

Week 4

Creation, Cosmogonies, Mythology, and Evolution

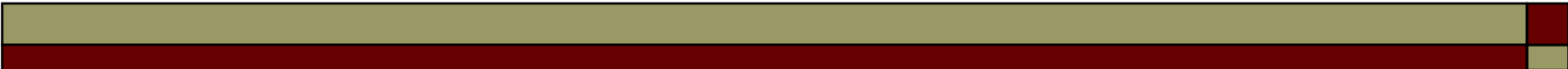
HPAH7015

Ancient Egyptian Religion

Dr. Katharina Zinn

Readings

- ❑ Pinch, G. 2002. *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford.
- ❑ Pinch, G. 2004. *Egyptian Myth: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP
- ❑ Kirk, G.S. 1970. *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*. Cambridge: CUP.
- ❑ Allen, James P. *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*. Yale Egyptological Studies 2. New Haven: Yale Univ., 1988.
- ❑ Verhoeven, U. 2016. Konzeptionelle Variationen über die Weltentstehung im Alten Ägypten. In M. Gindhard, T. Pommering (eds). *Anfang & Ende: Vormoderne Szenarien von Weltentstehung und Weltuntergang*. Darmstadt: WBG. 26-40.
- ❑ Tatomir, R. 2007. From Nwn to Ma'at and Back: „The Butterfly Effect and the Egyptian Pattern of Perfection. *Annals of the Sergiu Al-George Institute* 12-16(2003-2007). 7-12.



Conceptional variations

- ❑ Not *one* creation mythos, *one* approach, one concept → BUT many variations for creation and “end of the world”
 - Contemporary
 - Spatially (differently) determined
 - One after the other
- ❑ Dichotomy of creation and end experienced on daily basis and as such omnipresent
 - Sun cycle reminder of renewal and danger of disappearance

Sources available

- Creation and renewal – often described / pictured
 - Cult and temple inscriptions and decorations
 - Funerary texts and images
 - Magico-medical texts with vignettes
 - Mythological handbooks
 - → discourse created and uphold by elite involved in compilation and usage of writing (functionality of literacy) and visual canon
- Apocalypse – rarely

Characteristics of mythology in AE

- Clear geographical / spatial dedication
(Memphis, Heliopolis, Hermopolis, Thebes)
 - Nevertheless – influence each other beyond the points of origin without any obvious conflicts (!)
- Concepts become more complex, more theological
- Concepts reflect certain phenomena, contexts or materialities (such as humidity, water, air)

The materiality of CREATION

- Watery pre-state / primitive state
 - from which creation emerges as differentiation of sky and earth with the *duat* (underworld) in-between (not locally defined)
 - Described as absence of (tangible) things, being undifferentiated
 - Nun/Naunet – primeval water as synonym for lack of differentiation
 - Heh/Hehet – infinity as expression of lack of constraints / borders / thresholds
 - Kuk/Kuket – darkness/gloominess/obscurity (absence of light)
 - Amun/Amaunet – concealment / seclusion / latency (as the absence of tangibility, especially shapes / patterns)

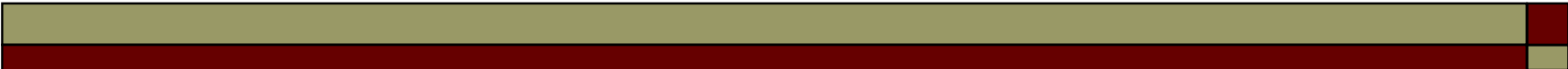
Ra: The Path of the Sun God





Ra: The Path of the Sun God

- A full-length animated film by Lesley Keen based on Egyptian mythology.
 - The first part, “Dawn,” images from creation myths;
 - the second, “Noon,” life cycle of an Egyptian king;
 - and the third, “Night,” animates the journey of the sun god through the underworld.

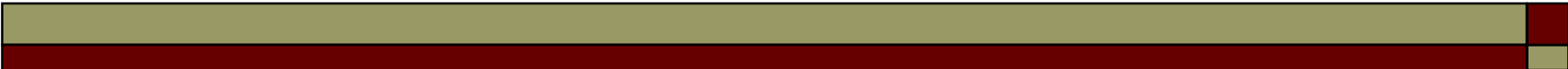


The nature of religion

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

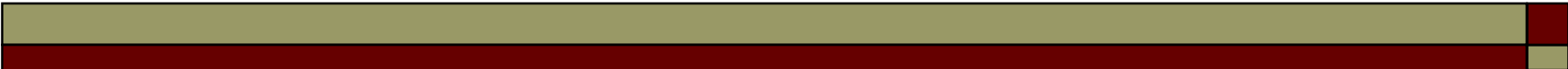
What is a myth?

- ❑ a traditional story
 - especially one concerning the early history of a civilisation
 - explaining a natural social phenomenon → typically involving supernatural beings or events
- ❑ In academia: “disease of language”, “garbled memories of historical events”, “expression of the subconscious mind”
- ❑ Kirk. 1970: 3 main categories
 - Myths told for entertainment (might be sacred, but not solemn)
 - Operative, iterative, validatory myths (justify/maintain institutions/state → repeated at ceremonial occasions)
 - Explanatory, speculative myths (etiological – explain origins)



What is a myth? – Egyptology:

- ❑ Mythology = integral part of Egyptian culture
- ❑ Characters and events from myth permeate Egyptian art, architecture, and literature
- ❑ underpinned many of the rituals performed by kings and priests
- ❑ knowledge of myth was seen as essential weapon in fight to survive the dangers of life and the afterlife
- ❑ When development of mythical narratives? → dispute depending on definition of myth



What is a myth? – Egyptology:

- ❑ myths regarded as stories with poetic rather than literal truths
- ❑ myths sometimes separated from other traditional tale by defining as stories featuring deities → applicable for Egypt, but not all cultures
- ❑ set in remote time or place: humans and deities can interact
- ❑ stories imbued with meaning and power: can explain / justify the way the world is
- ❑ power to transcend individual experience + act as bridge between the human and divine worlds

The landscapes of myth – mythical landscapes: Black land and Red land

- river dominated life → Egyptian cosmology: celestial realm in sky + underworld = river running through them; sun, moon, and stars shown sailing heavens in boats
- one name for Egypt = ‘Two Banks’: river both unified and divided country → crossing: involved of death by drowning or crocodile → dangerous boat journey as central part of Egyptian myth:
 - boat of the sun god attacked by chaos serpent Apophis
 - Boat carrying body of Osiris passed through crowd of enemies before risen again
 - dead person travelled the river of the underworld using the Book of Two Ways as guide → see coffin of Gue

