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Shabaka Stone : LINE 48
"the gods who manifest in Ptah"

U^a U^b U^c U^d U^e U^f U^g U^h Uⁱ U^j U^k U^l U^m Uⁿ U^o U^p U^q U^r U^s U^t U^u U^v U^w U^x U^y U^z

A horizontal row of 26 distinct Egyptian hieroglyphs, each corresponding to a letter of the alphabet. The symbols vary in shape, including birds, snakes, tools, and abstract forms.

[illegible]



ANCIENT EGYPTIAN
READINGS

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN



The translation of *The Shabaka Stone* is part of my [Ancient Egyptian Readings](#) (2016), a POD publication in paperback format of all translations available at maat.sofiatopia.org. These readings span a period of thirteen centuries, covering all important stages of Ancient Egyptian literature. Translated from Egyptian originals, they are ordered chronologically and were considered by the Egyptians as part of the core of their vast literature.

The study of the sources, hieroglyphs, commentaries and pictures situating the text itself remain on the website at no cost.

1 The Shabaka Stone : a few historical parameters.



irregular slab of basalt of 138,5 by 93 cm with
a written area of 132 by 69 cm
given by Earl Spencer to the British Museum in 1805
used as a mill-stone by farmers in post-Pharaonic times

"The living Horus : excellent Two Lands ; the Two Ladies : excellent Two Lands ; the Golden Horus : excellent Two Lands ; King of Upper and Lower Egypt : Neferkare, the son of Re, [Shabaka], beloved of Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, who lives like Re forever.

This writing was copied out anew by his Majesty in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, for his Majesty found it to be a work of the ancestors which was worm-eaten, so that it could not be understood from the beginning to the end. His Majesty copied it anew so that it became better than it had been before, in order that his name might endure and his monument last in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall throughout eternity, as a work done by the son of Re [Shabaka] for his father Ptah-Tatenen, so that he might live forever."

Shabaka Stone, lines 1 - 2 (horizontal).

The Shabaka Stone (BM n° 498), is a heavy, near black block or slab of "Green breccia" from Wadi Hammamat named after Pharaoh Shabaka (ca. 712 - 698 BCE), who ruled in the XXVth Dynasty (ca. 716 - 702 BCE) and who is mentioned in LINE 1 of the inscription (the titulary). It was given by the First Lord of the Admiralty George John 2nd Earl Spencer (1758 - 1834) to the British Museum in 1805. It was registered in the inventory of the Museum on the 13th of July of

that year. Up to now, its provenance is still unknown.¹

For a more detailed discussion of the Shabaka Stone : [click here](#).

To contextualize Pharaoh Shabaka's "rescue", one has to realize he was the first king able to (shortly) reunite Egypt and take Residence at Memphis at the end of the Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1075 - 664 BCE) following the New Kingdom (ca.1539 - 1075 BCE). This Intermediate Period had been one of civil strife, and (as the two others before) confused and characterized by the split of the land in Upper (South) and Lower (North, Delta) Egypt.

"Following the death of Rameses XI, ca. 1069 BC, the 20th Dynasty -and with it the Renaissance era- came to an end, but the foundations of a new power structure were already in place, and transition to a new regime occurred smoothly. Under the 21st Dynasty Egypt was -to outward appearances- politically united, but in reality control was divided between a line of kings in the North and a sequence of army commanders, who also held the post of high priest of Amun, at Thebes."

Taylor, J. in [Shaw](#), 2000, p.331.

Whenever they were split, the Egyptians looked back to the Old Kingdom as the proto-type of a divine, stable, reliable and comprehensive (pyramidal) unity, with as foci Ptah of Memphis and Atum-Re of Heliopolis, superseded in the Middle & the Late New Kingdom by Amun-Re of Thebes.

The Old Kingdom conception of Egypt as the cosmos and uprisen land ("ta-Tenen") in the midst of chaos ("Nun"), had been replaced in the New Kingdom by the naturalism of the Sun ("Re") and its course (prototype of the Divine "*creatio continua*"). The New Solar Theology explained this in terms which rejected :

"the entire mythic, pictorial world of polytheistic thought"

[Assmann](#), 2001, p.201.

