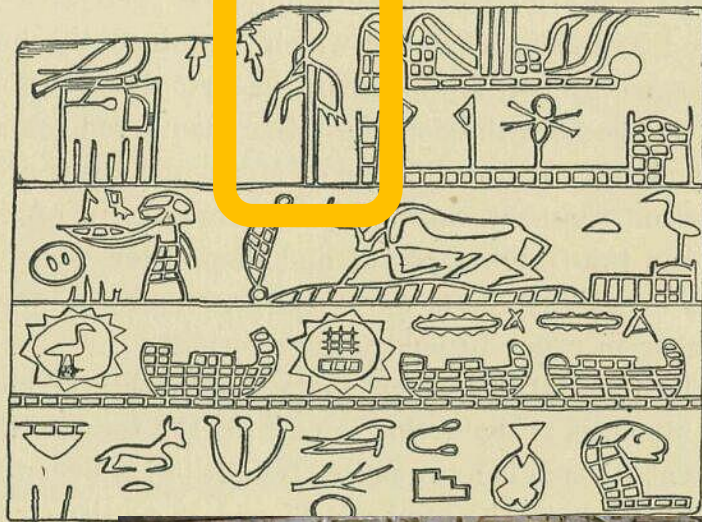


Divine revelations happen through or via

- ❑ Divination
- ❑ Oracles
- ❑ Festivals
- ❑ Texts
 - Religious
 - Wisdom
- ❑ → BUT NOT revealed via a book as in the so-called book religions / scriptural religion in the Christian, Muslim tradition
- ❑ Cult religion and not scriptural religion
- ❑ Nevertheless: God is in and above human individual

Fetish, sanctuary, shrine, temple?

