

Session 3 – week 1, Thur

The characteristics of Ancient Egyptian Religion

HPAN5046/6046 Religions in Africa

Dr Katharina Zinn

Associate Professor in Egyptian Archaeology
and Heritage

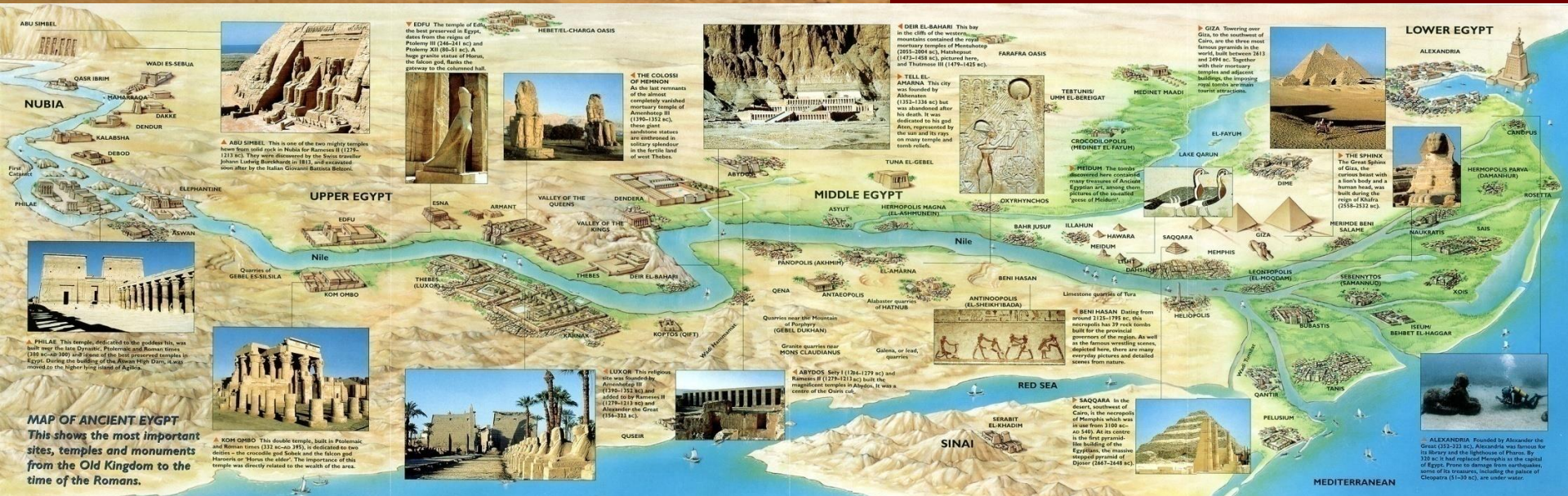
Ancient Egyptian Religion?????

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION!



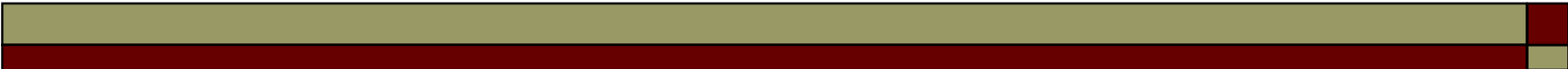
Mapping ancient Egyptian Religion in Time and Space

SPACIAL AWARENESS AND CHRONOLOGY



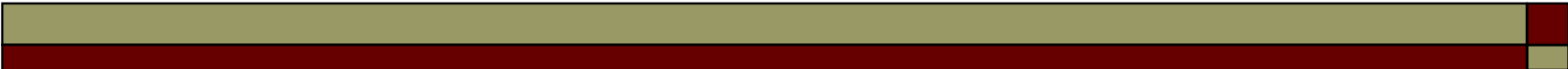
Nile and Desert - seamless





All Periods

- ❑ Pre- and Early Dynastic Period
- ❑ Old Kingdom
- ❑ First Intermediate Period
- ❑ Middle Kingdom
- ❑ Second Intermediate Period
- ❑ New Kingdom
- ❑ Third Intermediate Period
- ❑ Late Period
- ❑ Ptolemaic and Roman Period



Periods

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- ❑ Old Kingdom
- ❑ First Intermediate Period
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- ❑ Second Intermediate Period
- ❑ New Kingdom
- ❑ Third Intermediate Period
- ❑ Late Period
- ❑ Ptolemaic and Roman Period

Dynasties

- ❑ Predyn. (5300-3000BC), 0-2
- ❑ 3-6
- ❑ 8-11
- ❑ 11-12
- ❑ 13-17
- ❑ 18-20
- ❑ 21-24
- ❑ 25-30
- ❑ No dynastic time anymore (332BC -331AD)

Relative vs. Absolute Chronology

relative

- relative chronological position of objects, events, and longer periods

absolute

- chronology in absolute numbers (years)
- Egypt: established back from beginning of the Late Period (// Greek chronology, Assyrian king-lists) back to the Ramesside Period (still debated)
- Earlier: several problems
 - Form of dating: 'year 3 of king X', but exact length not known, nor every Egyptian king, chronology would be no problem. However, we do not even number of kings for all periods
 - reigns overlapped (coregency, political disunity)

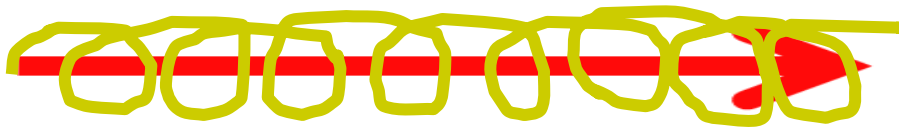
Time concepts AE

- Linear time (f.i. linear passage of generations)

- $\underline{d}.t$ (djet)

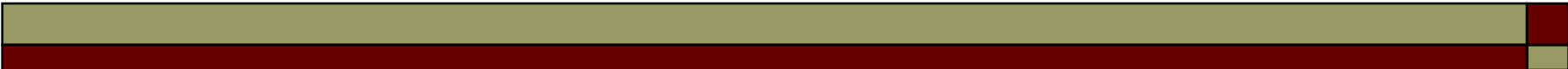


- Cyclical time (occurring cyclical patterns – f.i. seasons)



- $n\dot{h}h$ (neheh)