Politically, the New Kingdom brought internationalization, which defied the particularism of the Old and Middle Kingdoms. From Mycenaean, Knossos, Mitanni, Babylon, and from the Hittites, Assyrians, Libyans & Nubians gifts & trade goods were flowing in. The XVIIIth & XIXth Dynasties produced a formidable theological synthesis (cf. [The Great Hymn to the Aten](#), Ramesside [Amun-Re theology](#) and great monuments of theocratic statesmanship). This political system collapsed under the last kings of the Late Ramesside period, the XXth Dynasty (ca. 1188 - 1075 BCE).

After Pharaoh Ramesses III, the last great king able to repel invasions by the sea peoples (Philistines, Libyans), internal order rapidly decayed, leading to famine & the pilage of royal

sepultures. The XXth Dynasty ends (ca. 1075 BCE) with civil strife and the split of Egypt. With it, the New Kingdom ended and the Third Intermediate Period began. The chief warrior-priests of Thebes (in charge of the rocking barks & statues of the divine oracles of Amun-Re and hence omnipotent) become the hereditary monarchs (in Upper Egypt) while the kings of Tanis held power in the Delta (Lower Egypt).

At the end of the Third Intermediate Period (the latter half of the eighth century BCE), Egyptian sovereignty broke down (again) and the Nubian kings moved North.² They first advanced to Thebes to control Upper Egypt. The brother of Pharaoh Shabaka, Piye, exercised only limited authority in Lower Egypt and returned to Napata (Upper Nubia). The art of this Kushite period of which he is the second Pharaoh, *looks back to the Old Kingdom for inspiration, using models and styles from earlier periods (archaisms)*.³

The black African Nubian Shabaka was the first king of the "Ethiopian" Dynasty *to reunite Egypt by defeating the monarchy of Sais while settling in Memphis*. He needed "propaganda" to ideologically establish himself.⁴ Pharaoh Shabaka had indeed marched North to Memphis, making this Dynastic capital of old (cf. Pharaoh Menes, founder of Memphis) his new seat of government (cf. Frankfort on the importance of Memphis).⁵ The Shabaka Stone was originally set up in the temple of Ptah at Memphis. It is clear that this stone had to prove *the legitimacy of the power of the Nubio-Kushite "Ethiopian" Dynasty* (Egypt and Nubia unified). The stela affirmed that Pharaoh, son of Ptah, was again the sole ruler uniting the "Two Lands" ...

The story of how he found the worm-eaten work of "his ancestors" and its subsequent rescue may also be understood in the context of this search for political justification. Being "backed" by the god of Memphis had always been a sound mythico-political strategy and rhetorical device. His "rescue" is the making of *a more permanent* copy of the core of an ancient tradition, rooted in Memphis and the unification of the "Two Lands". Was this not suggestive of the fact that his reign would be a copy of tradition too ?

To save a genuine tradition from being lost, had always remained a strong image in the minds of the Ancient Egyptians since the beginning of the Dynasties and probably even before. It was also potent in the minds of those around Pharaoh Shabaka, for the period of strife, attempts of reunification, new decline and civil war had lasted for more than four centuries !

The "Ethiopians" did not stop the further decay of Egyptian autonomy and unity. Thebes was sacked under the Assyrian occupation (671 - 664 BCE) and although Psammetikus I (Wahibre) expels the Assyrians, Psammetikus III (Ankhkaenre) was kept in power by the Persians but committed suicide. Persian rule initiated the Late Period (664 - 332 BCE). The restoration of the

old unity of the "Two Lands" had failed. The days of an independent Ancient Egypt were irreversibly over.

2 The inscription on the stone : hermeneutical levels.

The inscription on the Shabaka Stone claims to be *a copy of an ancient worm-eaten document* which Pharaoh ordered to be transcribed for posterity (colophon). The egyptologists of the British Museum have good reasons to assume the compiler of the inscription on the stone *reproduced the layout of early documents and introduced a number of genuine Egyptian archaisms* (older spellings & grammatical usages) to lend the piece *an air of antiquity*.⁶ The story of the rescue of an old original is considered by scholars as an example of a rhetorical device well known in Egyptian royal inscriptions. So in this hypothesis, Shabaka's scribe invented the whole composition (an amalgam of layouts) on the basis of existing documents. This begs the question of the age of the latter.

