

Week 1, Tuesday

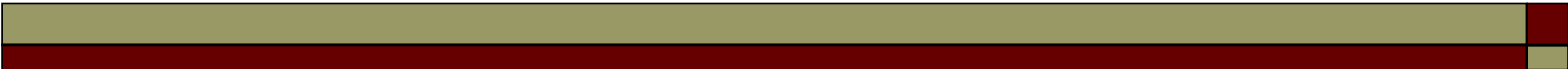
Egyptian Creation Myths

HPHP4006

Myth and Mythology: How stories shape the
world

Dr. Katharina Zinn

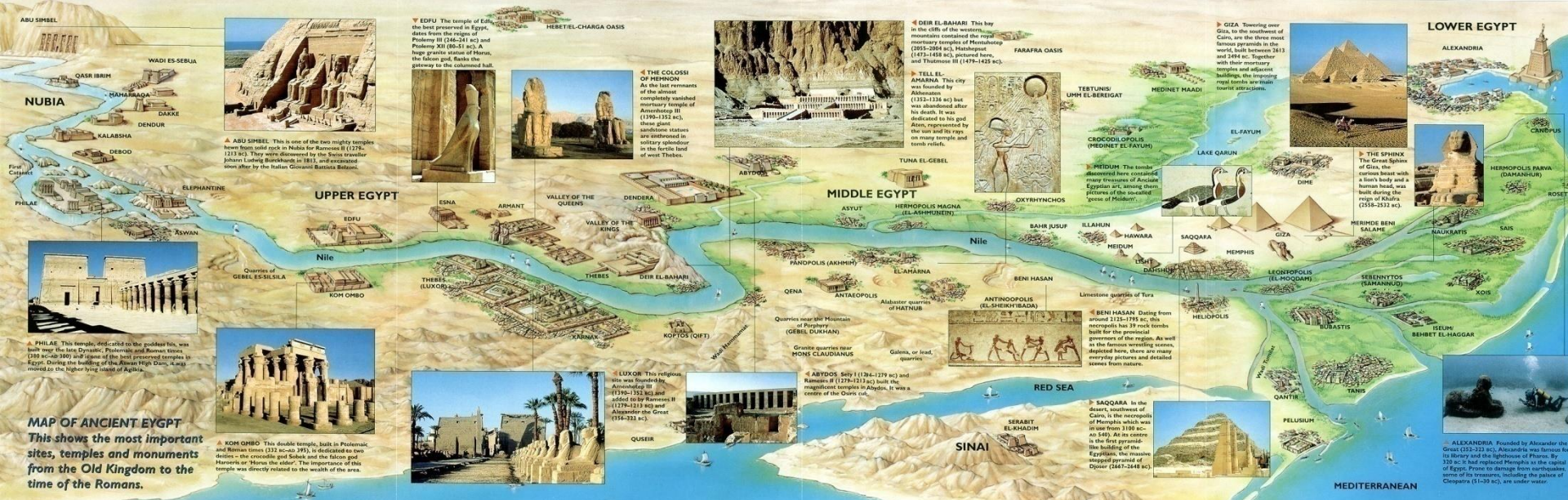
Associate Professor in Egyptian Archaeology
and Heritage



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: Oxford Univ. Pr.
- ❑ 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 University, 1988.
- ❑ Conman, Joanne. “It's About Time: Ancient Egyptian Cosmology.” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 31 (2003), 33-71.

Ancient Egypt



The nature of religion

The religious side of nature



Nile and Desert

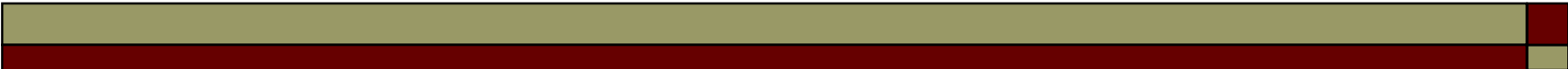
Riverine society

already represented in earliest
representations Hierakonpolis Tomb 100:
(about 3500 BC - Naqada II)



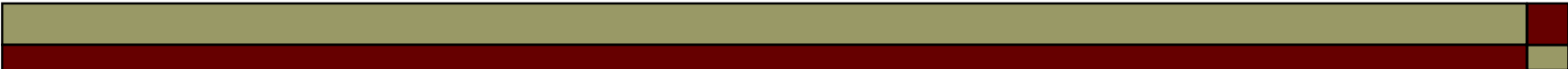
Predynastic (Naqada ii-iii) pottery with boat decorations





