

All story or what?

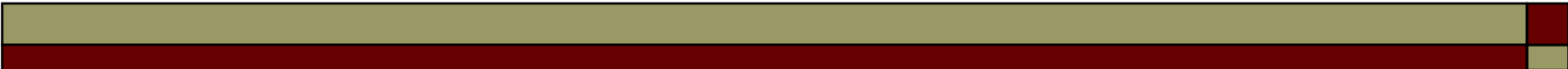
Methodological thoughts about
myth as integral part of
Egyptian society and approach
to life

HPHP4006

Myth and Mythology: How stories shape the
world

Dr. Katharina Zinn



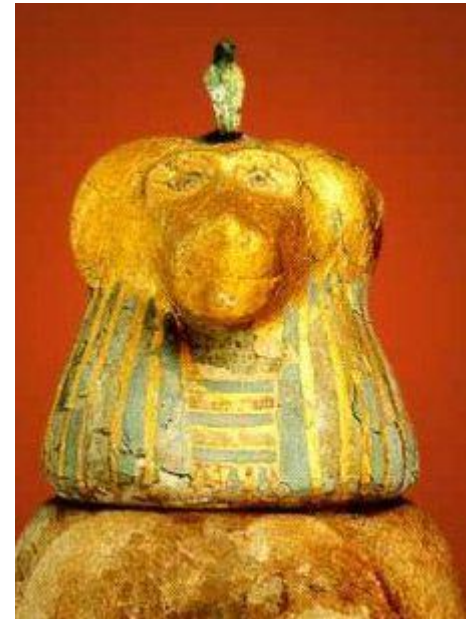


What is myth?

- ❑ Often classified as story which is not true but reflect wished for outcomes / ideas
- ❑ Many scholarly definitions proposed
 - myths as stories about gods
 - myths as sacred stories
 - myths are stories that explain the world
 - myths as traditional stories to transmit collective knowledge or experience

What is myth, what was myth in ancient Egypt?

- Interpreted as
 - garbled memories of historical events
 - mode of prelogical thought
 - expressions of the subconscious mind
 - as symbolic descriptions of natural world
 - symbolic statements about the social order
 - spoken part of ritual
- all interpretations have flaws
- but each idea applicable to some Egyptian myths!



Categories of myth (G.S. Kirk, 1973)

- ❑ myths told for entertainment
 - maybe sacred, but not necessarily solemn
 - But some cultures have parallel “secret” versions (rituals)
- ❑ Needed for justification / transformation of world: stories with transformative power, but about things that may not have really happened
 - operative, iterative, or validatory myths → repeated in ritual / ceremoniously
- ❑ explanatory or speculative myths

AE categories of myth?

- ❑ integral part of Egyptian culture
- ❑ Characters / events from myth permeate Egyptian art, architecture, and literature
- ❑ underpin rituals performed by kings and priests
- ❑ Education reveals knowledge of myth as essential weapon in the fight to survive danger
 - life
 - afterlife