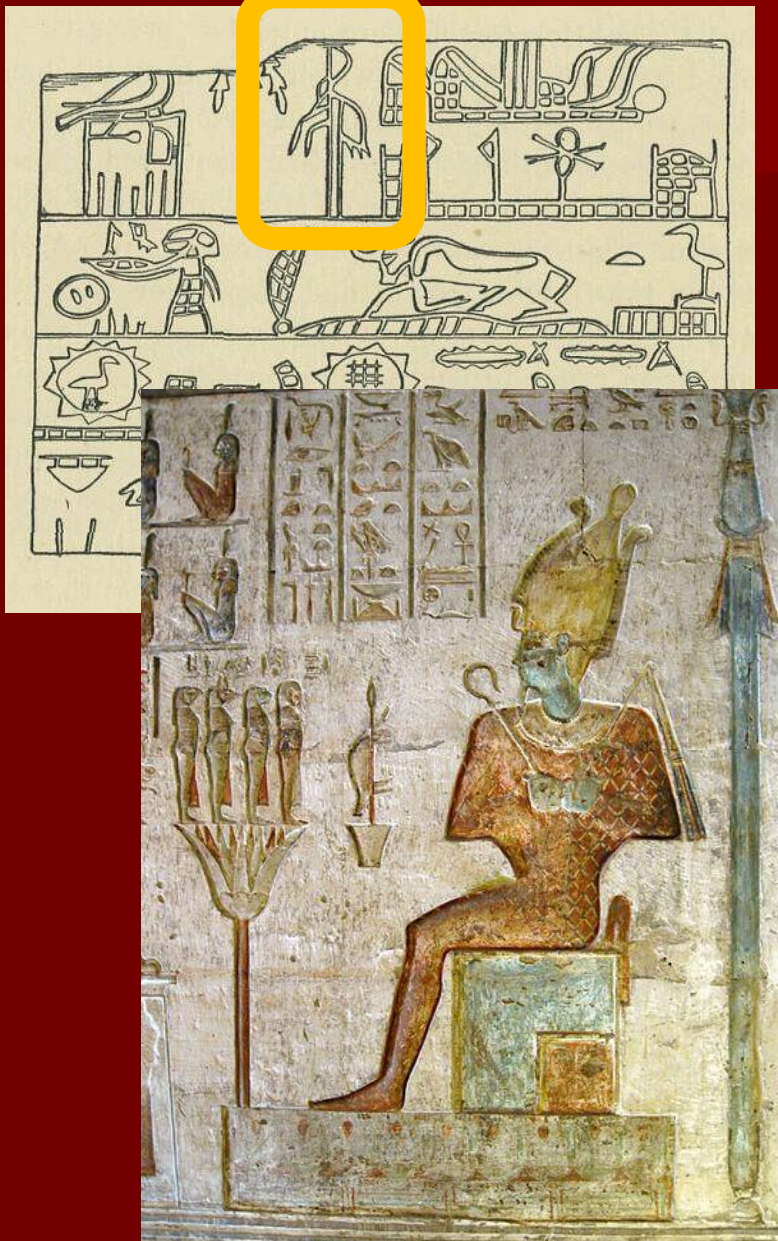




Imiut - fetish



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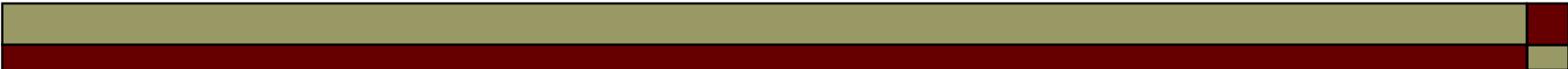


Connected
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underworld
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Maat the
principle
of life





The nature of religion

- ❑ **The myth(odology) (and theology)**
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- ❑ **Gods and Goddesses**
- ❑ Temples
- ❑ Festivals and Processions
- ❑ **Kingship**
- ❑ **Afterlife beliefs**
- ❑ → all underpinned by the right order **“Maat”**

Maat

- ❑ concept of ma'at is central to understanding ancient Egyptian culture
- ❑ equivalent to 'rightness' and 'ordered-ness', world order
- ❑ In new publication compared to tianxia (ancient China: *all under heaven*) → Pines, Y.; Moreno Garcia, J.C. Building world orders in ancient China and Egypt: tianxia and maat. *Journal of Egyptian History* 13(2020) (forthcoming).
- ❑ *Tianxia* 'the world': 1) all under the sky; 2) common choice/agreement in the 'hearts' of all people; 3) political world system with a global institution to ensure universal order.

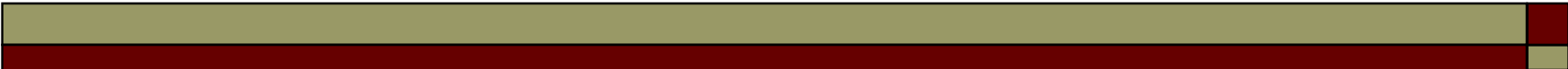
Maat is...

A word cloud centered around the concept of Maat. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with some oriented vertically and others horizontally. The colors range from dark red to light orange. The words include:

- justice
- law
- balance
- personified
- goddess
- creation
- order
- truth
- antonym: Isfet
- morality

Pap. Of Ani (BM EA 10470/3)





Rudolf Anthes (1952)

“Ma’at holds this little world together and makes it a part of the cosmic order. It is the delivery of grain; it is the uprightness of human beings in thought, word, and deed; it is faithful conduct of the administration, it is the king’s prayers and offerings to the divine; it permeates the economy, the administration, the cult, the law.”

Ma'at as central concept of Egyptian worldview

- structural social order / formal social control
 - Enforcement of law and order by state and its executives (police, military, administration)
 - Political order / control (comparable to modern totalitarian ideologies ?!?) → divine political order to justify godlike kingship (ma'at as ideology)
 - Opposition to the king seen as act of rebellion / ignorance of tradition
- informal social order / social norms (mostly commented on in secondary literature)
 - live ma'at as a social norm/rule/value
 - be rewarded if successful (praise, merit, promotion)
 - Receive sanctions (reprimand, exclusion, demotion)