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

- 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

Egypt and the sun

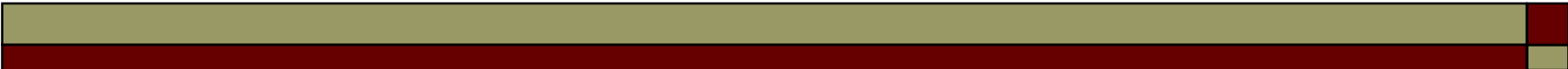


TEMPLE OF DUSH,
PARIS OASIS, EGYPT



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



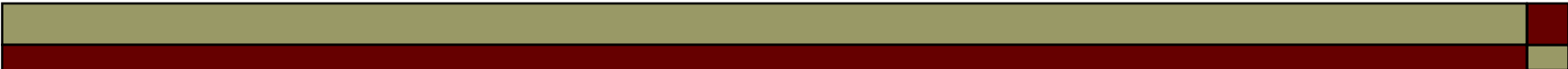


Aspects of Egyptian religion

- 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 – the annual FLOOD
 - Destruction
 - New life
 - Depending on the good will of the divine

Geography and climate determine religion: the story of the flood (creation)





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
 - Enacted by the divine (gods, ...)

Sun symbolism:

Akhet, Ra, solar barque with worshipping baboons





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 mythic 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!

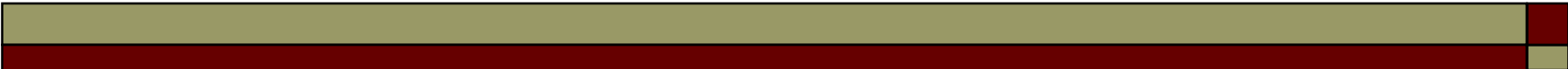
=grouping gods by 3: triad consists of a god, his spouse and one child