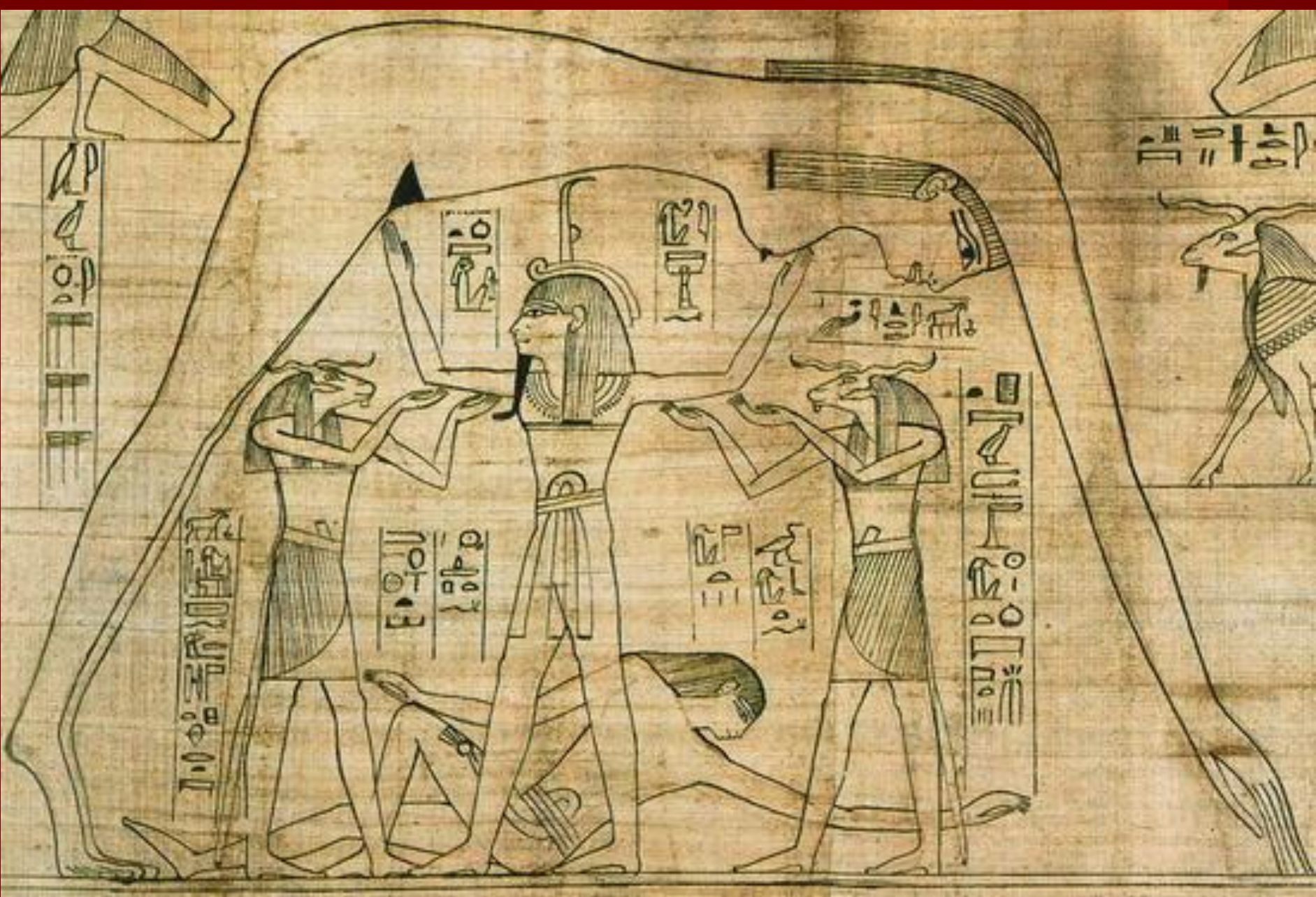


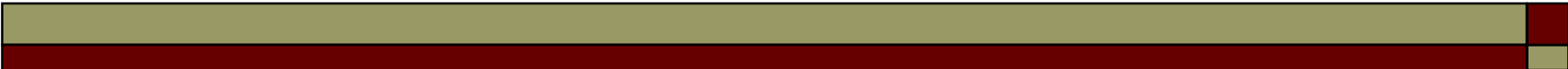
Ancient Egypt

- ❑ Myth is connected with
 - Geography: Nile with flood / inundation, desert, climate
 - Time: linear and cyclical time
 - Kingship: king as guarantor for existence and life, unification / re-unification
 - Religion: gods, ritual, existence, creation
 - All aspects of life: birth, death, social stratigraphy
- ❑ Therefore never a fully authorised version of particular myth
 - Sometimes expressed as theology

Consequences?

- ❑ No book religion: official holy book (Bible, Quran)
- ❑ relationships between deities not fixed, but develop / are alive
- ❑ mythology was never gathered by priests as one “authorized version”
- ❑ never harmonized in literary work (parallel to Hesiod’s Theogony for Greek mythology)
- ❑ Only few literary descriptions classed as myths





Sources

- ❑ vary greatly over 3,500 years Pharaonic Egypt
- ❑ Archaeological
- ❑ Architectural
- ❑ Iconographical
- ❑ Textual
- ❑ All connected into one object / artefact



What is clear...

- ❑ In the ancient Egyptian culture...
- ❑ (mythical and mythodological) stories
CLEARLY shaped the world