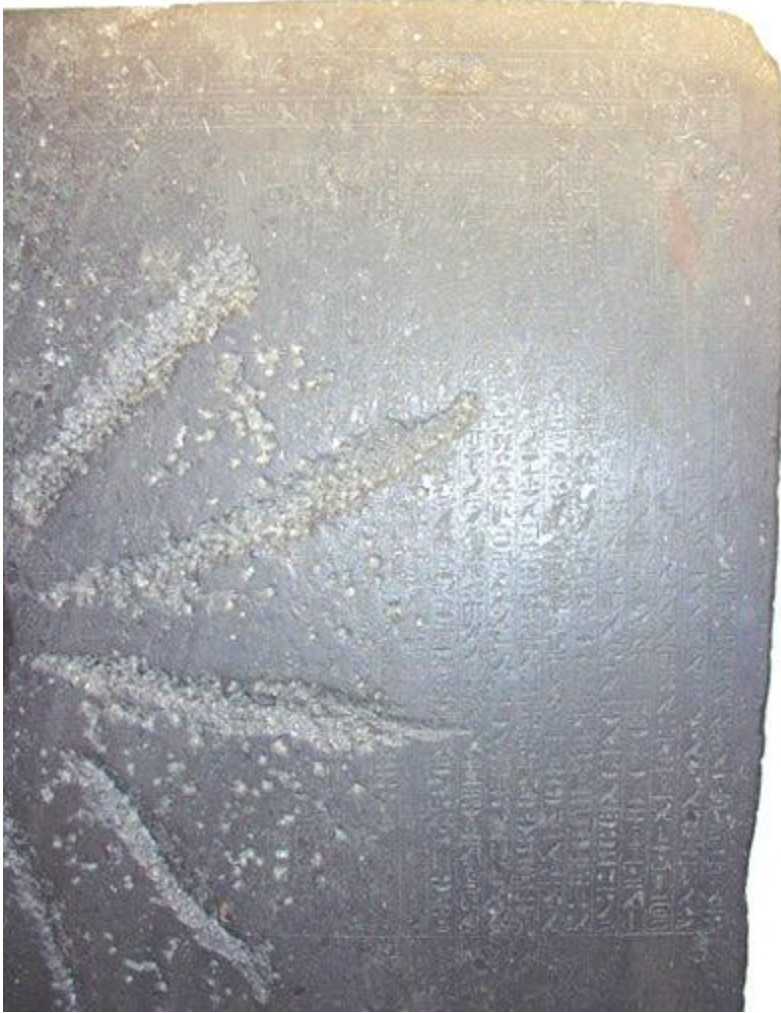
Regarding the inscription three hermeneutical levels emerge :

- the inscription on the Shabaka Stone itself = extant text :
This text is a composition of the XXVth Dynasty, and is probably an adapted and transformed version (hence a more advanced configuration) of an older "worm-eaten document" ;
- the worm-eaten document found by Pharaoh Shabaka = proposed original text(s) :
The document is very probably a Late New Kingdom set of texts which contained the teachings of the priests of Memphis concerning the Lord of the Walls, Ptah. These texts contained more ancient thoughts but also bear the influence of the New Solar Theology and its all-comprehensive conception of divinity, i.e. the Great One in All forms (Re-Harakhty, Aten, Amun-Re) ;
- the moment the ideas contained in the original text(s) emerged = lost original idea :
This is more difficult to establish. Comparative themes as well as rudiments of the proposed "divine" creative speech can be found in earlier Middle & Old Kingdom sources. The archaic form of the "logos"-philosophy could be associated with the importance of Pharaoh's [Great Word](#) (cf. [Pyramid Texts](#)), the crucial role of speech in the earliest manifestations of [sapiental literature](#) (cf. the VIth Dynasty [Maxims of Ptahhotep](#)) and the [vocal-auditive and magical characteristics](#) of Egyptian wisdom in general.

Accepting Shabaka's original existed, is it then not likely it contained a *canonical discourse*, i.e. a set of thoughts defining *an already well-defined cultural identity, in this case a religious form, namely the theology of Memphis* ?⁷ I think it did. This proposed original would itself be a summary or *canon of an older tradition*, with an even more remote historical origin, going back to the moment of the actual emergence of the original ideas, probably articulated in a less complex and sophisticated format (like in the spells of the Pyramid Texts which contain references to Sia & Hu, themselves originating centuries before the extant record, namely [Pharaoh Unis' tomb](#)).