The landscapes of myth – mythical landscapes

Outer coffin of Gua BM EA 30839

Length: 2.60m

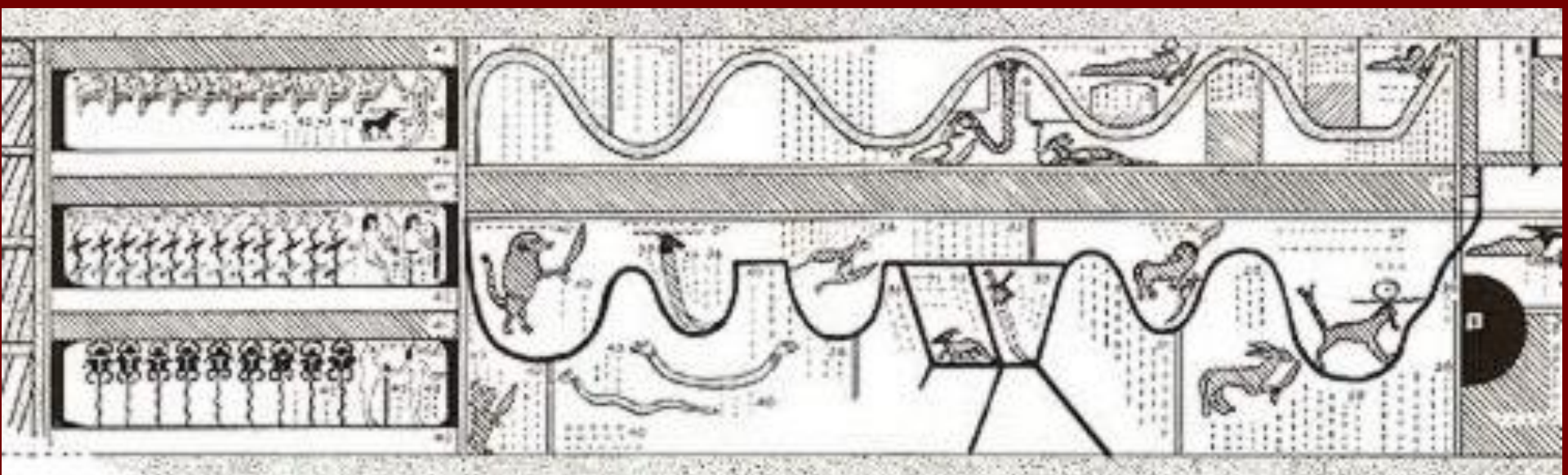
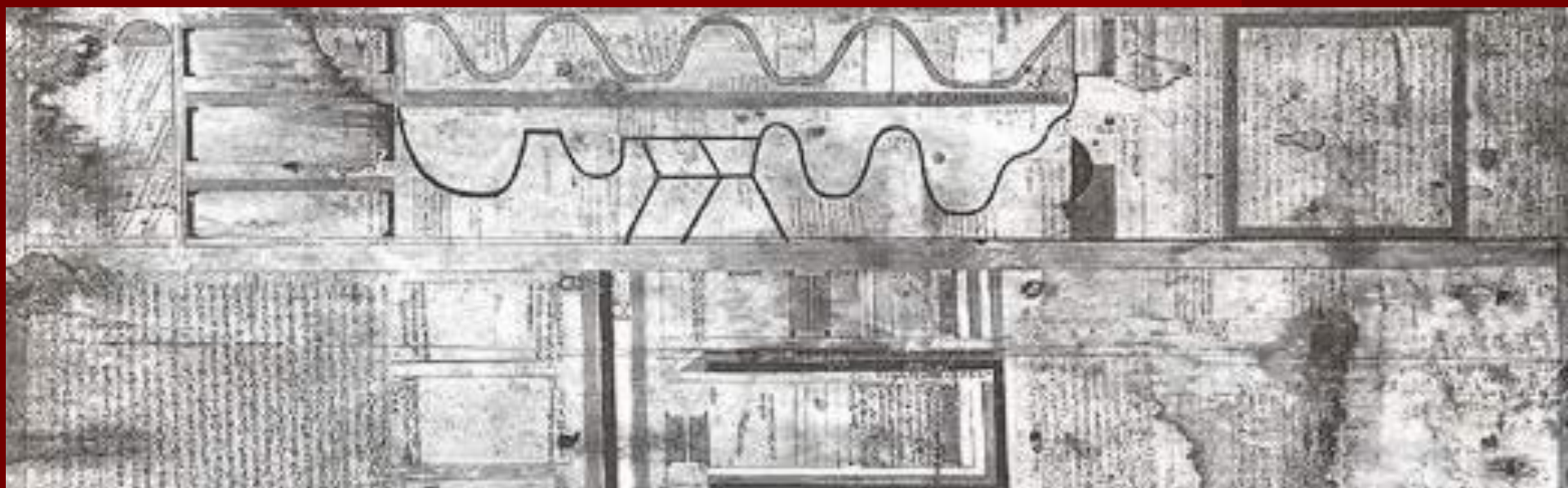
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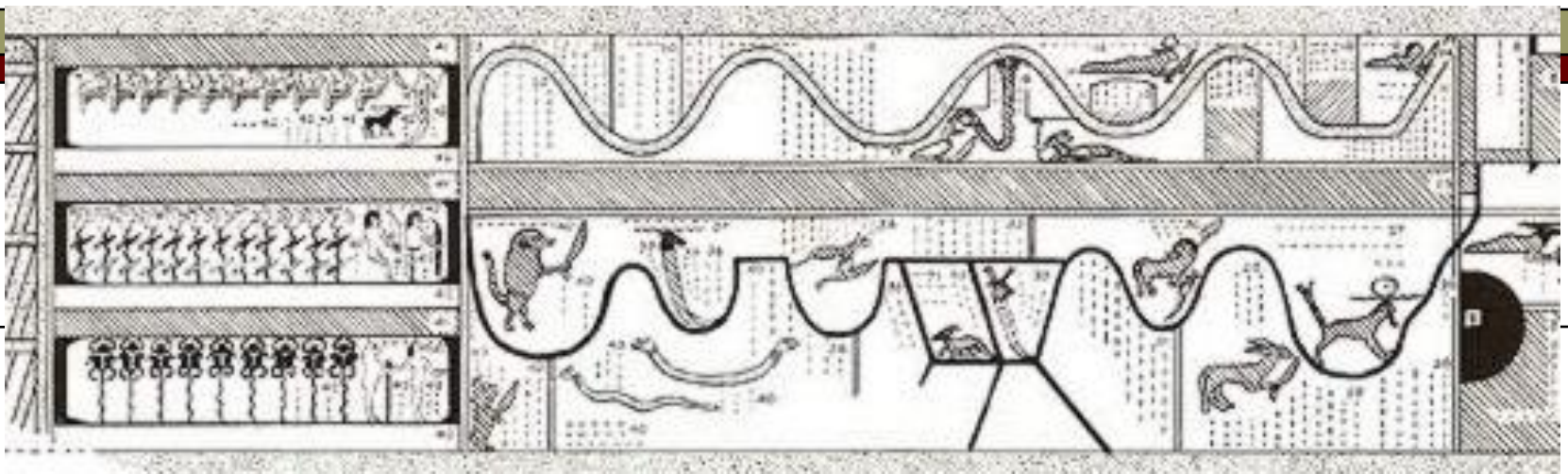
From tomb of Gua, Deir el-Bersha, Egypt

12th Dynasty, 1985-1795 BC

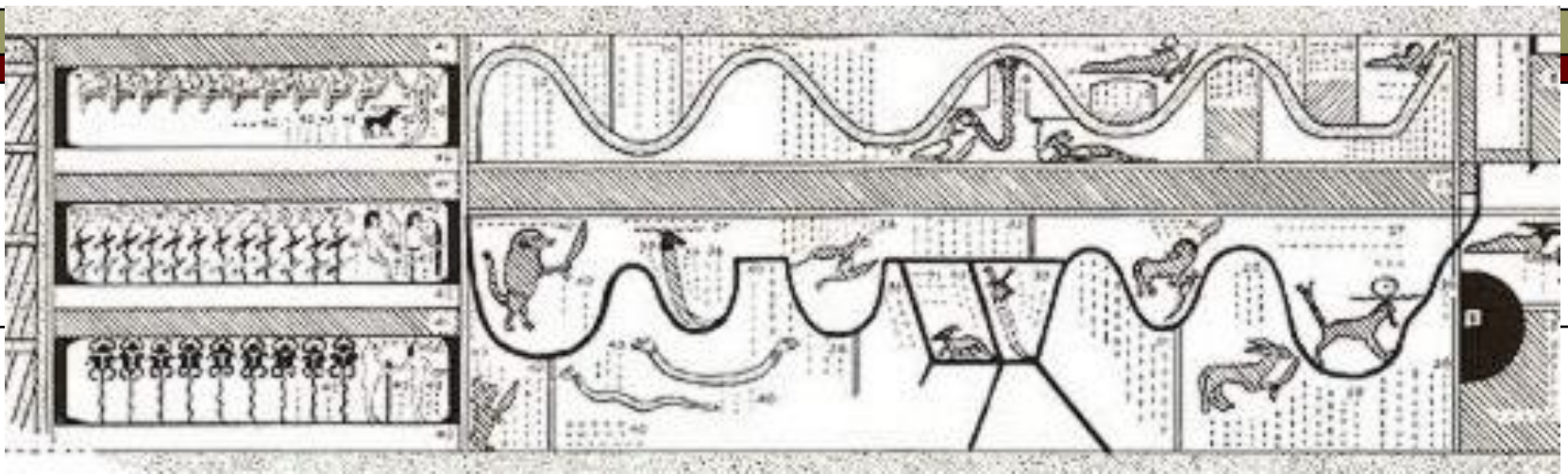
With maps showing the route to the underworld (*Book of Two Ways* = part of the *Coffin Texts*), intended to help the deceased reach the Afterlife.