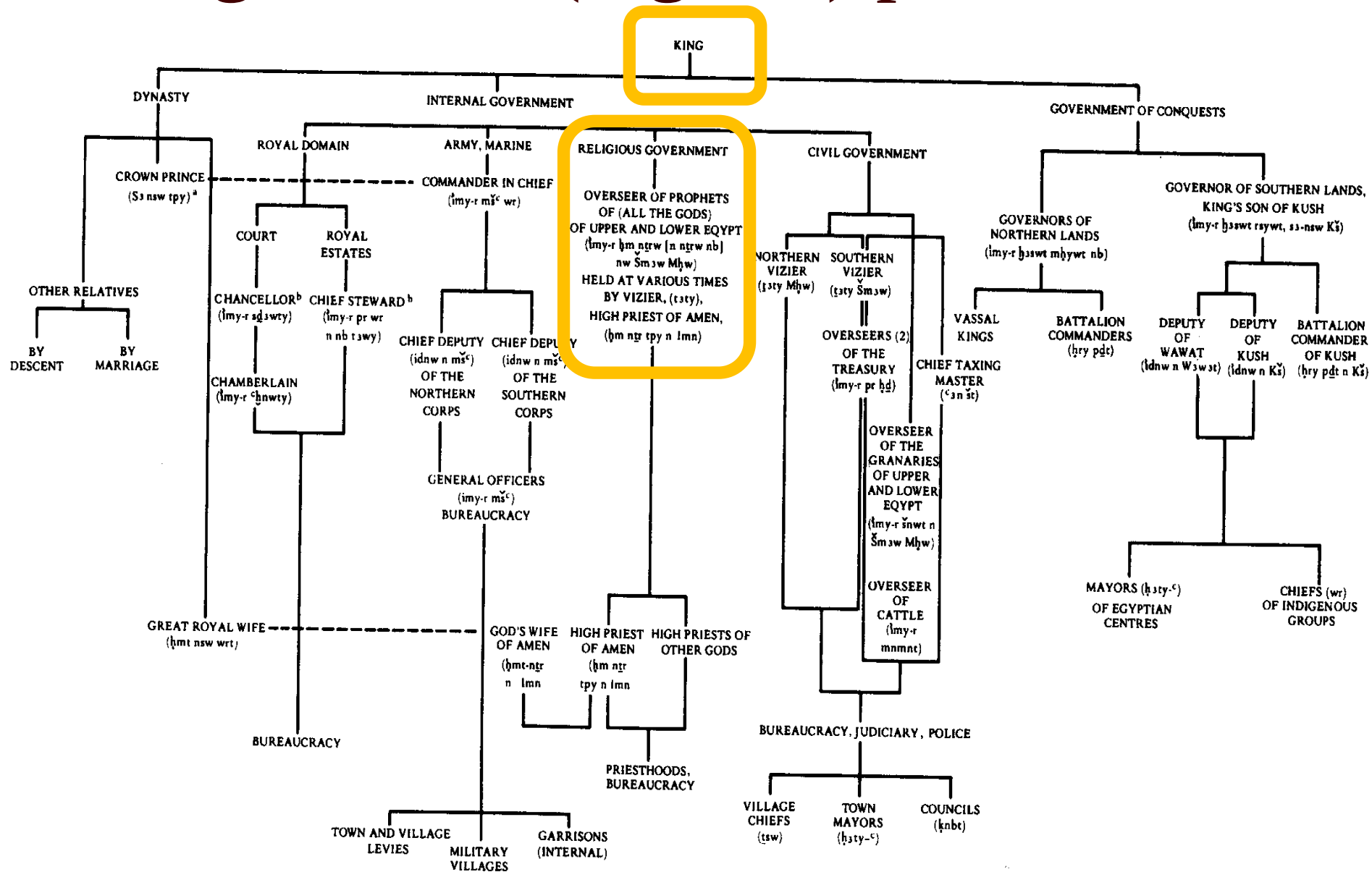
- Both = expressions of ETERNITY



Religion in ancient Egypt

- ❑ explained the mysteries of the universe and acted as a “social glue”
- ❑ priesthood preserved old traditions underpinning Egyptian culture
- ❑ kept order within society, maintained religious institutions, social structure
- ❑ religion central to everyday life in ancient Egypt
- ❑ AE religion as integral part of all aspects of Egyptian society

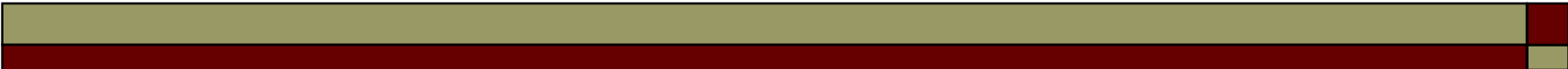
King as THE (highest) priest



The dual king:

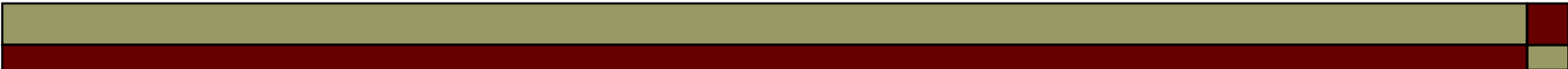
Divine kingship and mortality

- 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



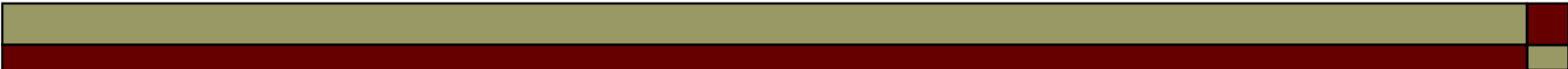
Priesthood

- ❑ Egypt as sacerdotal state: religion helped to formulate and realise important matters of kingship and administration – the king as the highest priest
- ❑ Priests responsible for mythology and theology with king as highest priest, but also administrative officials in all matters of the temple society
- ❑ Not a class with distinctive lives: most work in temple = routine performance of well-established rituals or pure administration of commodities and personnel



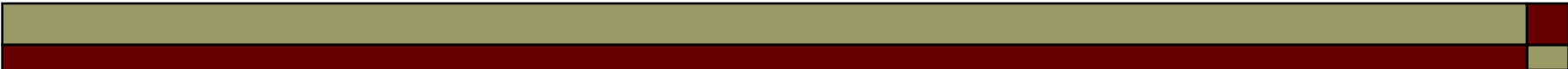
Temples as institutions

- ❑ **Spiritual contribution:** shelter for divine image; provisioning gods with regular sustenance (food offerings)
- ❑ **Political role:** Bolstering monarchy as symbiotic relationship (theological, strengthen king's role, economical) – exchange goods and ideas (temples get prisoners of war to work for them), Khato-land (owned by king, administered by temples)
- ❑ **Economic role:** temple owns productive sources (land, farmer, personnel) to produce offerings, renting out land (high proportion soldiers and women!)



The nature of religion

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

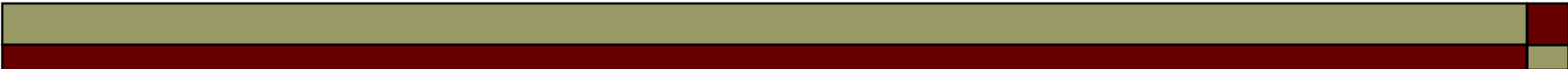


Aspects of Egyptian religion

- The nature of religion also as The religious side of nature
- 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.

Geography and climate determine religion

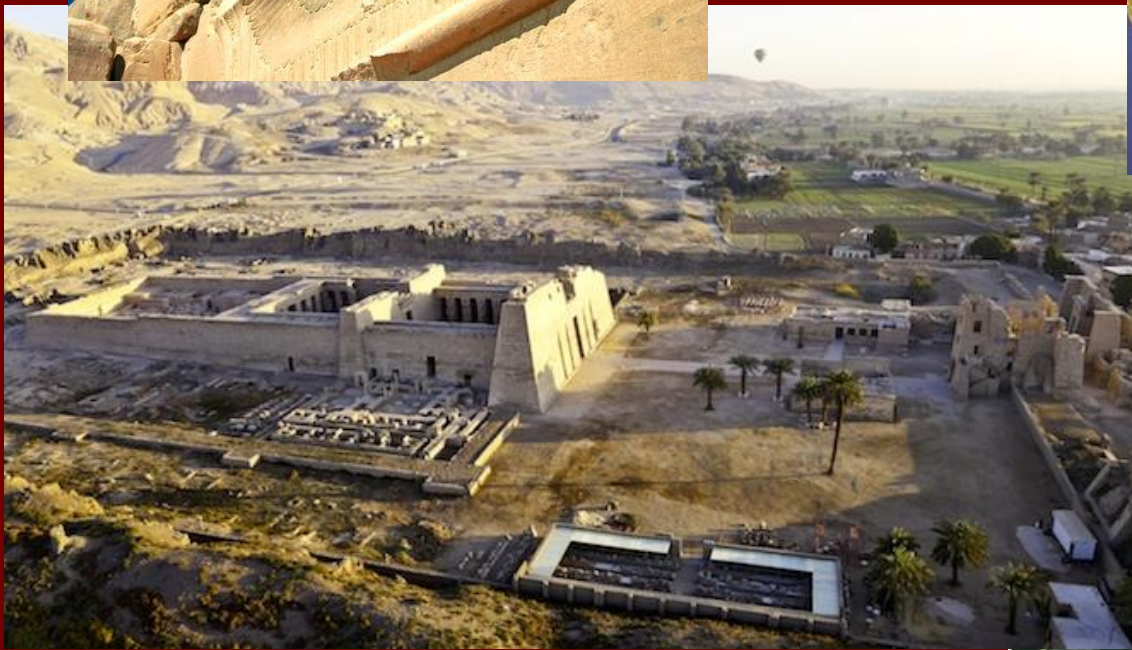




Aspects of Egyptian religion

- 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.