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



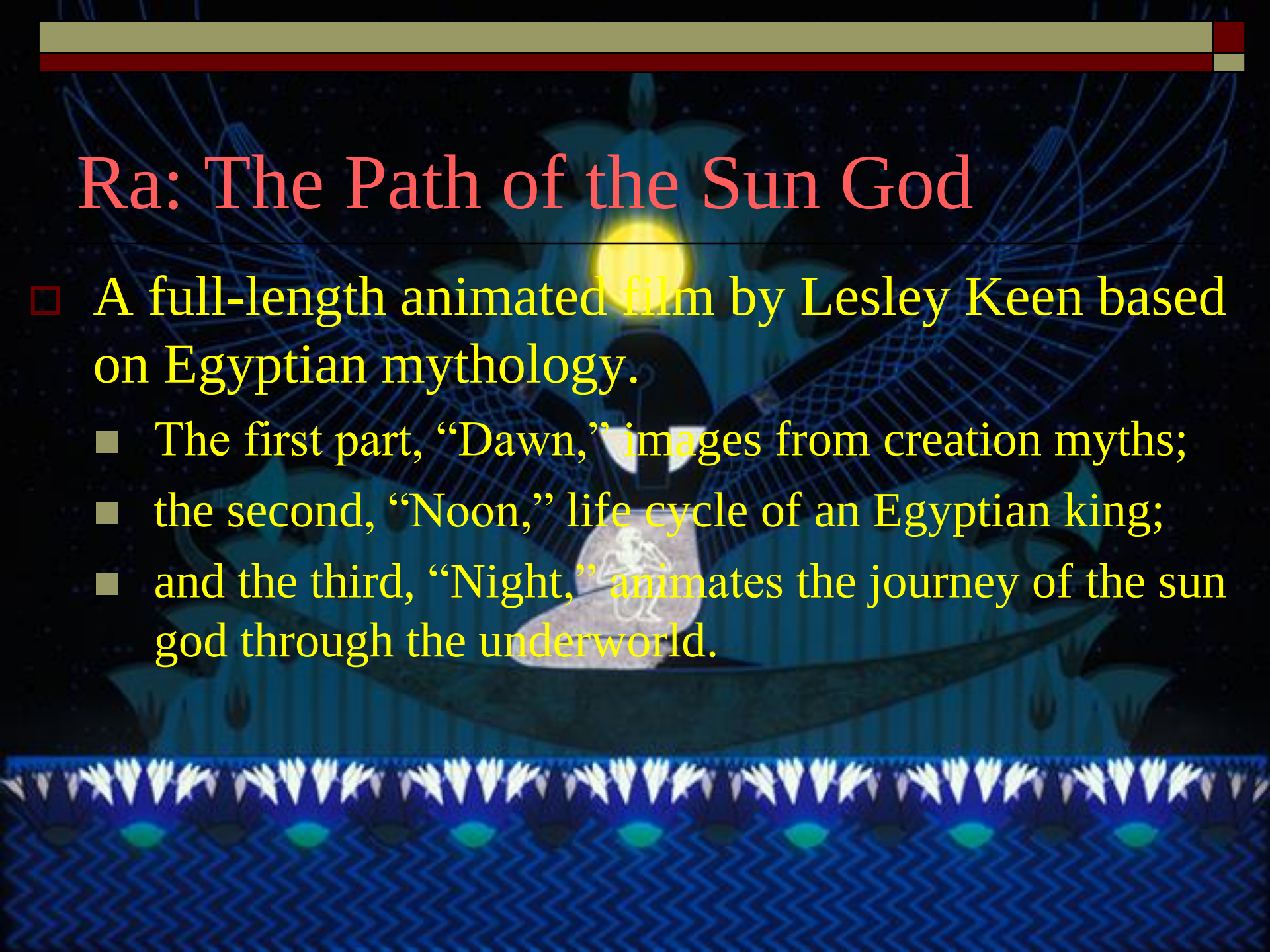
Core myths





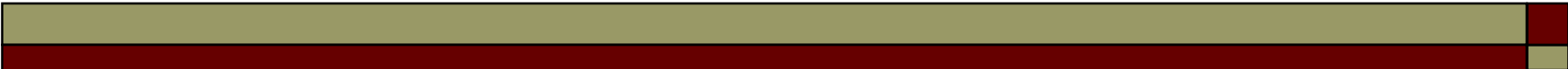
(Some) Core myths

- ❑ 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

The background of the slide features a stylized illustration of the sun god Ra. He is depicted as a falcon with large, outstretched wings, wearing a blue nemes and a red and white kilt. He holds a large, glowing yellow sun disk in his right hand. Ra is seated in a dark wooden boat. The boat is on a body of water, represented by a blue and white zigzag pattern at the bottom. The sky is dark blue with white stars. The overall style is reminiscent of ancient Egyptian art.

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.