- ❑ A true topographical map of the Afterlife: 2 windy, difficult paths separated by impassable lake of fire
- ❑ Deceased has to decide which way to go to get to the world of Osiris
- ❑ Land route (lower one) on embankment → to entrance of the realm of Osiris, with secondary routes leading into fire and nothingness
- ❑ Other – might be a canal: can be followed by deceased under protection of Osiris, entrance defended by ram-headed crocodile



- ❑ Journey with obstacles and dangerous creatures
- ❑ Both way lead into Rosetau (generic term for Osiris' underworld)
- ❑ Texts very complicated to understand, presents sun and Osiris as important parts
- ❑ Might be first draft of BoD and Amduat (developed from 18th dyn. onwards)

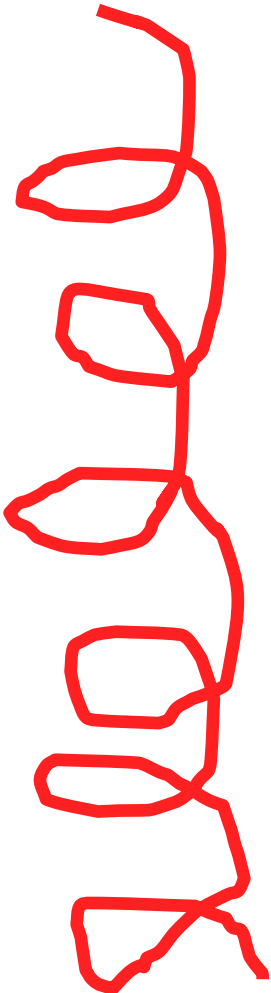
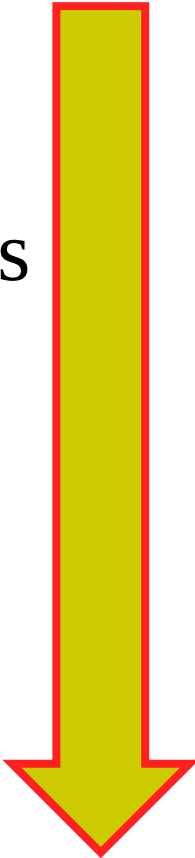
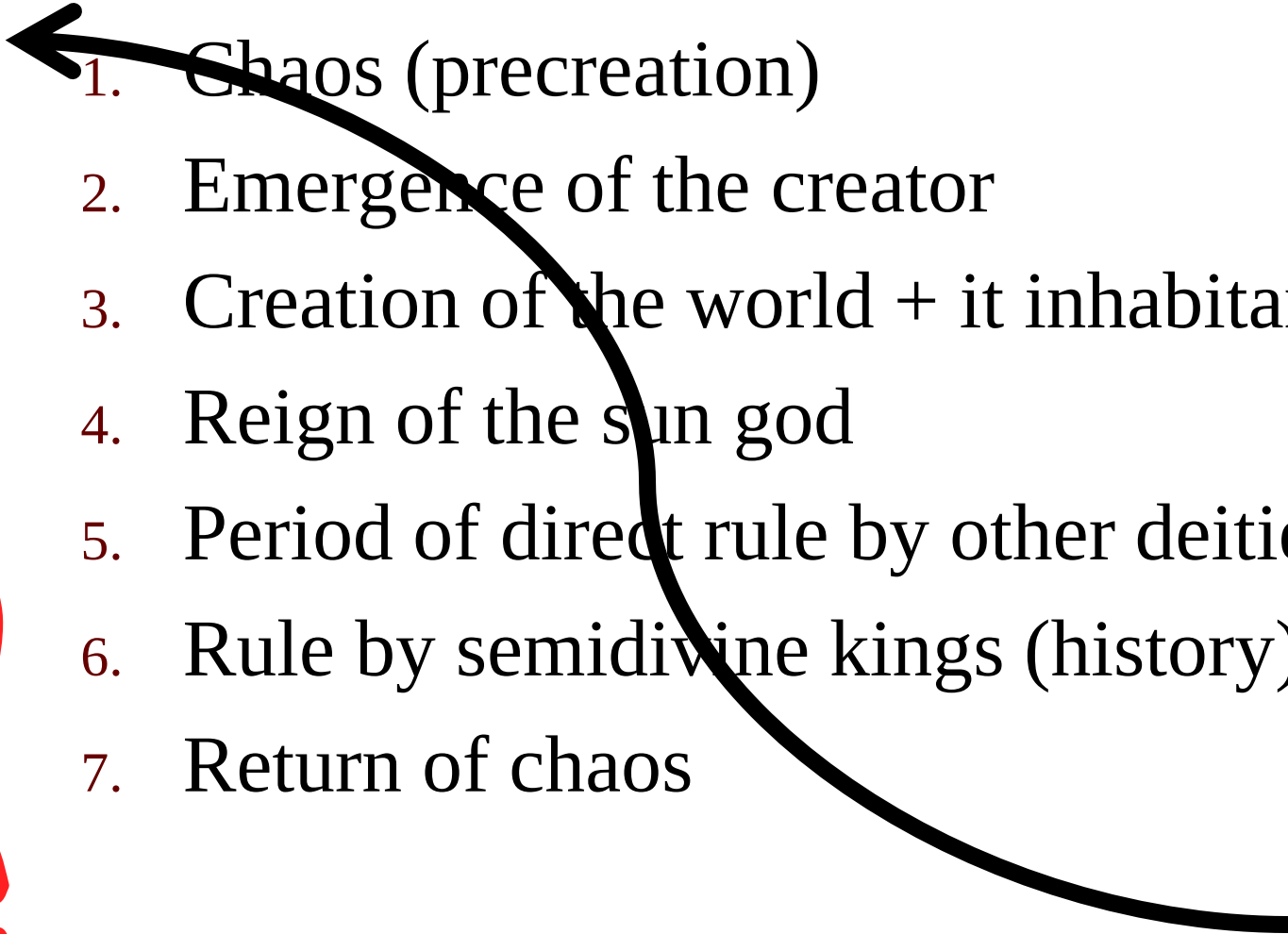


The landscapes of myth – mythical landscapes: Black land and Red land

- ❑ east bank → sun rose = realm of the living → site for towns and temples
- ❑ west bank → sun set = designated as realm of dead → proper place for cemeteries and mortuary temples
- ❑ territory divided into fertile ‘Black Land’ of the floodplain → Osiris, Isis, and Horus
- ❑ the barren ‘Red Land’ of surrounding deserts → Seth, Nephthys, and Anubis
- ❑ Black Land was under constant threat from the Mediterranean Sea and from the desert