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

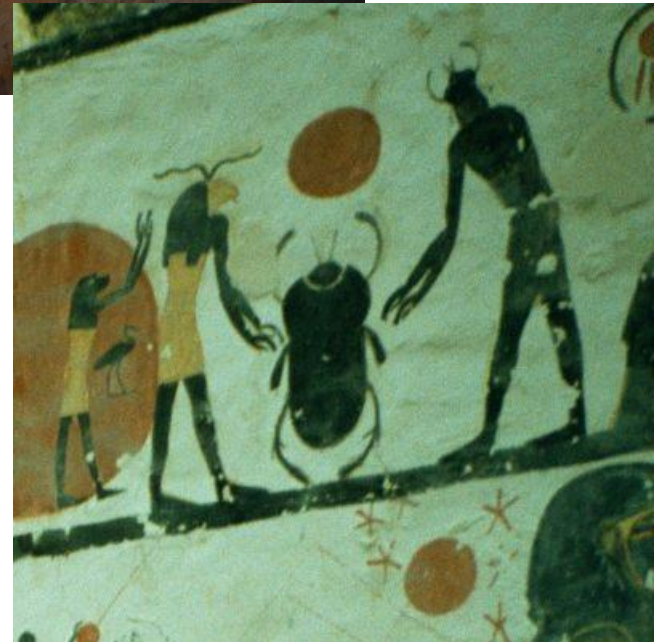


Karnak

W ← → E

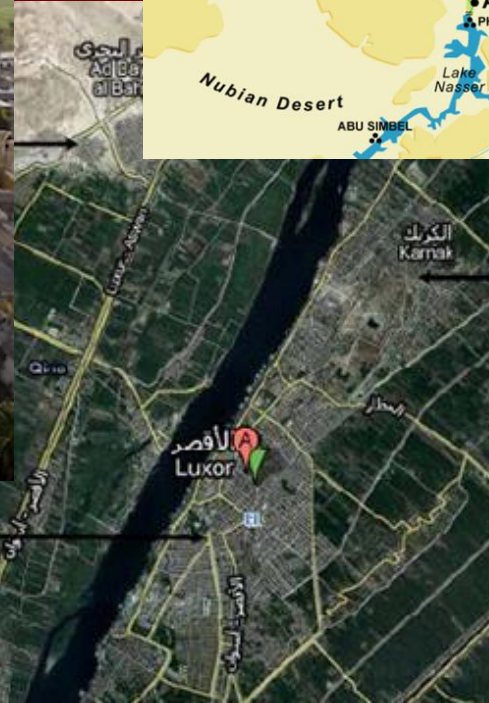
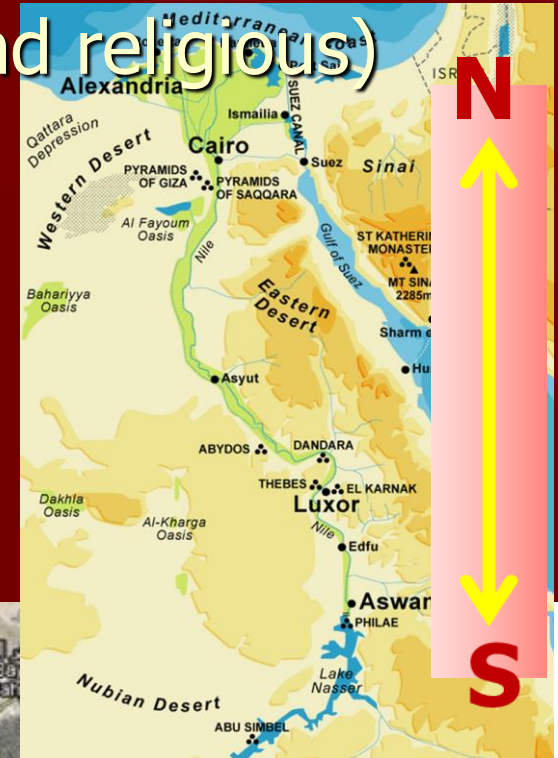
Aspects of Egyptian religion

- movement of the sun across the sky was represented by images of
 - sun in his celestial boat crossing the vault of heaven
 - sun flying over the sky in the form of a scarab beetle



Ancient Egypt and the sun:

nature forms (natural, social and religious)
landscapes



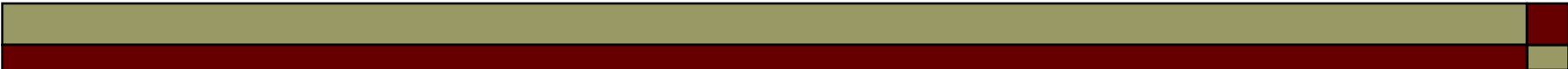
Karnak

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Geography, climate, Nile, sea → the (solar) barque

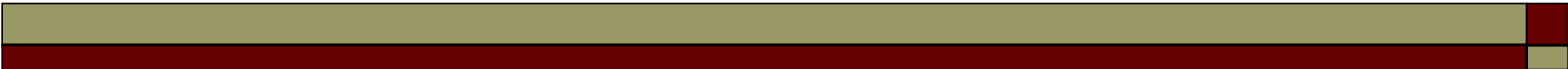


Gods



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



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

“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)



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



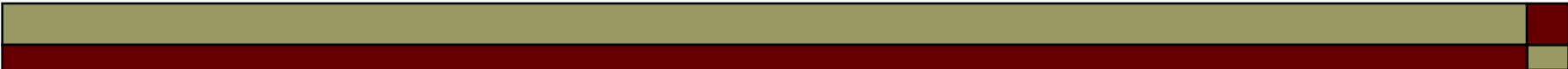
- *Cult image of a crocodile (god) – Sobek?*
- Middle Kingdom, 12th dyn.
- About 1800 BC
- Copper / Silver
- Fayum?

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

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

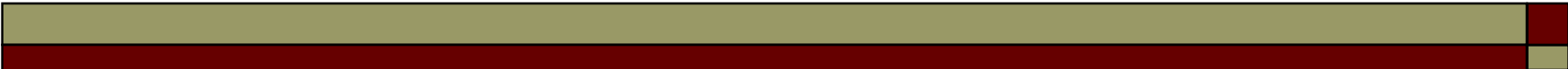
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 - Example 2: goddess with head of a lion → show fury OR head of a cow → show maternal love; but with body of a woman, if she is holding a sceptre
- Due to proportions and canon – inherent possibility to create harmonious hybrid forms

Iconography - gods and goddesses in formal art

- iconography 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





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





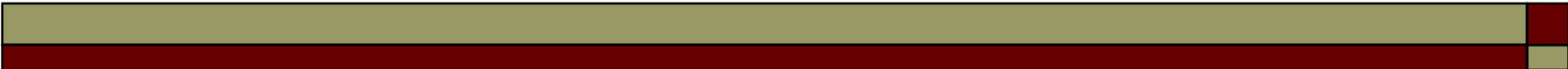
Syncretism: Fissioning and fusing of gods and their names

- each name identifies an area of divinity → division and fusing
 - Example 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

Aspects of Egyptian religion

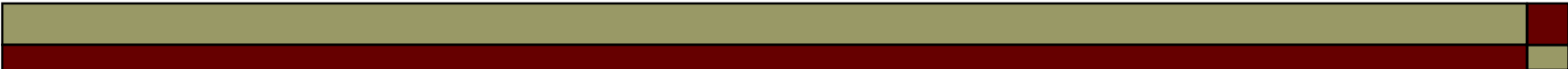
- ❑ **concept of death**
- ❑ transformed from the cessation of life into a mirror image of life
- ❑ The deceased and present gods = same material requirements + desires





Aspects of Egyptian religion

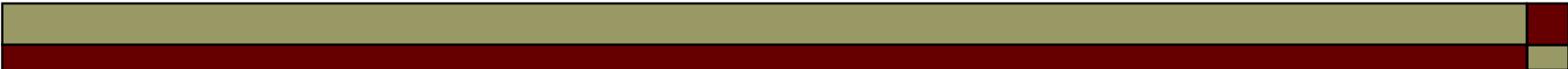
- ❑ many aspects of Egyptian theology elusive to modern researchers
- ❑ results from tremendous development of religious ideas throughout the nearly 4,000 years of Egyptian civilization
- ❑ however, only few concepts were discarded
- ❑ layered upon each other in an ever more complex and seemingly convoluted manner
- ❑ reinterpreted



Aspects of Egyptian religion

- ❑ sometimes dismissed as signs of a primitive culture or of the Egyptians' confusion about their place in the universe
- ❑ BUT: seemingly contradictory beliefs better interpreted as extended metaphors used to explain the intangible
- ❑ Coped better with the explanation of the world than many other civilisations to come
- ❑ Example – creation: different theologies
 - Ptah – by force of thoughts
 - Khnum – on his celestial potter's wheel
 - Atum – used spittle or semen