Maat

- ❑ hieroglyphic sign for ma'at = feather
- ❑ concept was personified as the goddess Ma'at
 - usually depicted as a female goddess with the feather hieroglyph on her head



Maat and Ethics

- What is “Ethics”?

ethics

/ˈɛθɪks/ 

noun

1. moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity.
"medical ethics also enter into the question"
synonyms: moral code, morals, **morality**, moral stand, moral principles, moral values, rights and wrongs, principles, ideals, **creed**, **credo**, **ethos**, rules of conduct, standards (of behaviour), virtues, dictates of conscience
"the ethics of journalism"
2. the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles.
"neither metaphysics nor ethics is the home of religion"

Maat and Ethics

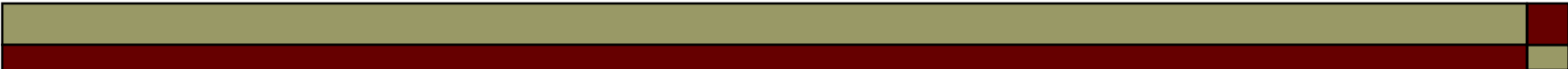
- ❑ Ancient Egyptian ethical thought and action revolved around notion of ma'at
- ❑ no traces of a standard moral code survived
- ❑ But: moral principles often reflected in the literature
 - wisdom texts (teachings)
 - funerary texts (Pyramid Texts, Book of the Dead)
 - Songs
 - tomb biographies
 - literary narratives

The Teaching of Ptahhotep - (Papyrus Prisse column 6, lines 3-6)

- If You are a man who leads,
charged to direct the affairs of a great number,
seek out every well adjusted deed,
so that your conduct may be blameless.
Great is Maat, lasting in effect.
Undisturbed since the time of Osiris.
One punishes the transgressor of laws,
though the heart that robs overlooks this.
Baseness may seize riches,
yet crime never lands its wares.
He says : 'I acquire for myself.'
He does not say : 'I acquire for my function.'
In the end, it is Maat that lasts, (and)
man says : 'It is my father's domain.'

The Teaching of Ptahhotep - (Papyrus Prisse column 6, lines 3-6)

- ir wnn.k m sSmyw
Hr wD n sxr n aSAt
HH n.k sp nb mnx
r wnt sxr.k nn iw im.f
wr **mAat** wAH spdt
n Xnn.t(w).s Dr rk wsir
iw xsf.tw n swA Hr hpw
swAt pw m Hr n awn-ib
in nDyt iTt aHaw
n pA DAYt mni sp.s
iw.f Dd.f sxt.i r.i Ds.i
n Dd n.f sxt.i Hr Hnt.i
wn pHwy **mAat** wAH.s
Ddw s w it.i pw
- If you are to be among leaders
at a command for the condition of the multitude,
seek out for yourself every effective moment,
until your condition reaches faultlessness.
What is **right** is great, and (its) keenness
enduring.
It has not been overturned since the time of
Osiris.
The one who overlooks laws is punished;
that is what is overlooked in the sight of the
greedy.
It is the small-minded that seize riches,
but crime never managed to land its rewards.
Whoever says 'I snare for myself'
does not say 'I snare for my needs'.
The final part of what is **right** is its endurance;
of which a man says 'that is my father'

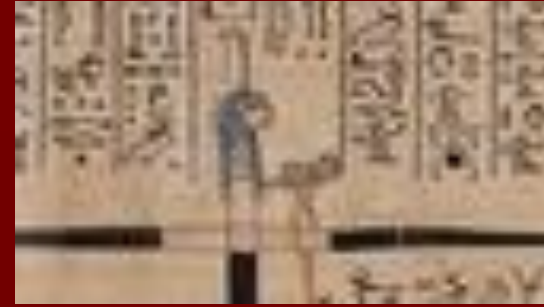


Maat and Ethics

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Book of the Dead of Hunefer (BM EA 9901/3)

Weighing of the heart scene takes place
in Hall of Maat – Hall of two truths)



BoD 125: Negative Confession

- Address at arrival at the *broad hall of the Two Goddesses of What is Right*, shielding N [the deceased] from all forbidden things that he has done, and seeing the faces of the gods.