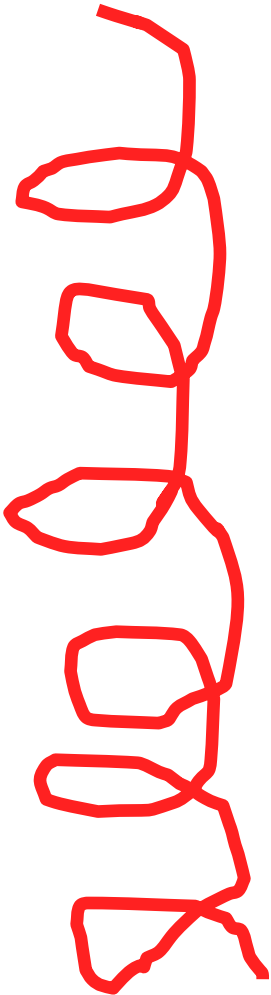
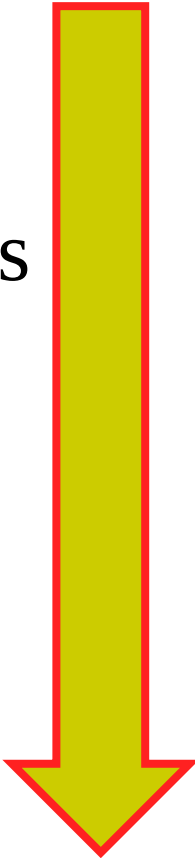
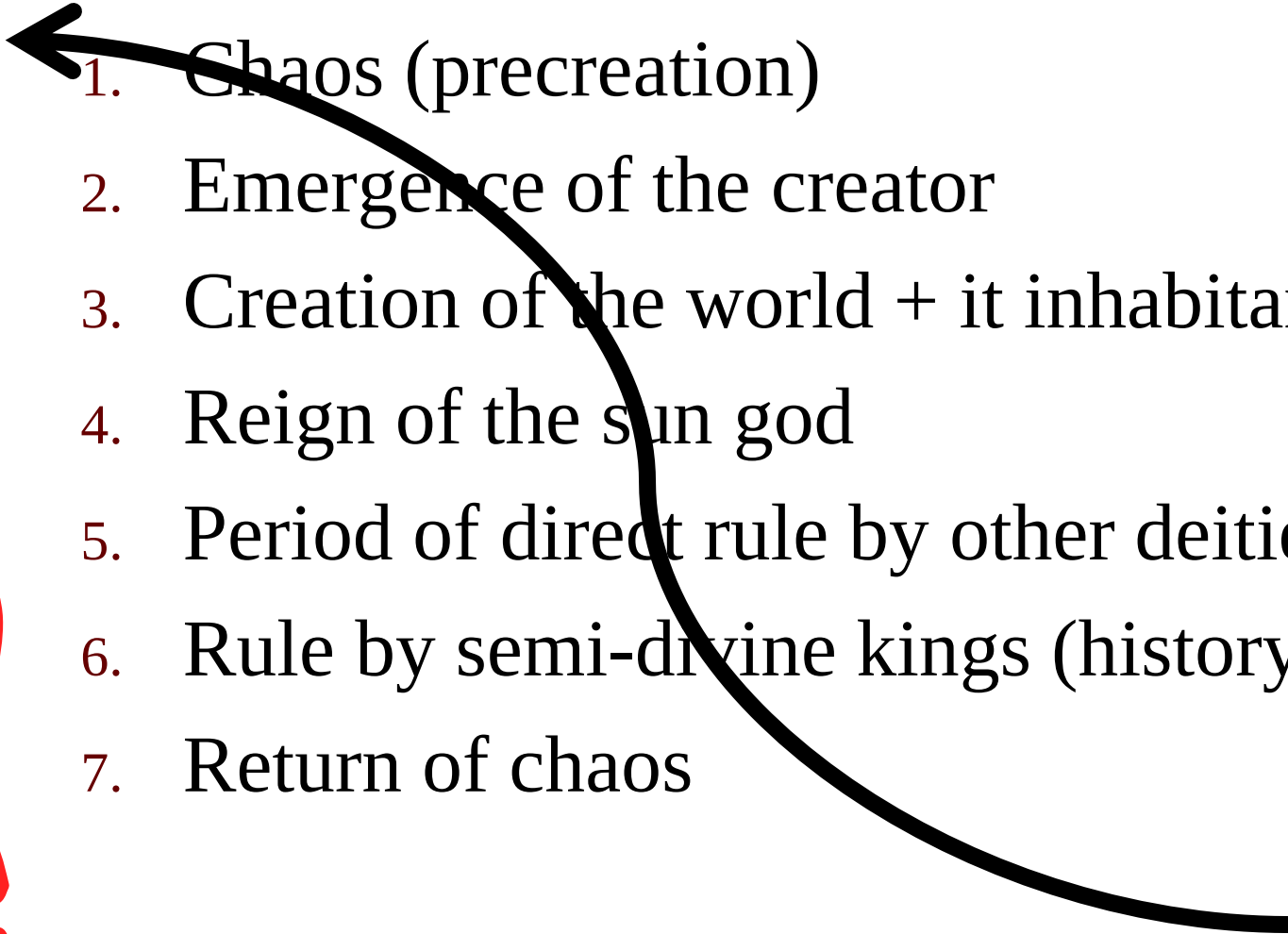


The nature of religion

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

The mythical story of Egypt (in a timely aspect)

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



Classifications of gods

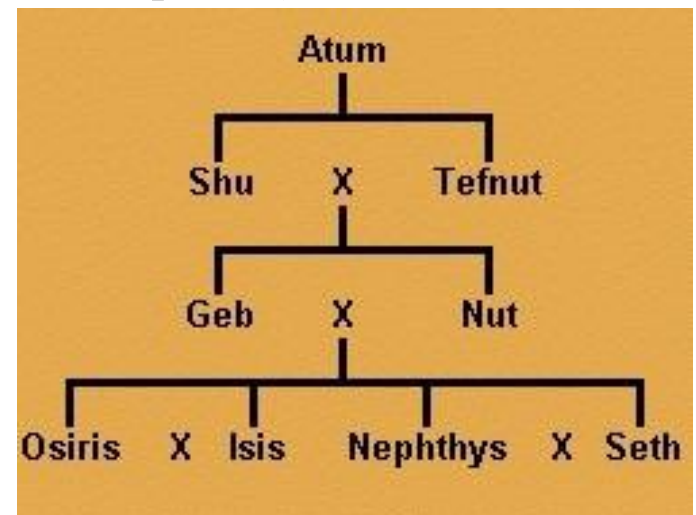
- each = specific area of divinity as one sacred and independent part of existence by Egyptians
- Grouping according Egyptian sources:
 - Creation
 - several different and equally vivid metaphors for creation in writing
 - Annual Nile flood in late summer, in autumn: riverbanks coated with black mud → 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