Creation, Cosmogonies, Mythology, and Evolution



Conceptional variations

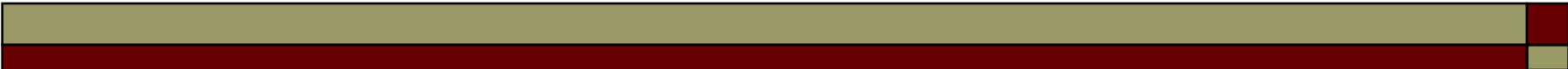
- ❑ Not *one* creation mythos, *one* approach, one concept → BUT many variations for creation and “end of the world”
 - Contemporary
 - Spatially (differently) determined
 - One after the other
- ❑ Dichotomy of creation and end experienced on daily basis and as such omnipresent
 - Sun cycle reminder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

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)

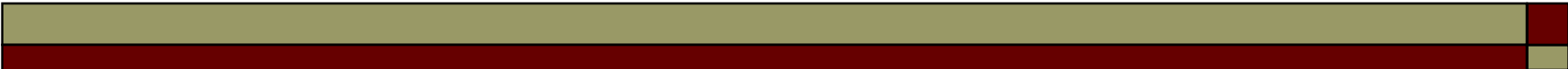
The materiality of CREATION

- 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)



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? – 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

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 Gua

The landscapes of myth – mythical landscapes

Outer coffin of Gua BM EA 30839

Length: 2.60m

Width: 0.92m

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.



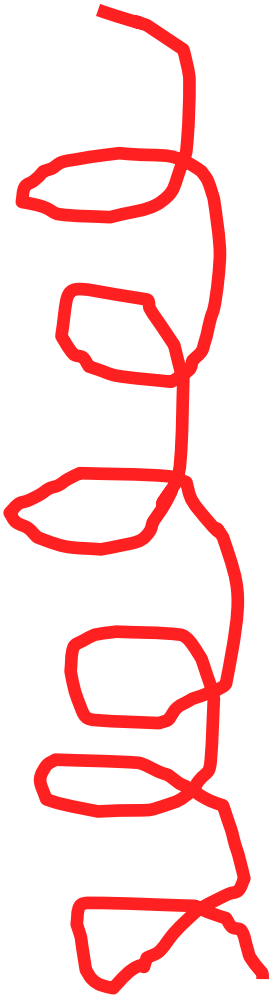
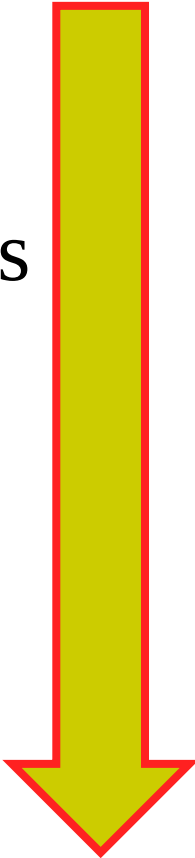
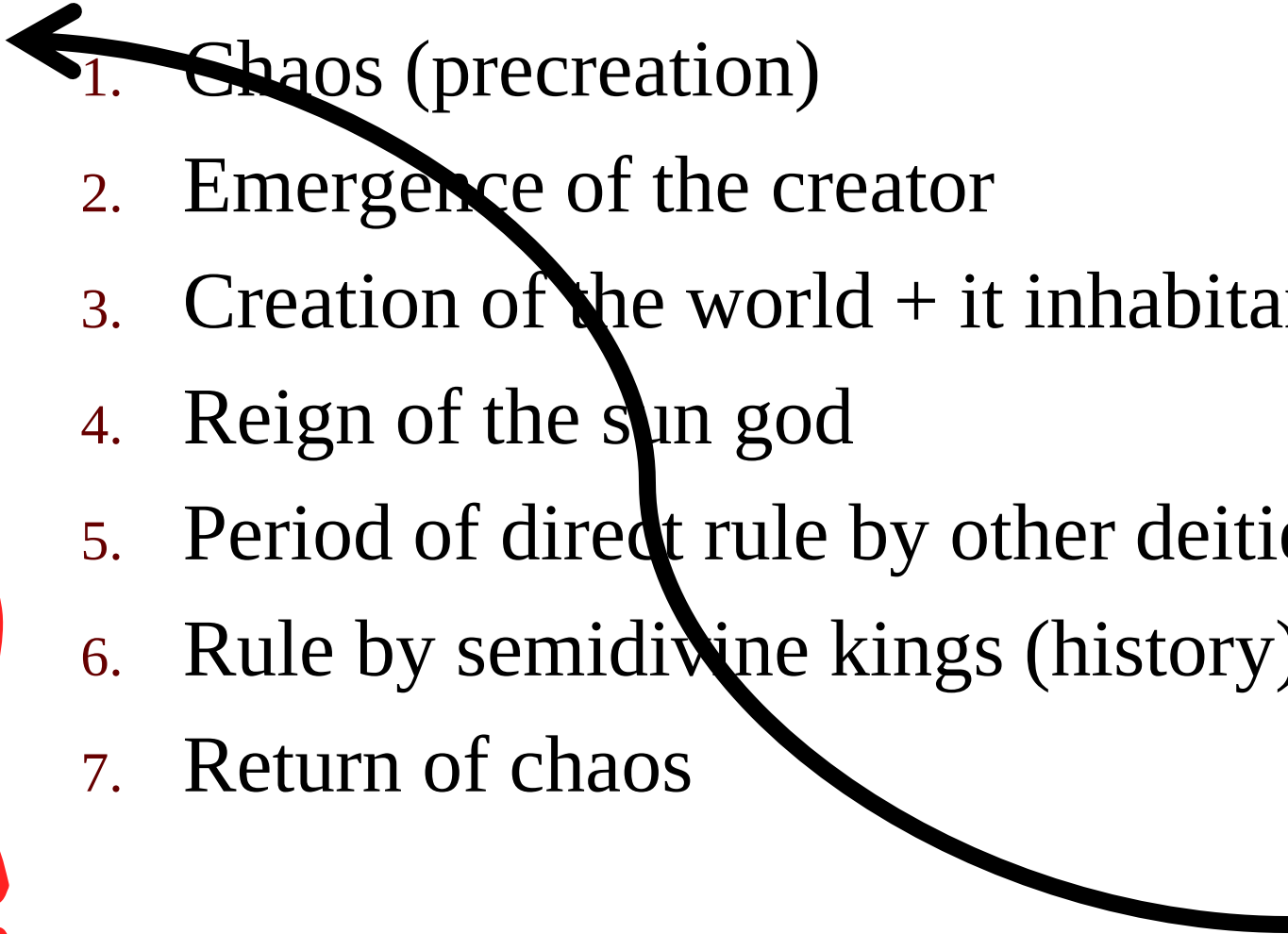


The landscapes of myth – mythical landscapes: Black land and Red land

- ❑ 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, Nephtys, and Anubis
- ❑ Black Land was under constant threat from the Mediterranean Sea and from the desert