Words spoken by N:

Hail great god, lord of the place of the Two Goddesses of What is Right.
I have come before you so that you may bring me to see your perfection.

I know you, I know your name,

I know the name of these 42 gods who are with you in this broad court
of the Two Goddesses of What is Right,

who live on the henchmen of evil, and eat of their blood

on that day of calculating characters in the presence of Wennefer.

See, your name is He of the two Daughters, he of the two Chants, lord
of the Two Goddesses of What is Right,

See, I am come before you, I have brought **What is Right** to you, I have
removed What is Wrong for you.

BoD 125: Negative Confession

- Middle part: Declaration of Innocence
- I have not impoverished the divine herd (people); I have committed no crime in place of What is Right;
I have not known (explored) nothingness; I have not done any evil
I have not made a daily start in labours over what I did (previously);
My name has not reached the office of director of servants;
I have not orphaned the orphan of his goods;
I have not done the abomination of the gods;
I have not slighted a servant to his master;
I have not caused affliction; I have not caused hunger; I have not caused grief; I have not killed;
I have not harmed the offering-cattle; I have not caused pain for anyone;
I have not reduced the offerings in the temples;
I have not harmed the offering-loaves of the gods;
I have not taken the festival-loaves of the blessed dead;

BoD 125: Negative Confession

- I have not penetrated the penetrator of a penetrator; I have not masturbated;
I have not reduced the measuring-vessel, I have not reduced the measuring
cord;
I have not encroached on the fields; I have not added to the pan of the scales;
I have not tampered with the plumb bob of the scales;
I have not taken milk from the mouths of babes;
I have not concealed herds from their pastures;
I have not snared birds in the thickets (?) of the gods;
I have not caught fish in their pools;
I have not held back water in its time;
I have not dammed a dam at rapid waters;
I have not put out the fire in its moment;
I have not transgressed the days concerning meat offerings;
I have not turned back cattle from the property of a god;
I have not blocked a god in his processions;

BoD 125: Negative Confession

- **I am pure** (four times),
my purity is the purity of that great phoenix which is in Henenesut,
because I am indeed that nose of the lord of breath,
who enables all the populace to live, on that day of filling the Sound Eye in
Iunu, on month 2 of winter, last day.
I am the one who sees the filling of the Sound Eye in Iunu.
Nothing evil can befall me in this land, in this broad hall of the Two
Goddesses of What is Right,
because I know the names of the gods who dwell in it.

Order (Maat) versus Chaos (Isfet)

- ❑ Ma'at is not necessarily a natural phenomenon
 - because the spontaneous tendency of things is deterioration, entropy = *isfet*
 - in disorder, violence, the law of the strongest, the absence of indispensable organisation → unable to render a viable and prosperous country of Egypt
- ❑ *ma'at* needs to be established / manifested / reinforced in everything → to build up and keep a viable and prosperous country of Egypt
- ❑ Cycle of *ma'at* and *isfet* → *butterfly effect* (Renata Tatomir 2007) since first creation

Order (Maat) versus Chaos (Isfet)

- ❑ theme "order versus chaos": Egypt against (foreign) enemies, wild animals, dangerous landscapes (desert)



King smiting the enemies: from Narmer to Ptolemy XII



Order (Ma'at) versus Chaos (Isfet)

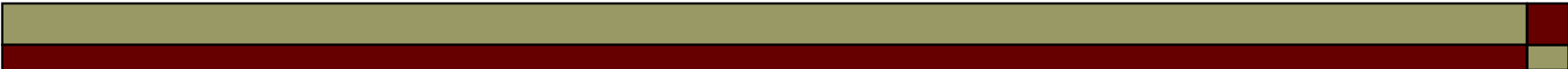
- ❑ theme "order versus chaos"
- ❑ fullest, most exaggerated composition → 'Admonitions of Ipuwer' (Papyrus Leiden 334) → Lamentations
- ❑ Set in FIP, but necessarily reflecting real historical events → only preserved copy written in NK