The mythical story of Egypt

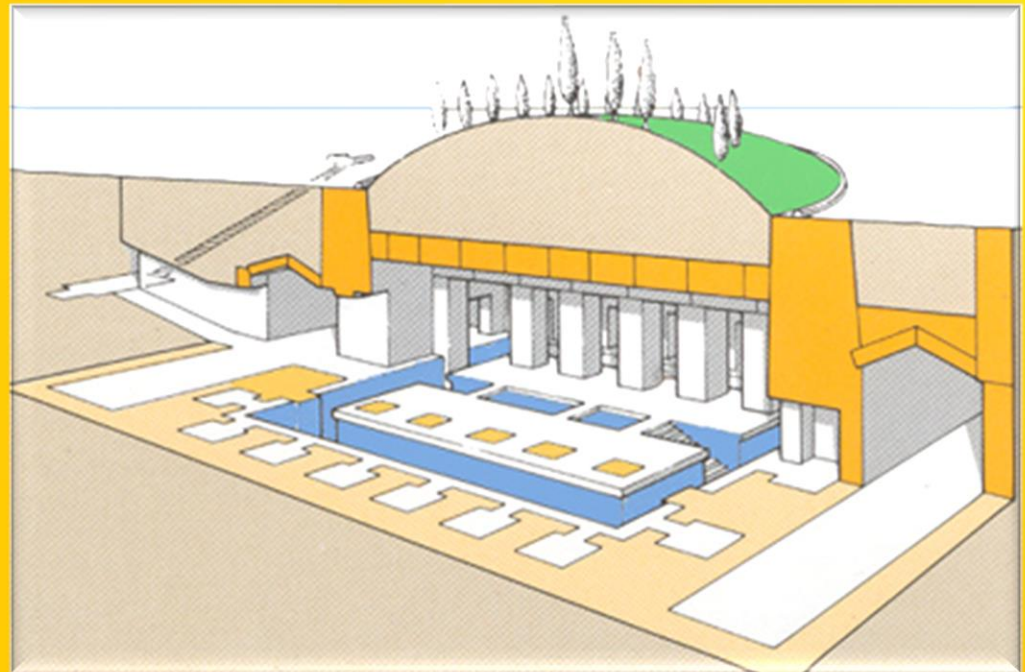
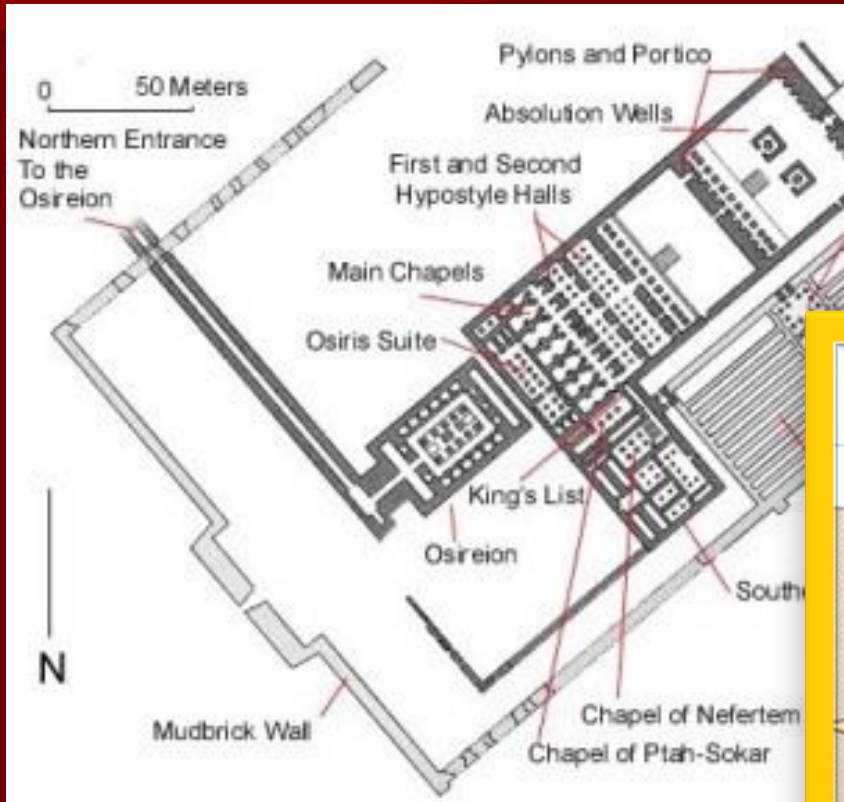
1. Chaos (precreation)
2. Emergence of the creator
3. Creation of the world + it inhabitants
4. Reign of the sun god
5. Period of direct rule by other deities
6. Rule by semidivine kings (history)
7. Return of chaos



Ancient Egyptian Cosmology: How the Universe Works

- ❑ **Excerpts from the Book of Nut :**
- ❑ *Outside the Cosmos*
 - “The uniform darkness, ocean of the gods, the place from which birds come: this is from her (i.e. Nut’s) northwestern side up to her northeastern side, open to the Duat that is on her northern side, with her rear in the east and her head in the west. ... The upper side of this sky exists in uniform darkness, the southern, northern, western, and eastern limits of which are unknown, these having been fixed in the Waters, in inertness. There is no light of the Ram there: he does not appear there, (a place) whose south, north, west and east land is unknown by the gods or akhs, there being no brightness there. And as for every place void of sky and void of land, that is the entire Duat. ...”

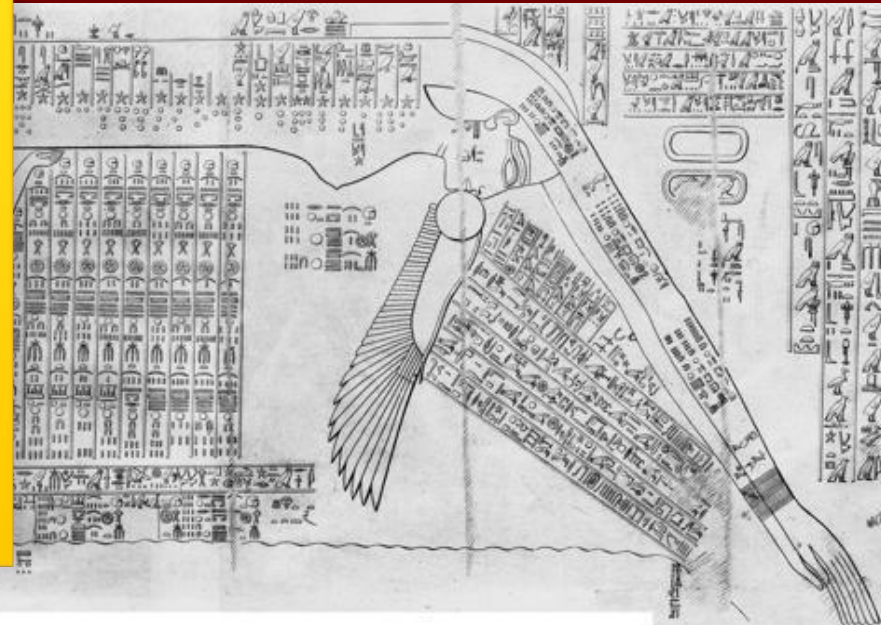
Osireion Abydos



Cosmology

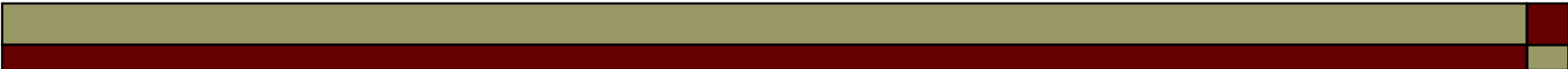
Book of Nut (one of the Books of the Sky):
Movement of the stars from the Osireion in Abydos (called cenotaph Seti I)

→ H. Frankfort, The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos, London 1933



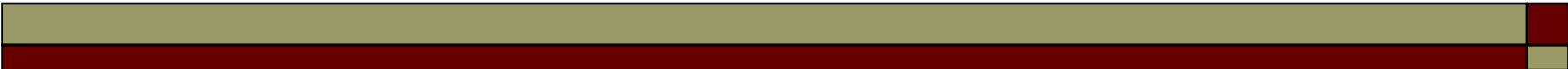
Core myths





Core myths

- ❑ Creation of Egypt as part of the divine order
- ❑ Continuing war between *isfet* (chaos) and *maat* (order)
- ❑ The creator sun god loses his eye/daughter/defender, but she is persuaded to return
- ❑ Rebellions by gods and people cause the sun god to destroy most of humanity and leave earth for heaven
- ❑ Osiris cycle: Osiris murdered by Seth → Isis + Nephthys search for his mutilated body; Isis revives Osiris to conceive a son, Horus → gives birth in the marshes
- ❑ Horus is poisoned by chaos creatures + healed
- ❑ Horus and Seth fight for the right to rule



Core myths

- ❑ Creator comes into being in the *nun* (primeval ocean)
- ❑ First land (primeval mound) rises from the *nun*
- ❑ Emergence of the sun god/birth of the solar child/first sunrise
- ❑ Solar child is threatened by forces of chaos and saved by protective deities
- ❑ Creation of living beings via the bodily fluids/thoughts/words/hands of the creator
- ❑ Humanity springs from tears of angry Eye of Ra
- ❑ Separation of earth god and sky goddess by air god

Source material for Egyptian myth(ology)

□ OK – FIP

- Pyramid Texts

□ MK – SIP

- Coffin Texts
- Magical Texts

□ NK – TIP

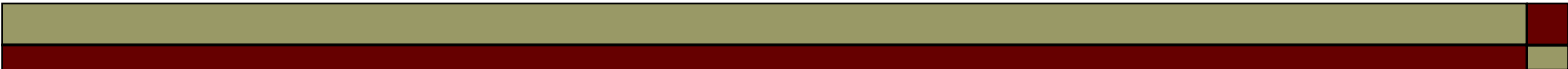
- Book of the Dead Papyri
- Underworld Books: Amduat, Book of the Day, Book of the Night, Book of Nut, Book of Caverns, Book of the Earth
- Magical Texts: Magical Papyrus Harris (pBM 10042), Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind (pBerlin 3027, 5/9-6/1)