Cosmogonies

- ❑ different creation accounts as **competing creation 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** to explain creation:
 - 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



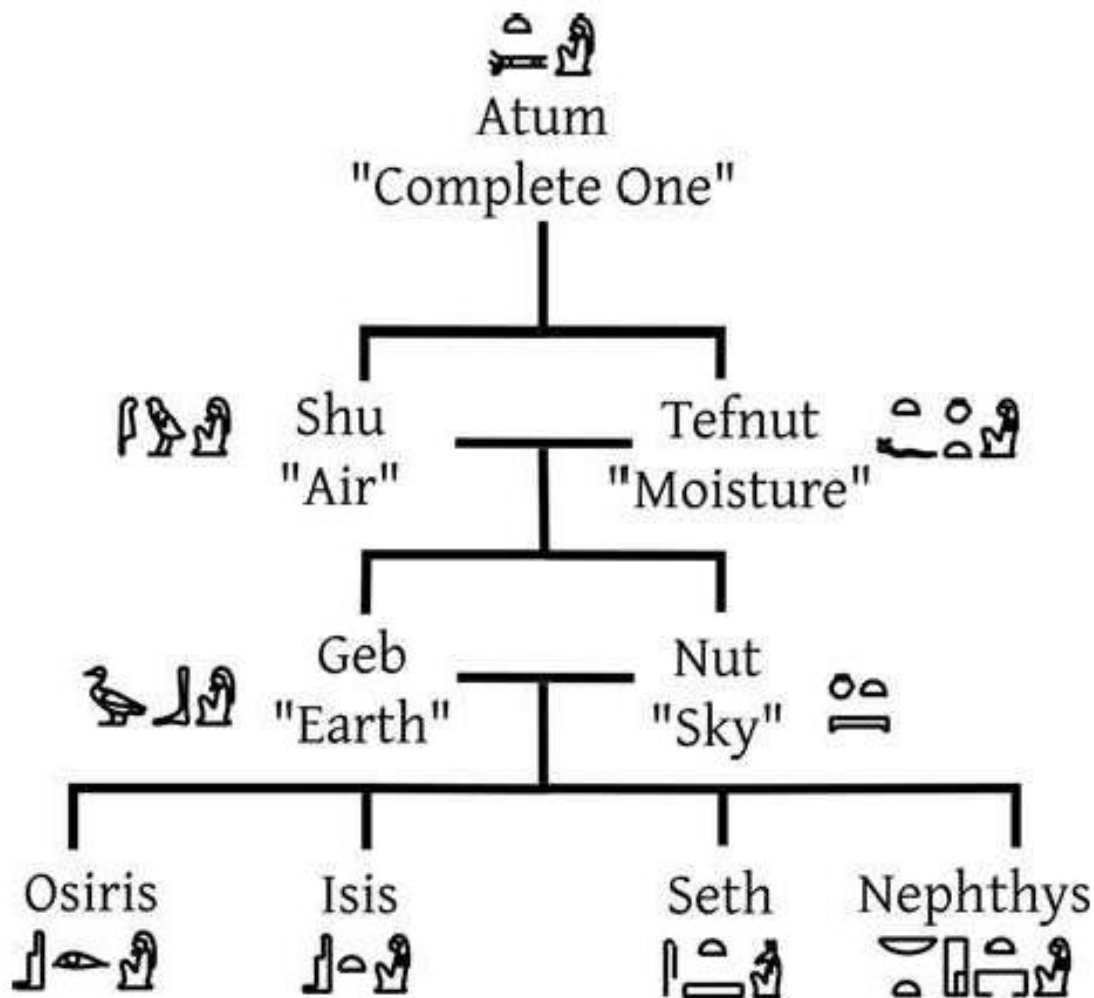
differentiations

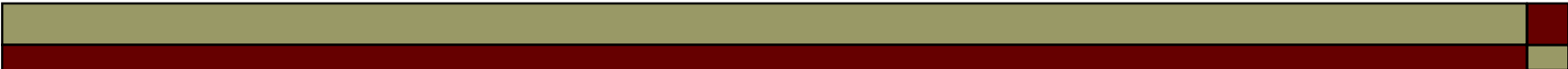
- ❑ Some enneads of lesser importance than others → depending on their composition.
- ❑ sun-hymn Horemheb . H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Part Three, § 16:
- ❑ *The great ennead worship thee
The lesser ennead exult to thee
They praise thee in they beautiful forms
With thy brilliance in the Evening-Barque,
As when the sacred apes spy thee.*