'Admonitions of Ipuwer' (Papyrus Leiden 334)

- *[. .] The door [keepers] say: "Let us go and plunder."
The confectioners [. . .].
The washerman refuses to carry his load [. . .]
The bird [catchers] have drawn up in line of battle [. . . the
inhabitants] of the Delta carry shields.
The brewers [. . .] sad.
A man regards his son as his enemy. Confusion [. . .]
another. Come and conquer; judge [. . .] what was
ordained for you in the time of Horus, in the age [of the
Ennead . . .]. The virtuous man goes in mourning because
of what has happened in the land [. . .] goes [. . .] the tribes
of the desert have become Egyptians everywhere.*

'Admonitions of Ipuwer' (Papyrus Leiden 334)

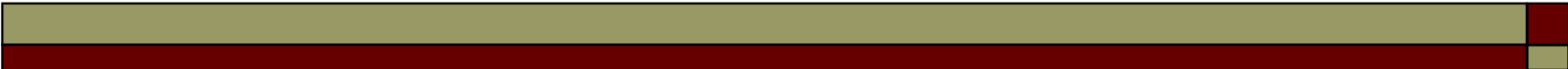
- *Indeed, the desert is throughout the land, the nomes are laid waste, and barbarians from abroad have come to Egypt.
Indeed, men arrive [. . .] and indeed, there are no Egyptians anywhere.
Indeed, gold and lapis lazuli, silver and turquoise, carnelian and amethyst, Ibheth-stone and [. . .] are strung on the necks of maidservants. Good things are throughout the land, (yet) housewives say: "Oh that we had something to eat!"*



Ma'at and Ethics

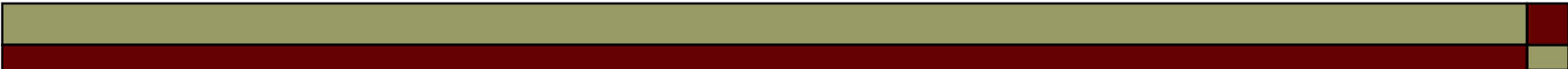
- In sources:
 - moral principles mostly expressed in practical admonitions and/or general observations on everyday conduct
 - voiced by authoritative sages
- Via sources: observation of occurrences of major changes in ancient Egyptian ethical thought
 - during the New Kingdom: piety and religiosity became significant criteria for the judgment of the individual





Evolution of the concept *ma'at*

- (1) Old Kingdom
 - merged with the will of the king → assumes the service of men
- (2) First Intermediate Period
 - no longer a career in the king's service: own virtuous life compliant to Ma'at leads to immortality
 - Due to weakness of kingship, word of Ma'at (still connected with kingship) seems to disappear from inscriptions
- (3) Middle Kingdom
 - "propaganda" literature monarchy reintroduces the traditional notion of Ma'at connected with kingship – service to the king as necessity of survival
 - tomb and Ma'at become inseparable



Evolution of the concept *ma'at*

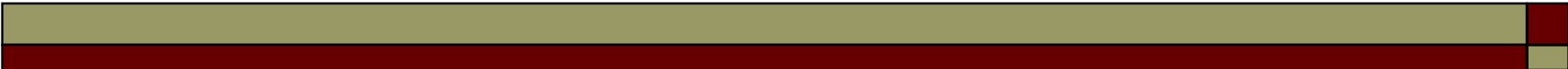
□ (4) SIP and New Kingdom

- invasion of the Hyksos → Egypt not stable terrestrial world anymore where Ma'at could reign without sharing
- major consequence for afterlife: no longer simply continuation of terrestrial life, but another state: deceased become immortal living divine entity in kingdom of Osiris when lived according right order
- Rituals / rites of passage necessary: "Judgement of the Dead," "Opening of the Mouth"