Source material for Egyptian myth(ology)

- NK – TIP (cont.)
 - Religious Texts: The Book of the Celestial Cow (KV17 – Seti I), Hymns (to Amun: pLeiden I 350), Temple Texts

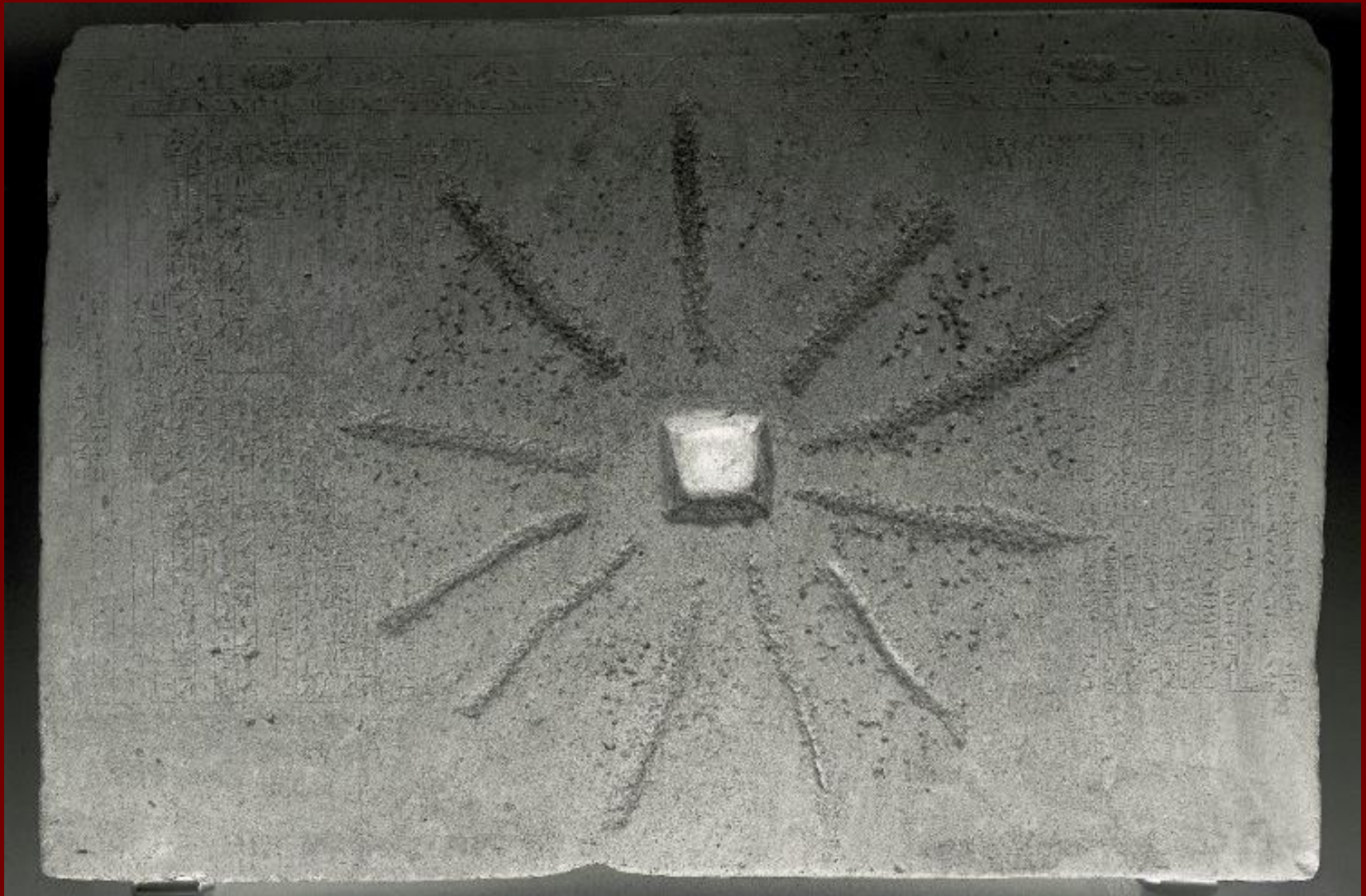


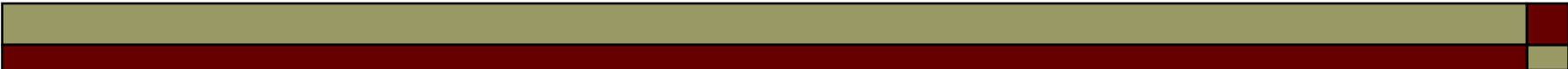


Source material for Egyptian myth(ology)

- ❑ NK – TIP (cont.)
 - Religious Texts: The Book of the Celestial Cow, Hymns (to Amun: pLeiden I 350), Temple Texts
- ❑ Late Period
 - Book of the Dead Papyri
 - Underworld Books: Amduat, Book of the Day, Book of the Night, Book of Nut, Book of Caverns, Book of the Earth
 - Magical Texts
 - Religious Texts: Shabaqo Stone (BM 498), Confirmation of Royal Power (pBrooklyn 47.218.50), Hymns (to Ptah: pBerlin 3048), Temple Texts

Monument of Memphite Theology – Shabako Stone (BM 498)





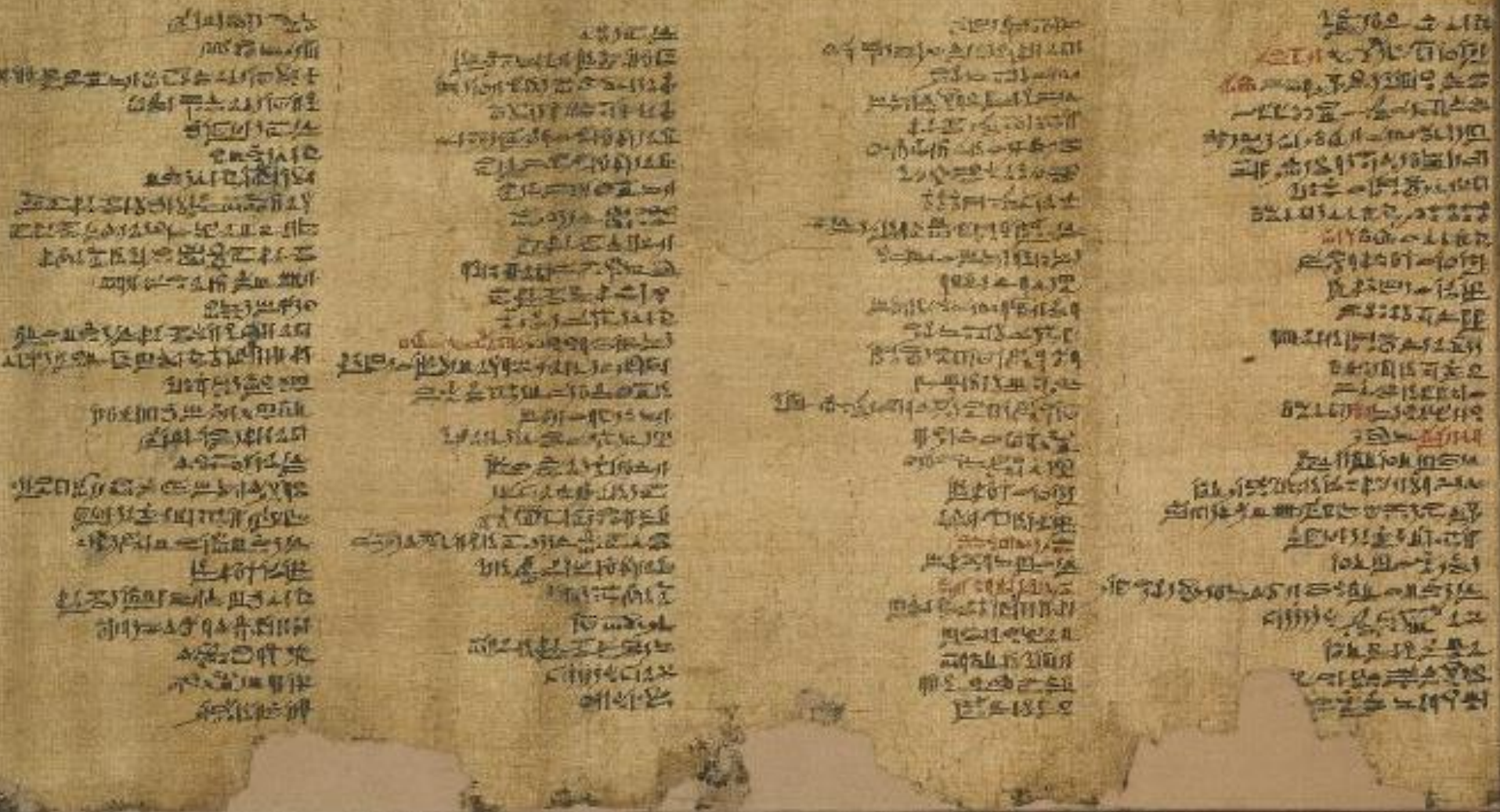
Source material for Egyptian myth(ology)