The mythical story of Egypt

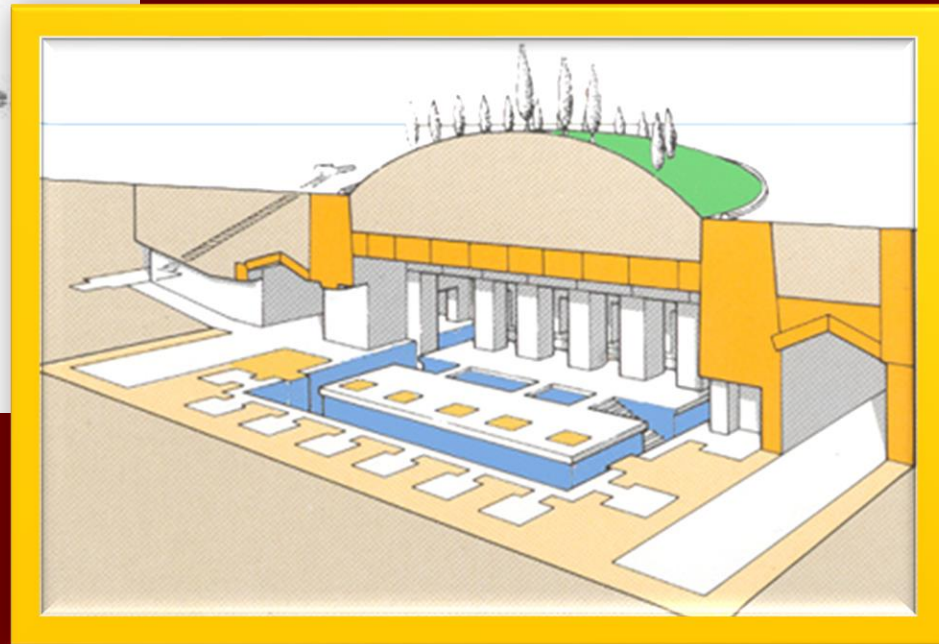
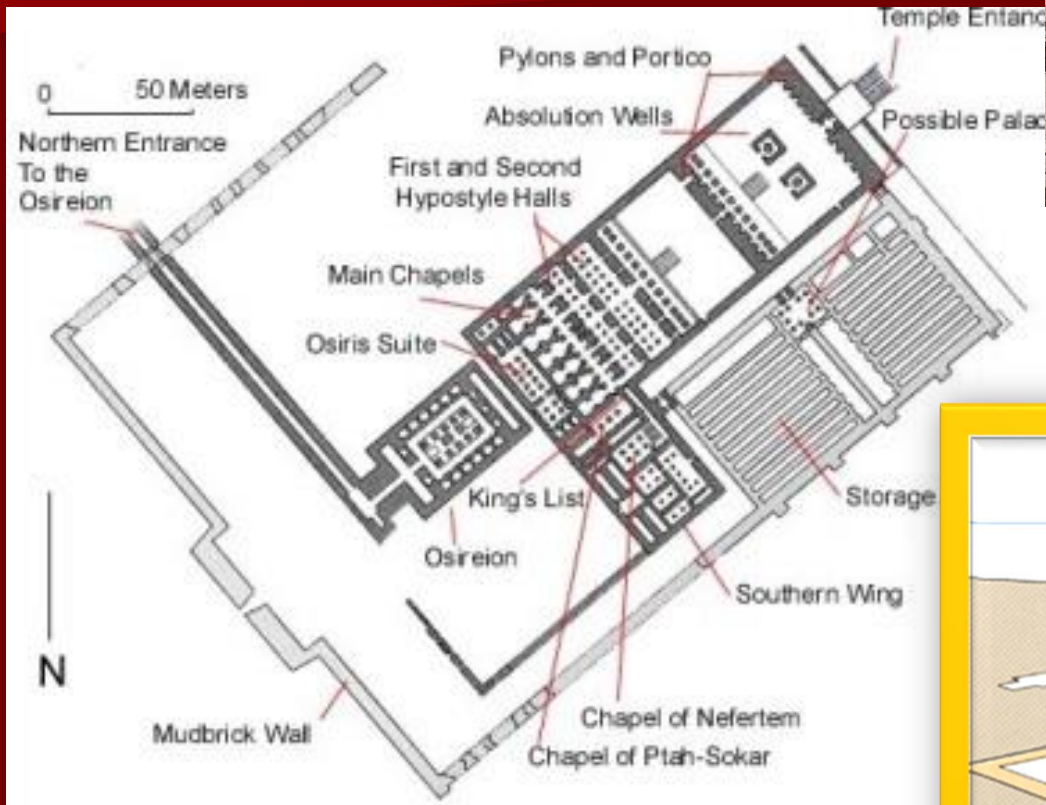
1. Chaos (precreation)
2. Emergence of the creator
3. Creation of the world + its inhabitants
4. Reign of the sun god
5. Period of direct rule by other deities
6. Rule by semidivine kings (history)
7. Return of chaos



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



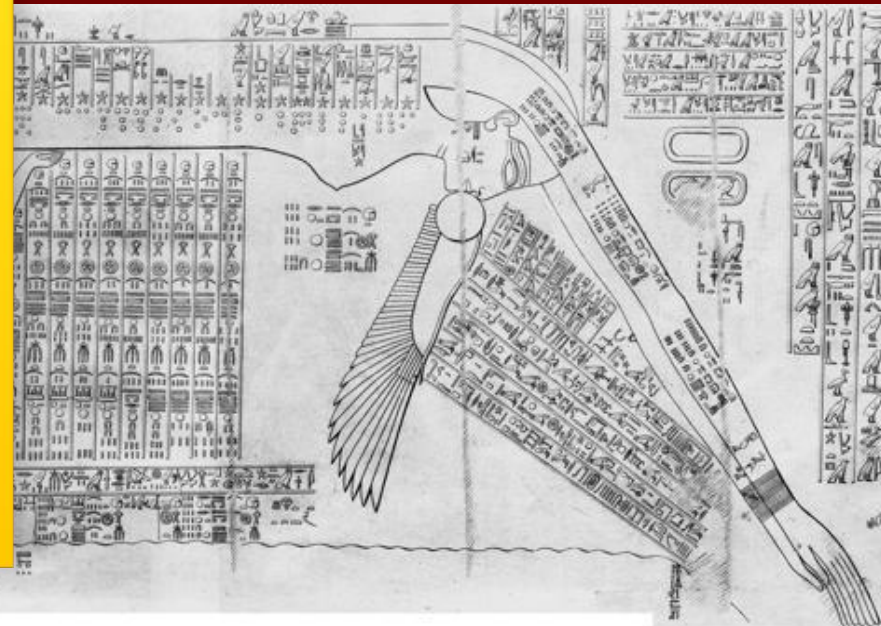
Cosmology

Book of Nut (one of

the Books of the Sky):

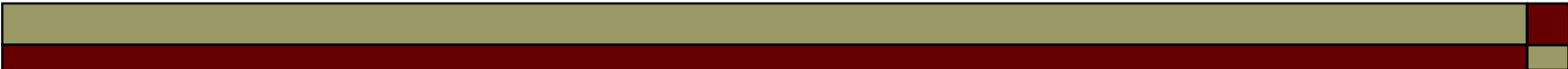
Movement of the stars from
the Osireion in Abydos
(called cenotaph Seti I)

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



Core myths



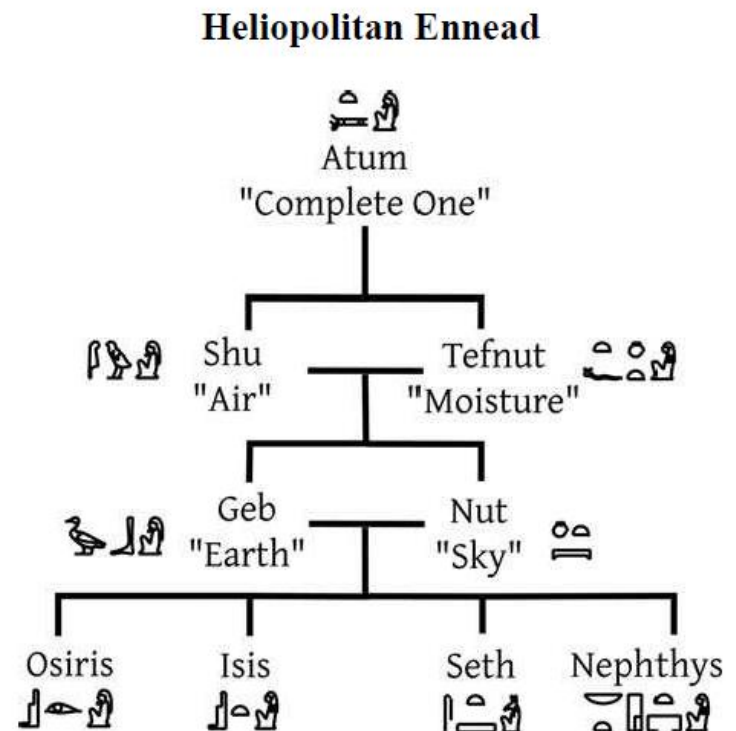


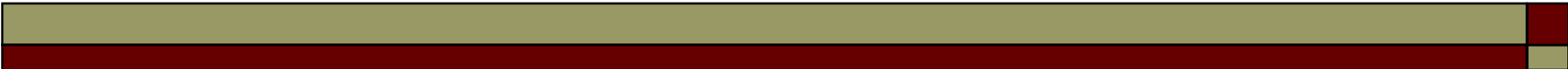
Core myths

- ❑ 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

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





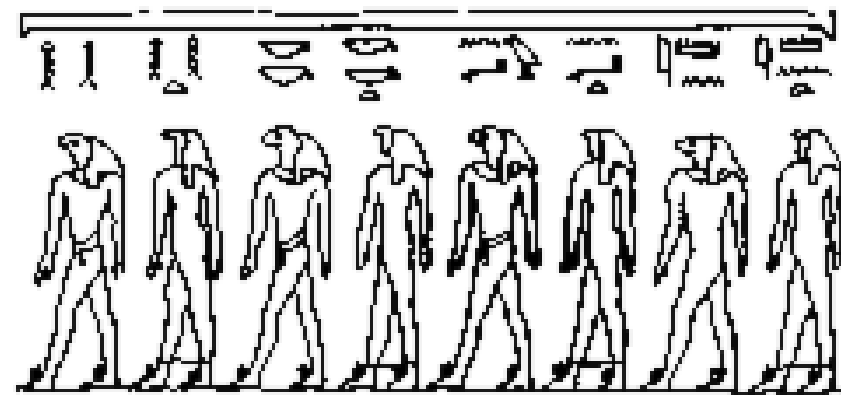
Creation – Iunu (Heliopolis)

- ❑ 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.