Ma'at and King

- ❑ From early Egyptian history: king's chief responsibility = to ensure that *ma'at* maintained in the world – i.e. in Egypt
- ❑ role of Pharaoh and state to fight against spontaneous tendency of disorganisation to make life of men and gods possible
- ❑ Responsibility carried out by defeating the country's enemies for example
- ❑ depiction of a king engaging and destroying enemies in battle = not necessarily any real fighting, BUT symbolises his maintenance of maat

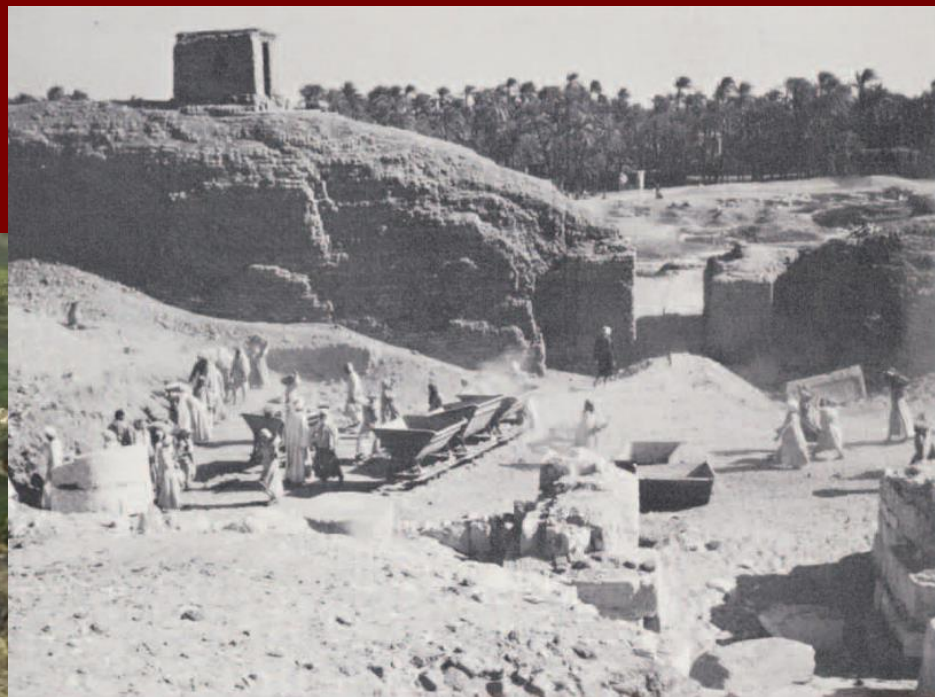


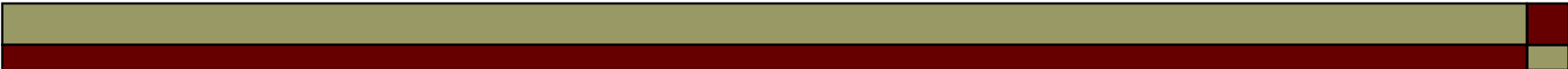


Ma'at in temples

- ❑ Egyptian temples represent the establishment of *ma'at* on earth:
- ❑ within their walls all is ordered correctly
- ❑ whilst outside lies chaos conceived of as a watery waste
- ❑ therefore walls of Egyptian temples are constructed in undulating courses

Walling out the chaos





Ma'at in temples

- ❑ Egyptian temples represent the establishment of *ma'at* on earth:
- ❑ within their walls all is ordered correctly
- ❑ whilst outside lies chaos conceived of as a watery waste
- ❑ therefore walls of Egyptian temples are constructed in undulating courses
- ❑ Maat therefore present in all temples, need to be maintained and guaranteed for the wellbeing of the gods present



Presentation / offering of Ma'at

Abydos, Temple
Sethi I (2nd
Hypostyle, North
Wall)



Presenting Ma'at in statuary



Seti I, 19th dyn., silver (gilded), from a ceremonial bark. Louvre E 27431