Creation myths

Egyptian  *Iwnw*

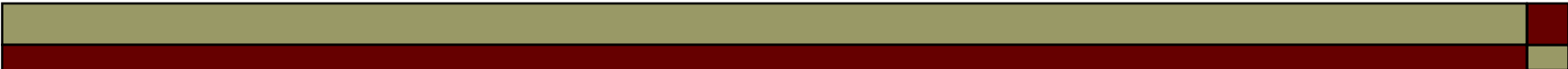
Heliopolitan Ennead





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 Nephthys, which in turn formed couples.



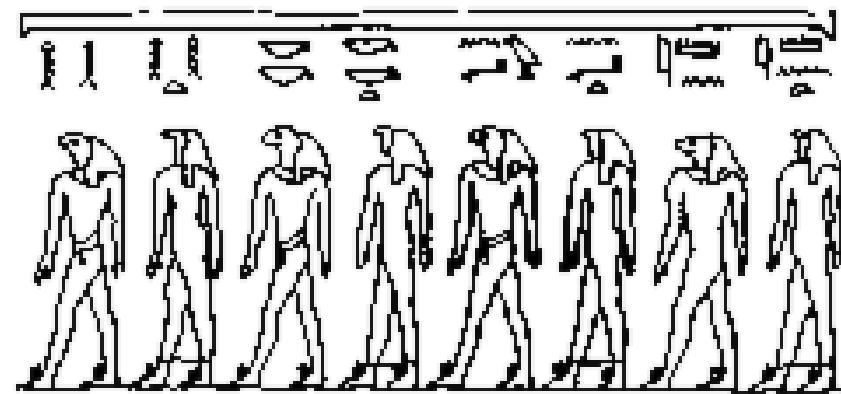
Creation Khmunu (Hermopolis) - Ogdoad

- "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

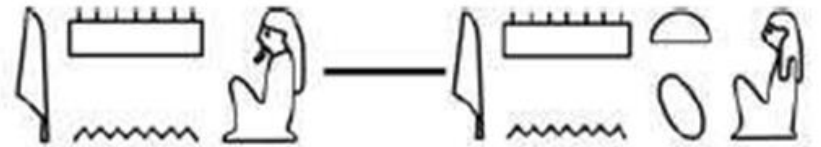
b. Hermopolitan Cosmology:

Greek Hermopolis

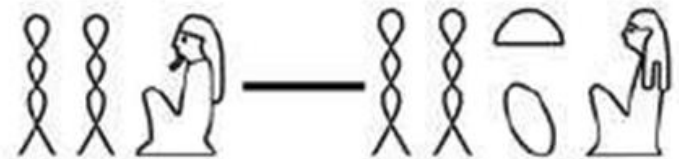
Egyptian  *Hmnw*



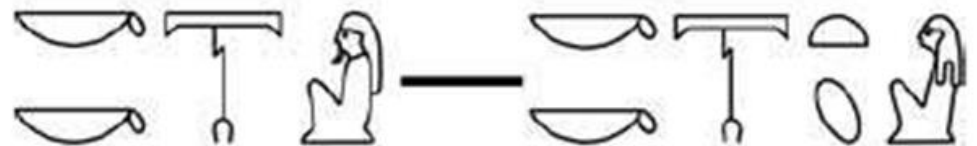
Hermopolitan Ogdoad



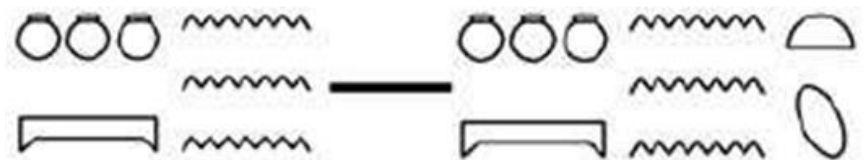
Amun "Hiddenness" Amunet



Heh "Infinity" Hehet

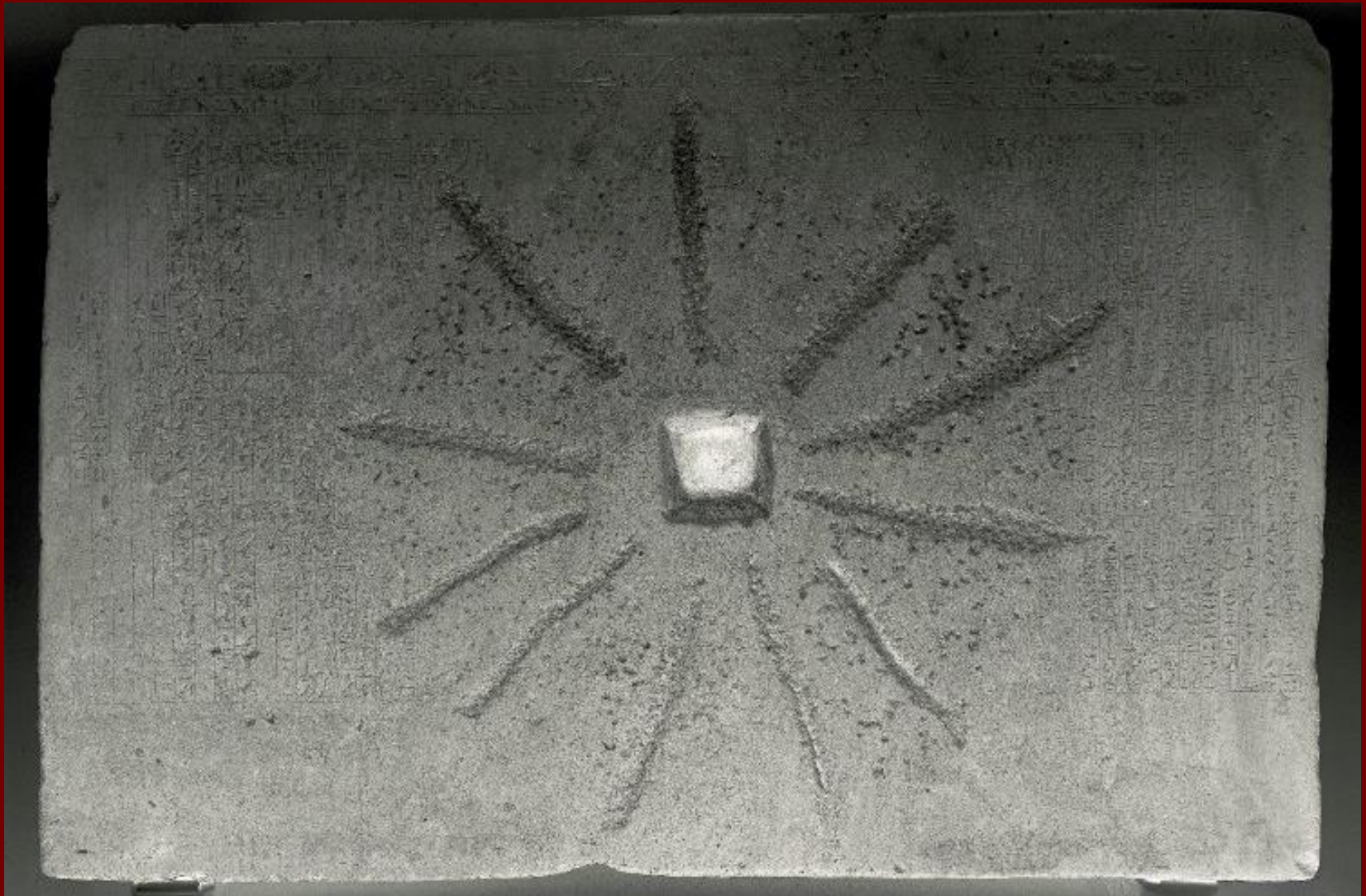


Kek "Darkness" Keket



Nun "Inertness" Nunet

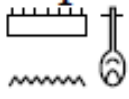
Monument of Memphite Theology – Shabako Stone



Monument of Memphite Theology – Shabako Stone (BM 498)

c. Memphite Theology

Greek Memphis

Egyptian  *Mn-nfr*

Important Attestations:

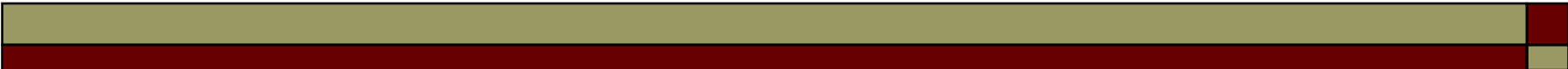
a. Pyramid Texts: PT 345

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)