□ Ptolemaic-Roman Period

- Book of the Dead Papyri
- Funerary Compositions: pBremner-Rhind (pBM 10188)
 - Papyrus of Nesmin; The 'Songs of Isis and Nephthys' are cols. 1--17'; 'the Ritual of Bringing in Sokar' cols 18-21; the 'Book of Overthrowing Apep' cols 22-32;; the 'Names of Apep' cols 32-33.
- Magical Texts (Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden)
- Religious Texts: Cosmogony of Memphis (pBerlin 13603), Nun Cosmogony, Hymns, Temple Texts

pBremner-Rhind (pBM 10188)

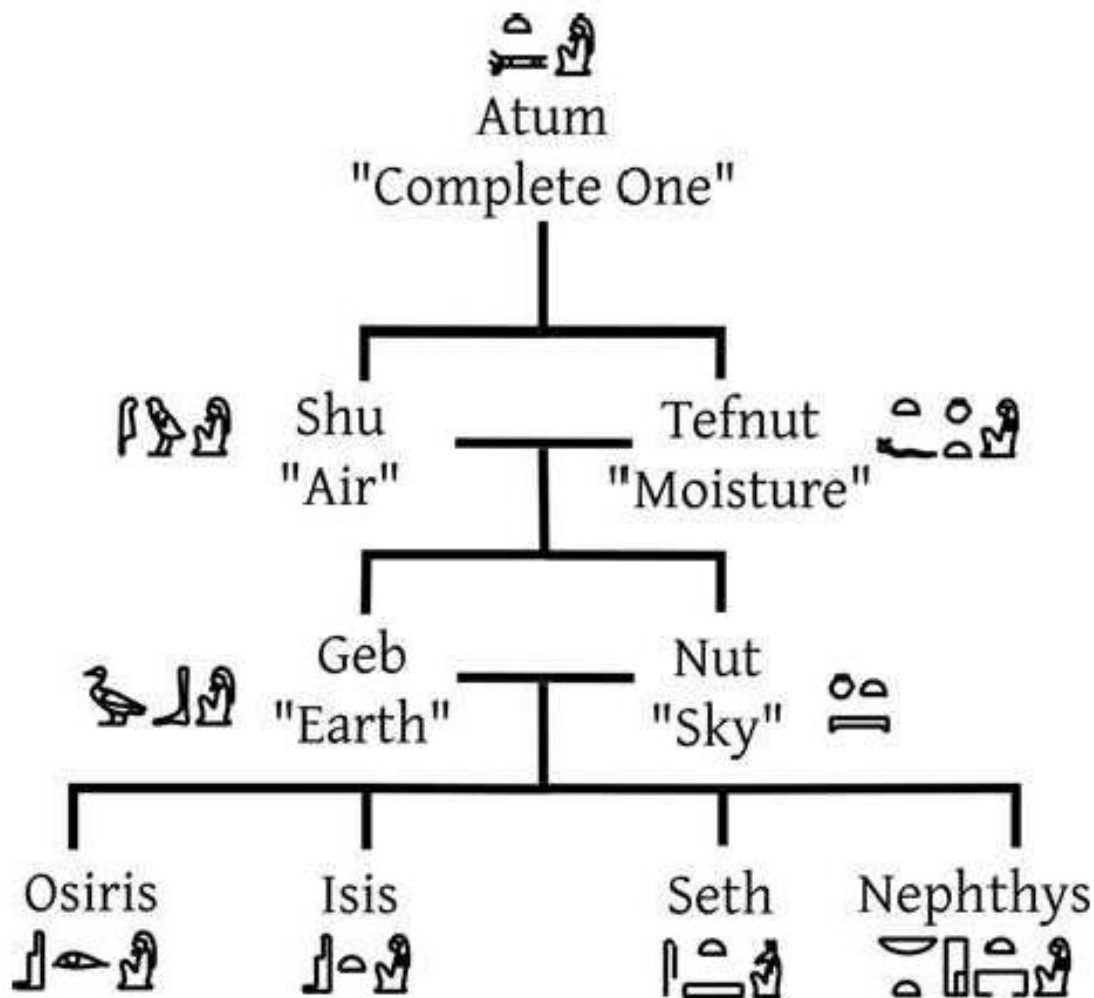
Papyrus of Nesmin; sheet 2; Hieratic text. The 'Songs of Isis and Nephthys' are cols. 1--17