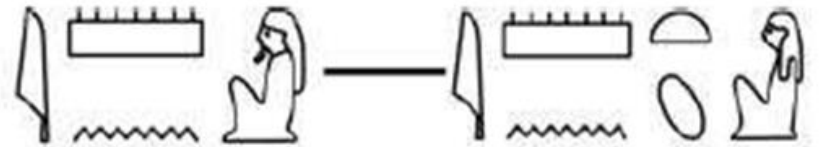
b. Hermopolitan Cosmology:

Greek Hermopolis

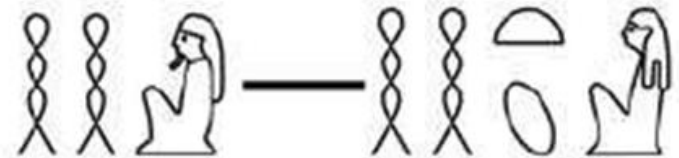
Egyptian  *Hmnw*



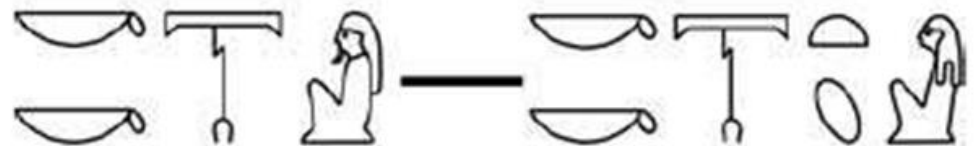
Hermopolitan Ogdoad



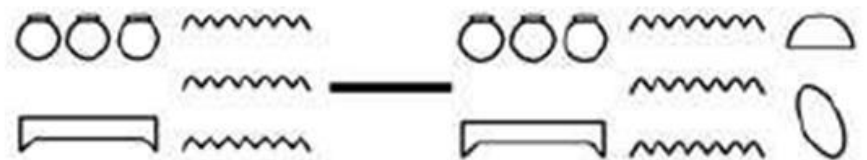
Amun "Hiddenness" Amunet



Heh "Infinity" Hehet



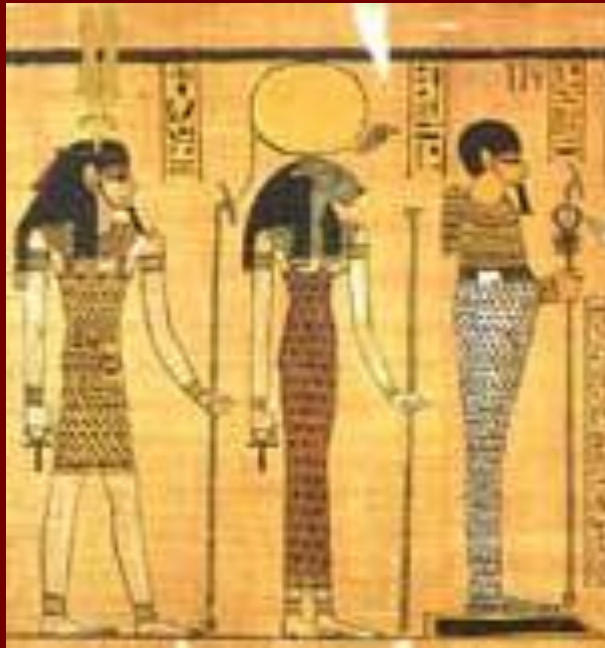
Kek "Darkness" Keket



Nun "Inertness" Nunet

Ptah: God of Craftsmen, Rebirth and Creation

Cairo JdE 60739

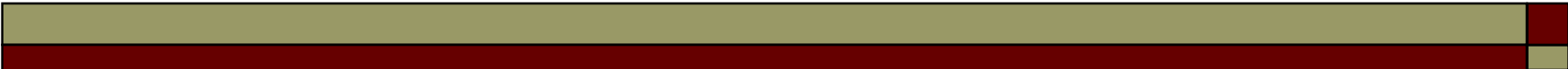


Ptah within Mennefer
(Memphis) Triad (Ptah,
Sekhmet, Nefertem)



heka – Memphite theology I

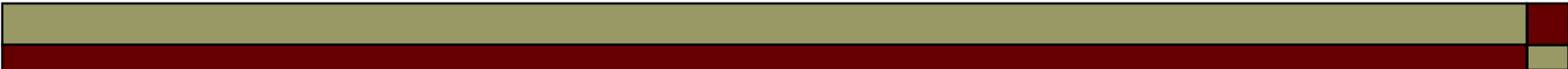
- creation of everything that exists in the universe by creator god Ptah through verbal manifestation of **divine thought** in **correct pronunciation** while recited (speaking out ALOUD)
- By “proclaiming the name of everything” Ptah gave birth,
 - initially, to Shu and Tefnut and
 - consequently to 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



heka – Memphite theology II

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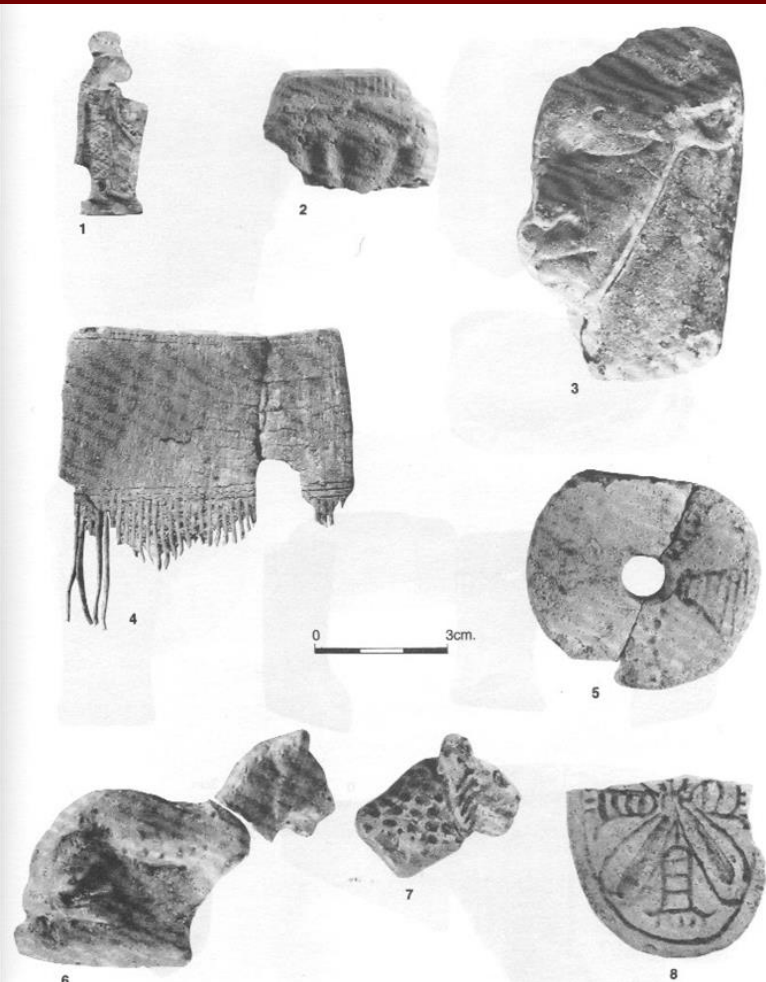
Personal piety and popular religion