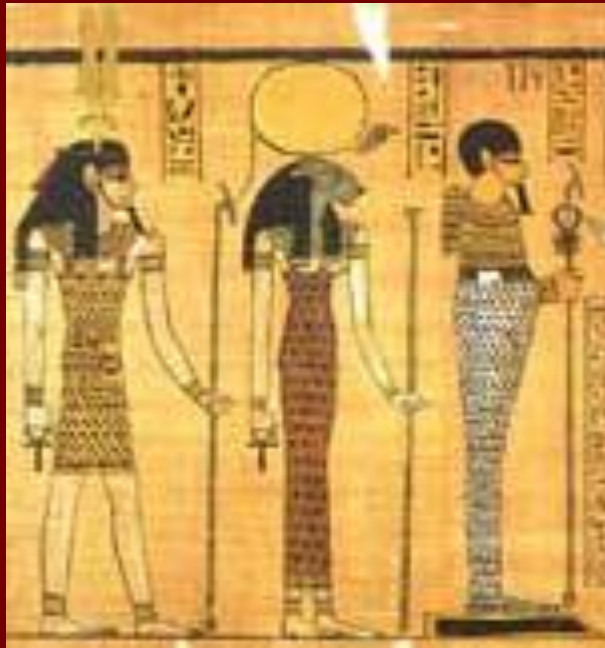
Monument of Memphite Theology

– 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



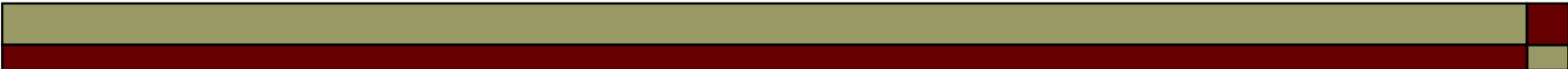
Ptah within Mennefer
(Memphis) Triad (Ptah,
Sekhmet, Nefertem)





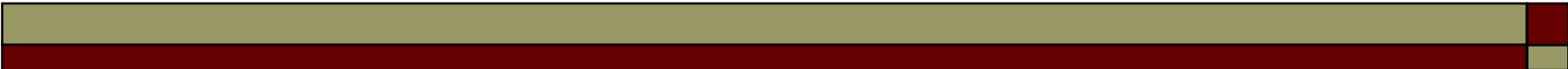
heka – Memphite theology I

- ❑ 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



Creation as continuous process

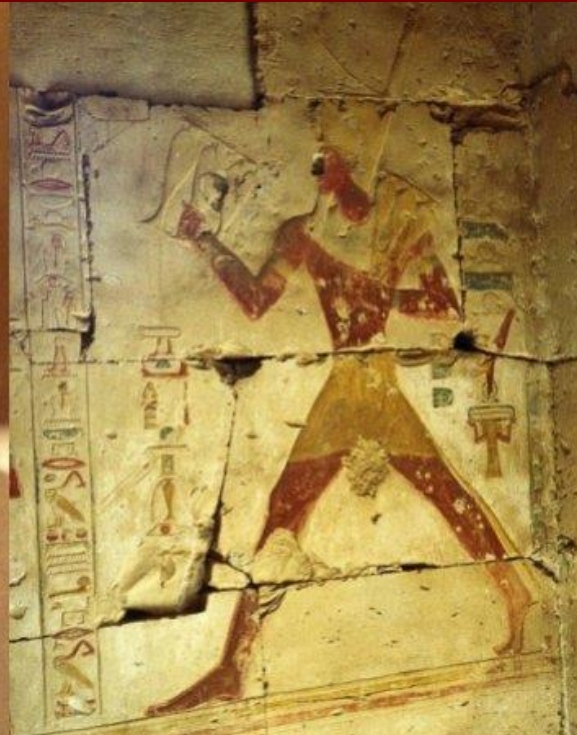
- Depending on understanding of time (see time slide before)
 - Linear time
 - Cyclical time
- On a never ending linear time scale, we have millions of cyclically repeating linear sub-events (personal life, day, months, royal reign, dynasty, ...) which all start with creation and end with death / destruction
 - Destruction needed to start new creation
 - But also overall destruction need to be avoided

Consequence for divine kingship



**Coronation as
new creation**

**Renewal of royal / divine
prowess in Heb Sed
Festival**



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