Creation myths

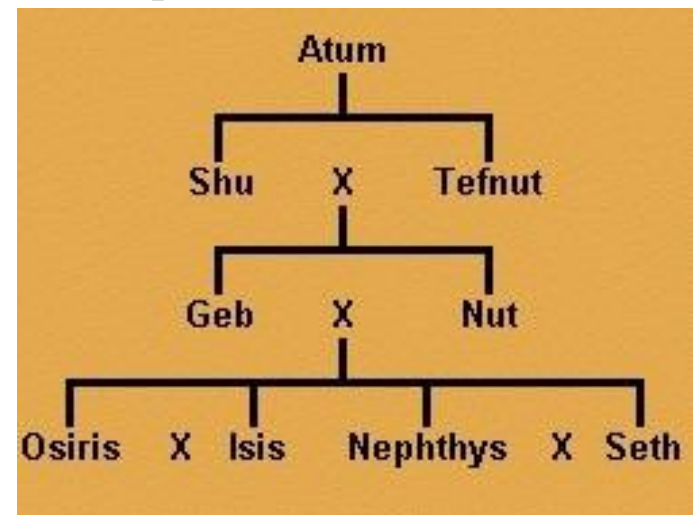
Egyptian  *Iwnw*

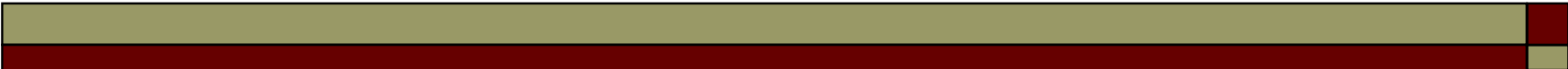
Heliopolitan Ennead



Egyptian mythology and order

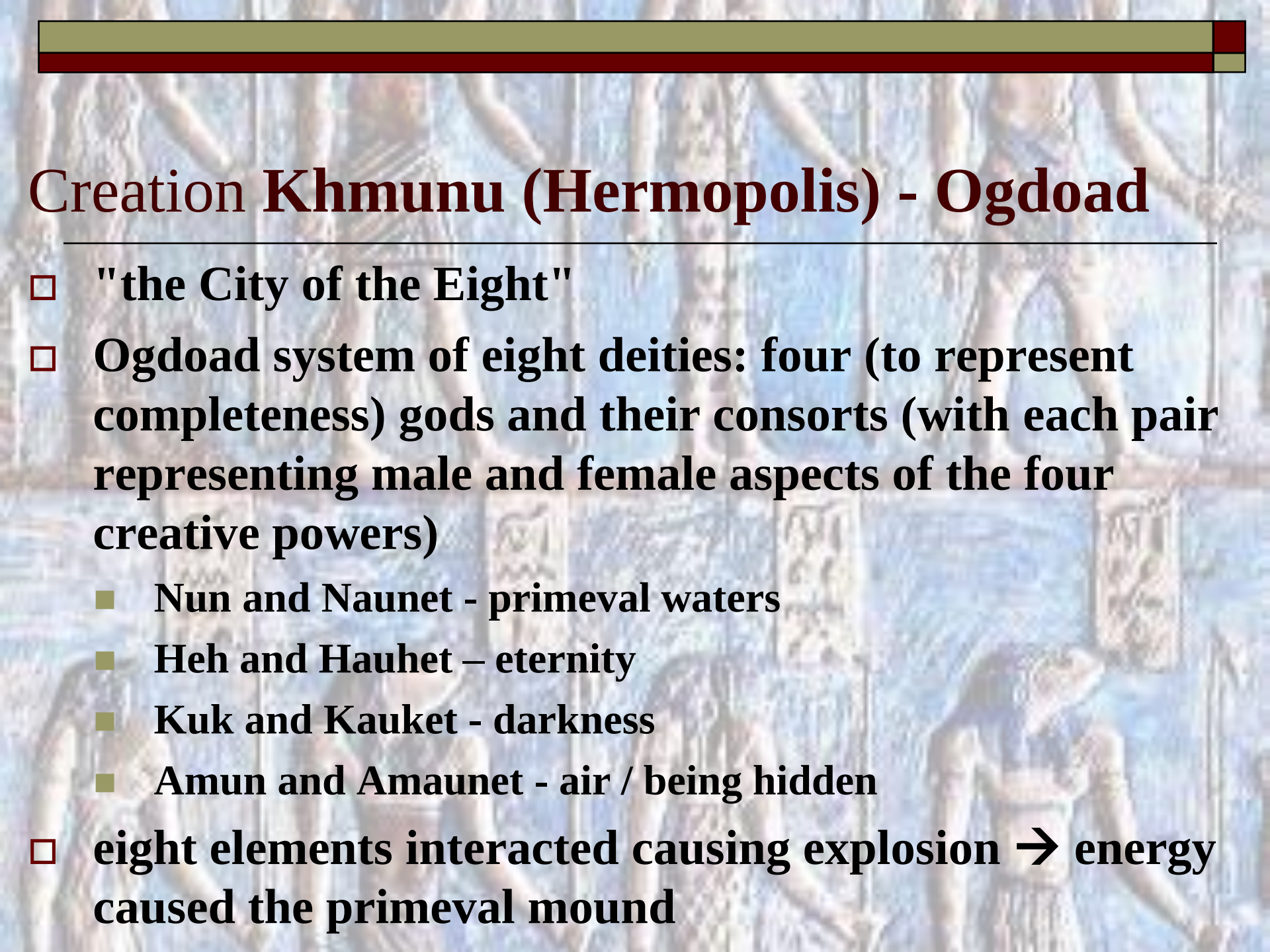
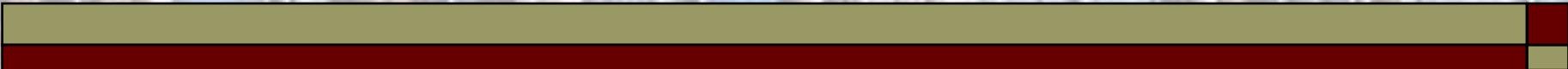
- Created by priests
- formation of a number of **enneads**:
 - groups of nine gods and goddesses, organized into families
 - number nine was a sacred and symbolic number that could also stand for 'all' gods
 - therefore, 'nine' should not always be taken literally → ennead of Thebes consists of fifteen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





Creation – Iunu (Heliopolis)

- ❑ from the primeval waters represented by Nun mound appeared with self-begotten deity Atum
- ❑ Bored and alone, Atum spat or masturbated, producing Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture)
- ❑ Shu and Tefnut mated: Geb (earth) and Nut (sky)
- ❑ Geb and Nut engaged in continuous copulation until Shu separated them: lifting Nut into her place in the sky
- ❑ children of Geb and Nut: Osiris and Set, Isis and Nephtys, which in turn formed couples.



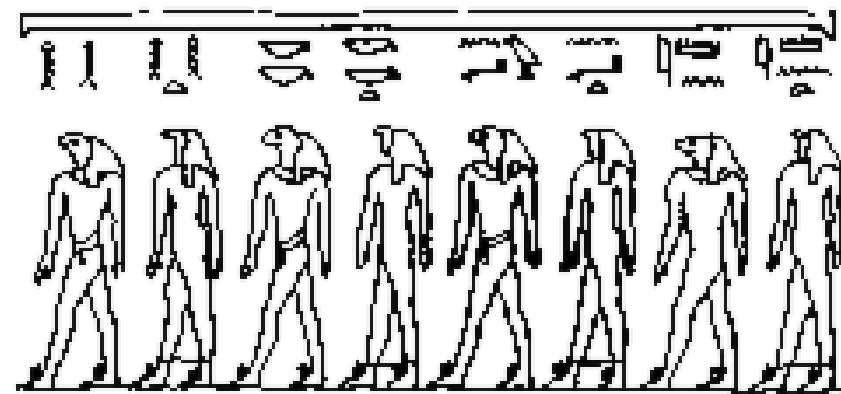
Creation Khmunu (Hermopolis) - Ogdoad

- ❑ "the City of the Eight"
- ❑ Ogdoad system of eight deities: four (to represent completeness) gods and their consorts (with each pair representing male and female aspects of the four creative powers)
 - Nun and Naunet - primeval waters
 - Heh and Hauhet – eternity
 - Kuk and Kauket - darkness
 - Amun and Amaunet - air / being hidden
- ❑ eight elements interacted causing explosion → energy caused the primeval mound

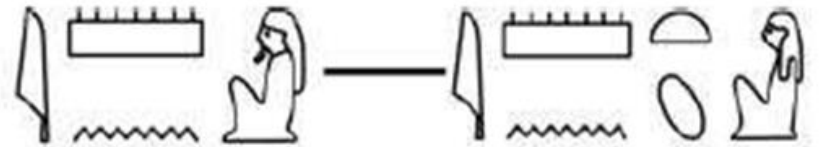
b. Hermopolitan Cosmology:

Greek Hermopolis

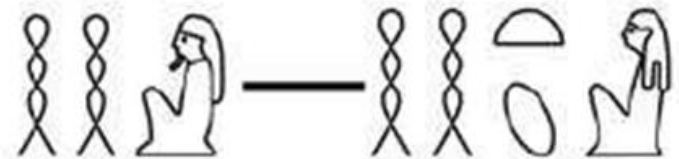
Egyptian  *Hmnw*



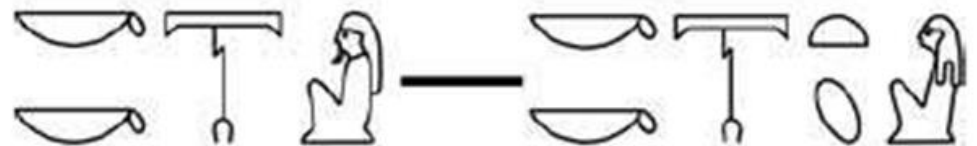
Hermopolitan Ogdoad



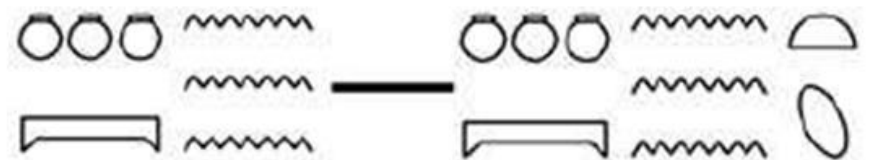
Amun "Hiddenness" Amunet



Heh "Infinity" Hehet



Kek "Darkness" Keket



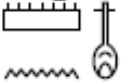
Nun "Inertness" Nunet

Monument of Memphite Theology

– Shabako Stone (BM 498)

c. Memphite Theology

Greek Memphis

Egyptian  *Mn-nfr*

Important Attestations:

a. Pyramid Texts: PT 345

b. Coffin Texts: CT 647

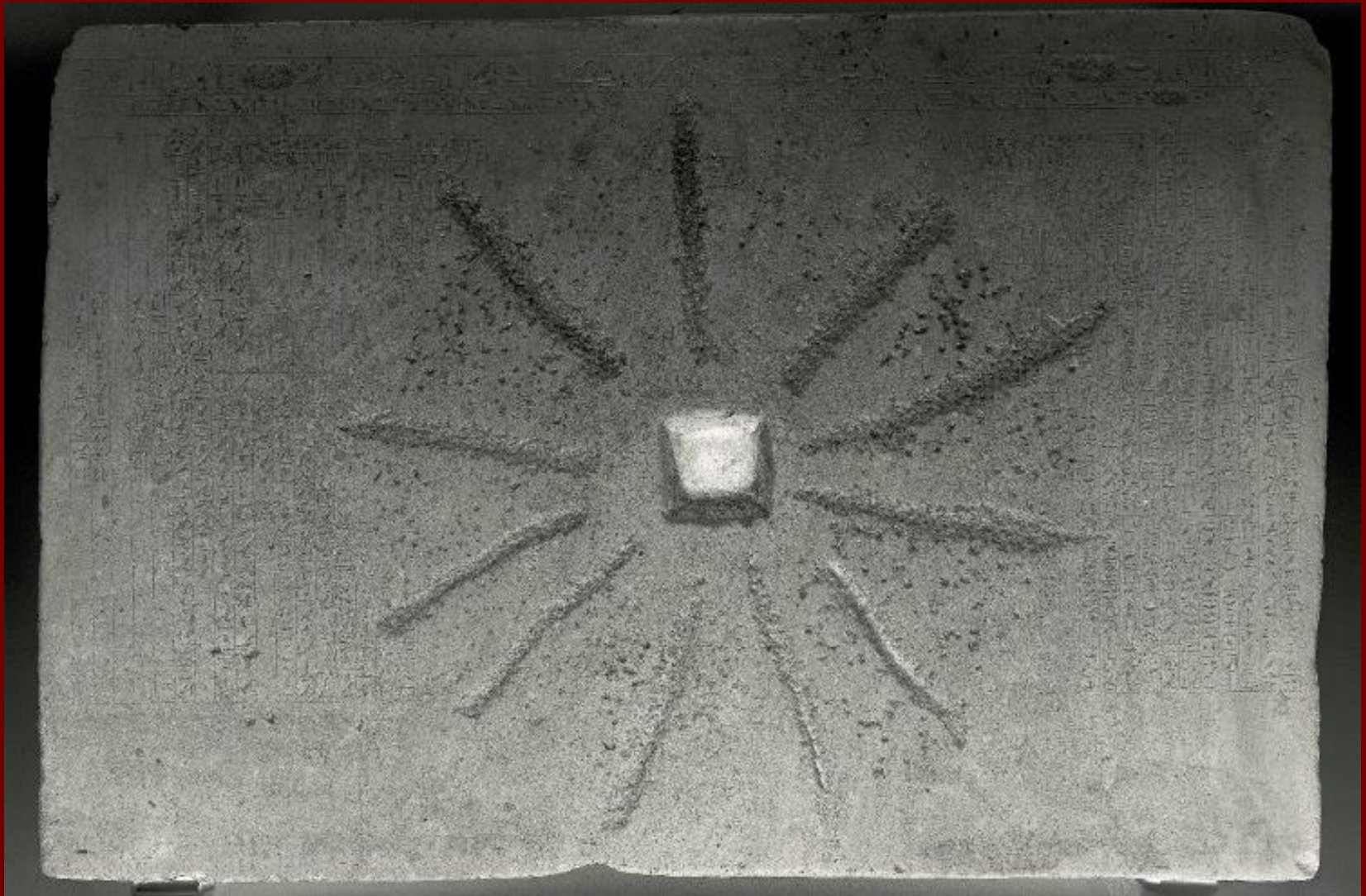
c. Book of the Dead: BD 82

d. Magical Texts

e. Religious Texts: Shabako Stone (BM 498), Hymn to Ptah (pBerlin 3048), Stele Copenhagen GNC 897/AEIN 54, Memphite Cosmogony (pBerlin 13603)

- two horizontal registers of hieroglyphs: names of Shabako and ‘ancient fiction’, that he preserved ancient text from further deterioration (dated back to OK)

Monument of Memphite Theology – Shabako Stone



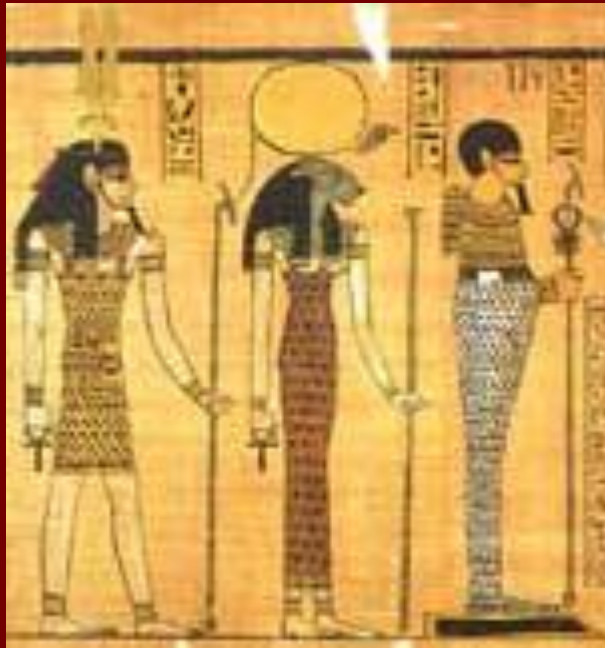
Monument of Memphite Theology

– Shabako Stone (BM 498)

- two horizontal registers of hieroglyphs: names of Shabako and ‘ancient fiction’, that he preserved ancient text from further deterioration (dated back to OK)
- below 60 vertical registers of hieroglyphs (some substantially damaged): record the 'Memphite Theology' or creation myth
 - text perhaps originally composed during the New Kingdom, in which Ptah is responsible for the creation of all things by means of the spoken word.

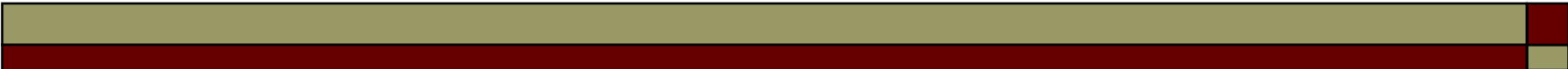
Ptah: God of Craftsmen, Rebirth and Creation

Cairo JdE 60739



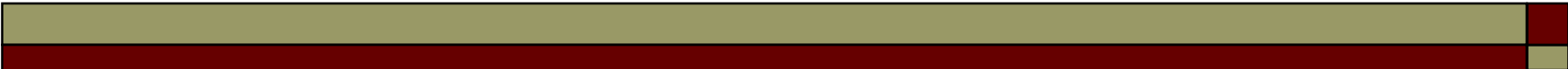
Ptah within Mennefer
(Memphis) Triad (Ptah,
Sekhmet, Nefertem)





heka – Memphite theology I

- ❑ creation of each human or divine being (in general everything that exists in the universe) by creator god Ptah
- ❑ achieved through verbal manifestation of **divine thought** and its **correct pronunciation** in recitation (speaking out ALOUD) as “logos,” (*Hw*), or “word, command” (*medet*)
- ❑ divine “logos” refers to encrypted abstract, symbolic notion of “name” (*ren*)



heka – Memphite theology II

- By “proclaiming the name of everything” Ptah gave birth,
 - initially, to Shu and Tefnut and
 - consequently to the whole Ennead (group of nine gods).
- Not possible without notion of *Heka* as power who brought proclamation to life
- All the gods and human beings came afterwards as result of this divine creativity caused by *Heka*, made manifest by the spoken words of Ptah

The Book of the Celestial Cow

(KV17 – Seti I, also outermost shrines Tutankhamun, Ramesses II – KV7, and Ramesses III – KV11)



A Mythological funerary text: destruction and creation of mankind

- ❑ not manual of spiritual instruction, or guidebook through the Duat
- ❑ tells story with magic spells and exact details of Divine Cow herself
- ❑ central theme: mankind's rebellion against Re → punishment of humans by the fiery "eye" of Re (Hathor)
- ❑ Rebellion → required complete reordering of world
- ❑ Prior: golden age, sun god not yet begun daily course through the sky and the netherworld → no cycle of day and night, nor a netherworld, death did not exist

A Mythological funerary text: destruction and creation of mankind

- ❑ mankind's rebellion: sun god consulted primeval deities, including Shu, Tefnut and Geb, Nun and Hathor in Great House in Heliopolis
- ❑ Hathor sent to inflict punishment: Hathor-Sekhmet waded in blood of men
- ❑ sun god took pity on those humans who were left → saved them by causing Hathor to become drunk on blood red beer
- ❑ Re withdrew to sky on the back of celestial cow (= transformed Nut), supported by Shu, 8 Heh-gods + Pharaoh