The nature of religion

- ❑ The myth(odology) (and theology)
- ❑ The cult
- ❑ Gods and Goddesses
- ❑ Temples
- ❑ Festivals and Processions
- ❑ Kingship → deified kings (Amenhotep I)
- ❑ Afterlife beliefs

Hathor temple Timna, modern Israel



Egyptian Mining
Operations
2000 - 1200 BC

Egypt

Sinai Peninsula was Egyptian
Territory from 2000 BC to 106 AD

Egyptian copper &
Turquoise mines

Egyptian mining
sea port

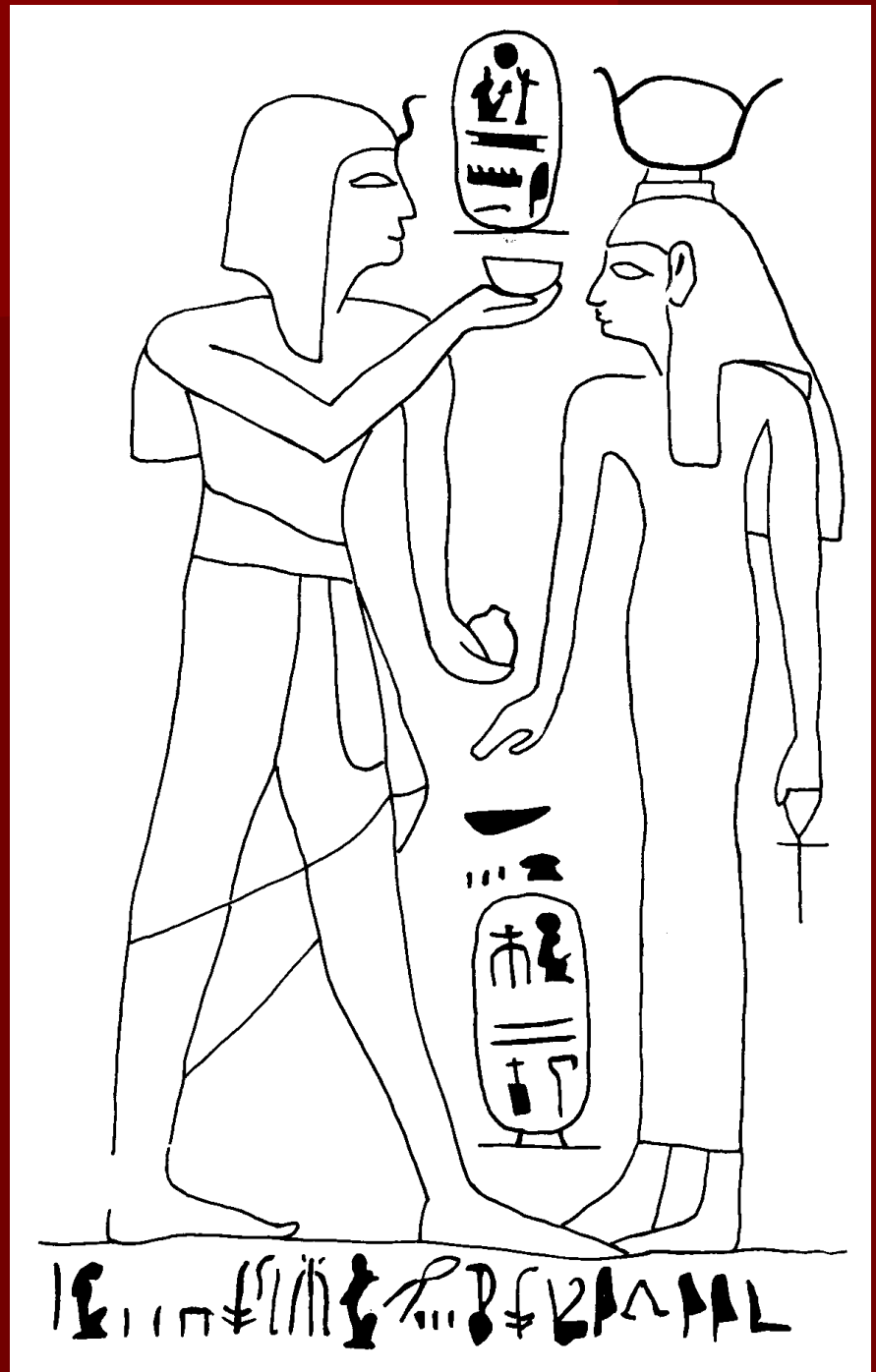
www.bible.ca

Succoth



Rock stela

- round topped
- pictures king (RIII as “Lord of Diadems” – nb h'.w) with nemes + uraeus
- offering to a goddess (must be Hathor due to attributes), facing him
- offered by royal butler Ramses-em-per-re (Asiatic origin)



Hathor



□ Symbol of continuity of belief between all levels of society

- Pivotal position between popular and state religion
- Fertility aspect = important folk religion
- Goddess “who listen to prayers” → focus of personal piety
- Prominent deity in state cult
- Major role in royal and private funerary religion



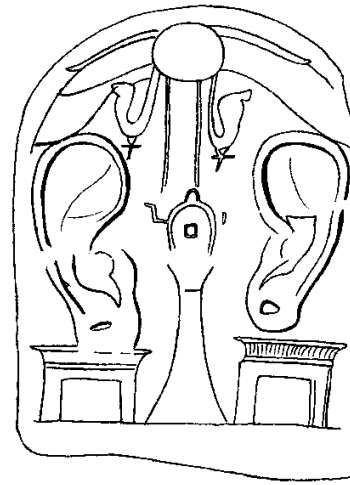
A) Type 1 faience fertility figurines from Kahun, London UC 16723-4



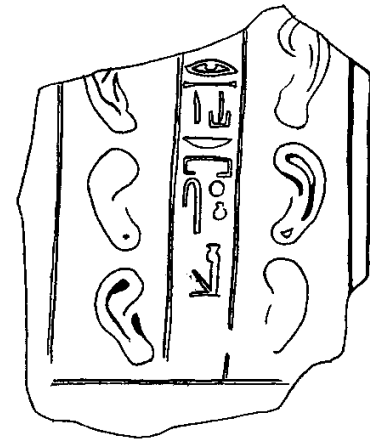
B) Type 6c pottery fertility figurine, London BM 20982



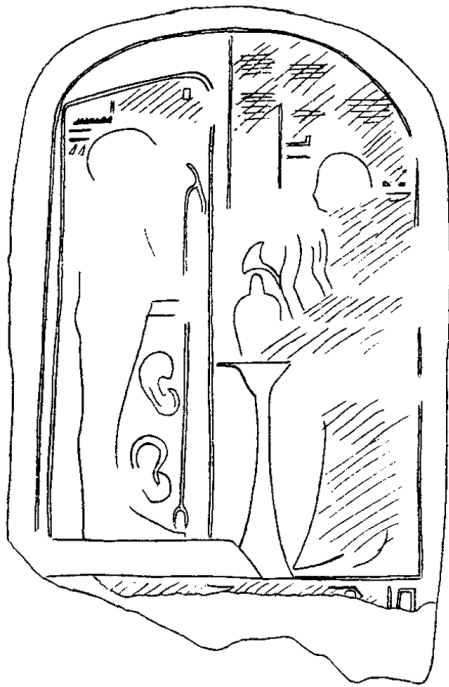
Ear stelae Memphis



A) Type 1 ear stela from the temple of Ptah at Memphis



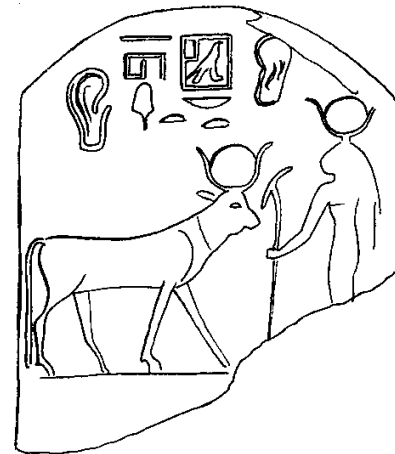
B) Type 1 ear stela from the temple of Ptah at Memphis



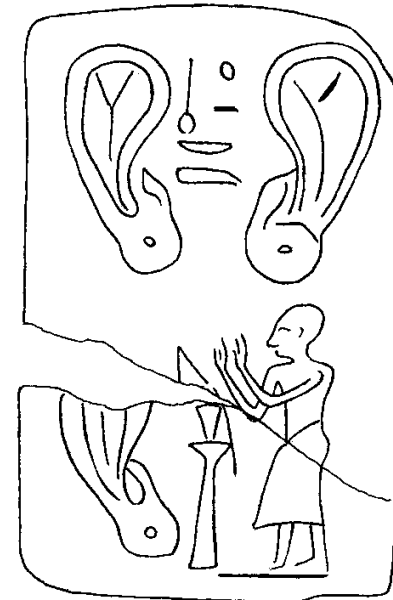
A) Type 4 ear stela from the temple of Ptah at Memphis



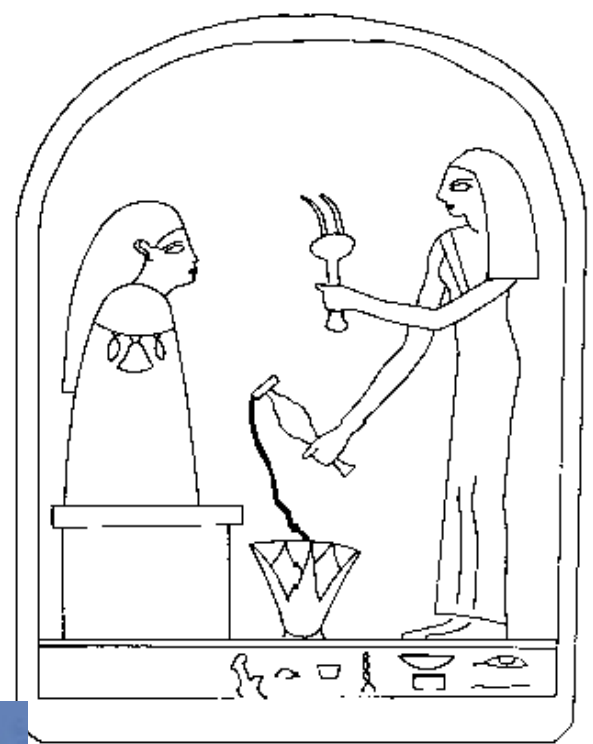
B) Type 4 ear and eye stela from Deir el-Medina



C) Type 2 ear stela from near the temple of Ptah at Memphis



D) Type 3 ear stela from the temple of Ptah at Memphis



16550



16030



16031



Akh-jkr stela: represents divinized ancestors

$\text{ʕ}h\text{ jkr } n\text{ R}^c$ – the able spirit of Ra

Inscriptions: short or more expansive

Some shows offerings

→ Offerings for recently deceased ones, which are maybe worshipped: gain intervention and aid

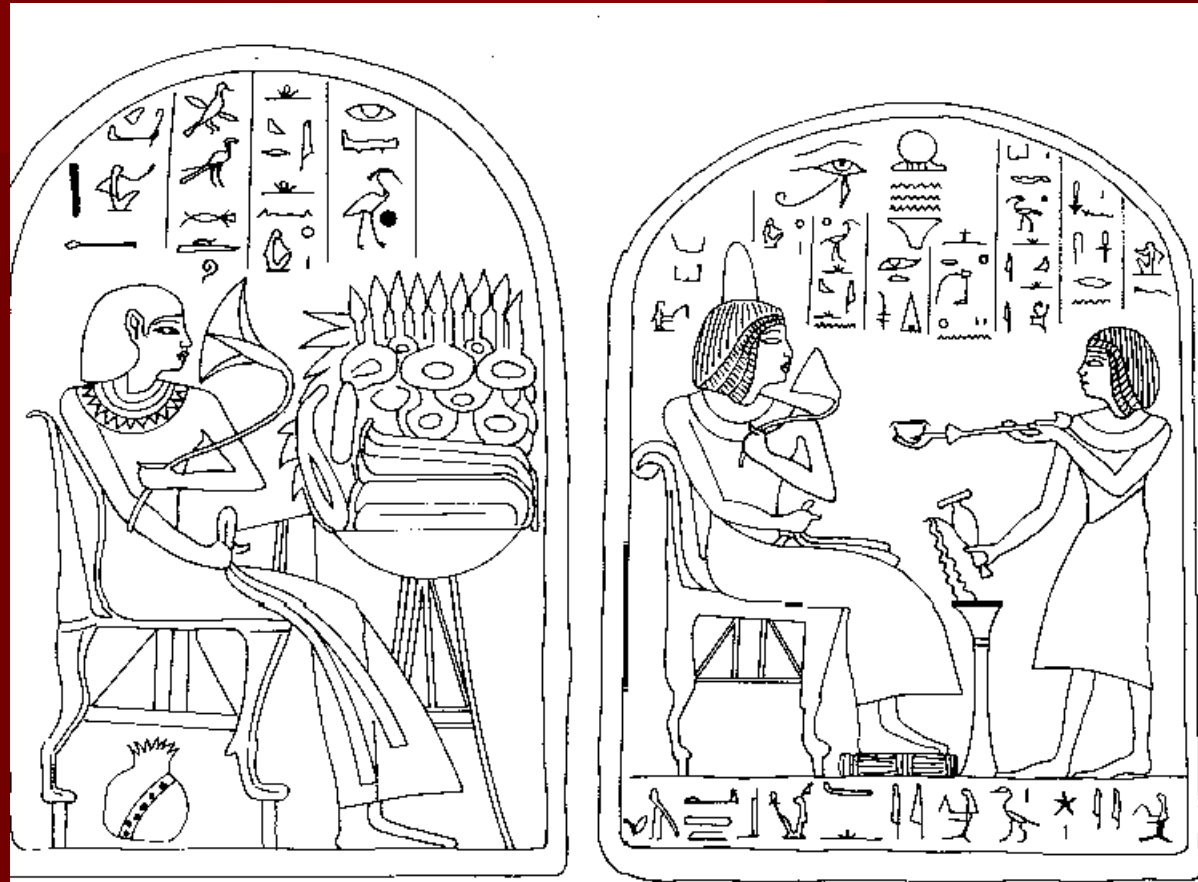


Figure 8. $\text{ʕ}h\text{ ikr } n\text{ R}^c$ stela from Deir el Medina. Drawn by Mary Winkes, after a drawing from R. J. Demarée, *The $\text{ʕ}h\text{ ikr } n\text{ R}^c$ Stelae* (Leiden, 1983), pl. VI, A17.

Figure 9. $\text{ʕ}h\text{ ikr } n\text{ R}^c$ stela from Deir el Medina. Drawn by Mary Winkes, after a drawing from R. J. Demarée, *The $\text{ʕ}h\text{ ikr } n\text{ R}^c$ Stelae* (Leiden, 1983), pl. XII, A49.

DeM



Fig. 1

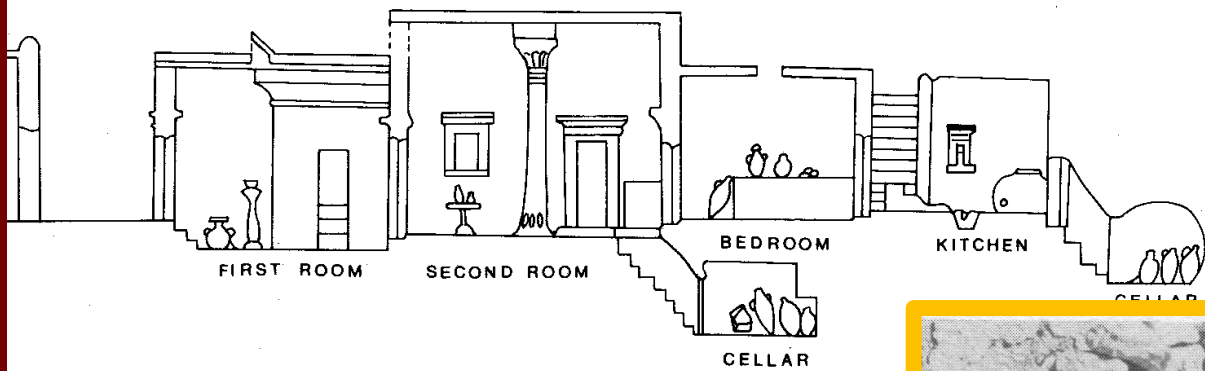


Figure 1. Plan of a typical Deir el Medina house. Drawn by M. after a drawing of Mrs. C. Barratt, in Morris Bierbrier, *The Tombs of the Pharaohs* (London, 1982), p. 69.