A first hand investigation of the [Shabaka Stone](#) revealed the following table of contents. It has 6 sections :

- I. **LINES 1 - 2** : heading (titulary, colophon) : general information about the stela & editorial remarks concerning its composition ;
- II. **LINES 3 - 6** : prefaces : **LINES 3 - 4** : general declaration of Ptah's supremacy as proclaimer of the great name of "Tenen" and as Pharaoh and **LINE 6** : introduction of the mystery-drama of the deities created by Atum who is begat by Ptah ;
- III. **LINES 7 - 35b** : the mystery-drama : here the division (decided by Geb) of the rule of Egypt between Horus and Seth is narrated and enacted. This settlement is replaced by the union of the Two Lands under the sole rule of Horus, who is a manifestation of Ptah ;
- IV. **LINES 48 - 52** : new heading & Ptah's epiphanies : reaffirmation all deities are manifestations in Ptah, to whom Ptah gave birth ;
 - v. **LINES 53 - 61** : the theology of Memphis ;
- VI. **LINES 61 - 64** : the royal residence : Memphis is the city of Ptah-Tenen.



Shabaka Stone : section V :
the theology of Memphis (right hand side)

The success of this cosmogony puts into evidence the importance of "words of power".

Section V, the Mempis Theology has three subdivisions :

► **LINES 53 - 57** : logoism : the description of the logic process with which Ptah created everything, including all possible deities. The reason why this Memphite process supercedes the Heliopolitan one of Atum is associated with the power of creative speech. Rudiments of an epistemology (the senses bring all to the mind) are also given ;

► **LINES 57 - 58** : natural philosophy : a holistic philosophy of nature (Ptah is behind all actions) ;

► **LINES 58 - 61** : pan-en-theism : poetical affirmation of Ptah being everywhere & everything, all being in Ptah. Ptah is above (celestial) as well as below (terrestrial). With Ptah we touch upon the third major cosmogony of Ancient Egypt.

3 How old are the levels ?

Breasted⁸ concluded the original text used to compose the Shabaka inscription was probably written in the XVIIIth Dynasty (ca.1539 - 1292 BCE), i.e. at the beginning of the New Kingdom.⁹ The work of later investigators (Erman¹⁰, Sethe¹¹, Junker¹², Frankfort¹³) abandoned

Breasted's justified caution and dated the original text between the Ith and the Vth Dynasty !¹⁵

Frankfort claimed :

"The Memphite Theology presents the religious teaching for Menes' new capital. It combines views which we can recognize as new, since they concern the new foundation ; others which we suspect to be new because they run counter to common Egyptian beliefs and could hardly have gained acceptance if they had not been part of the great movement at the dawn of history. Other doctrines again seem to be rooted in Egyptian, or even African, traditions of the greatest antiquity."

Frankfort, 1978, p.24.

Friedrich Junge (1973)¹⁶ convincingly demonstrated there are *no philological grounds to ascribe the text to the Old Kingdom*. He too thinks in terms of an original compendium of New Kingdom texts used in a free and adaptive way in the Late Period. The original compendium might date back as far as the Ramesside period, the Late New Kingdom, a period of extensive religious speculation. After Amarna, Ptah & Memphis had become more important again. Other leading egyptologists, like Hornung (1989),¹⁷ also reject an early dating of the original text.

A Late New Kingdom date proves Egyptian archaism (i.e. the Old Egyptian of the Pyramid Texts) was perfectly mastered by Shabaka's scribe (and hence available in the many Houses of Life of major temples throughout Egypt). In this context, the Frenchman Grimal¹⁸ is apparently the only scholar who still fancies Old Kingdom dates when considering the text. Late Period scribes must have been great linguists.

I accept the philological arguments of Junge and the insights given by the critical study of the political, opportunistic & propagandistic motivations of Pharaoh Shabaka. Hence, the original text was probably composed in the Ramesside period of the New Kingdom (XIXth or XXth Dynasty). Extant text, original text and the original ideas of the inscription on the Shabaka Stone each have a different age :

- **extant text** : ca. 700 BCE (XXVth Dynasty) - Third Intermediate Period
- **original text** : ca. 1292 - 1075 BCE (XIXth - XXth Dynasty) - Ramesside New Kingdom
 - ... lost texts ... other texts ? ... this is very likely !
- **lost original** : ca. 2400 BCE (Vth Dynasty ??) - Late Old Kingdom

So if the original worm-eaten document found by Pharaoh Shabaka was written in the New Kingdom and the hermeneutical form of this New Kingdom original was canonical (implying it or they were the culmination of the evolutionary process of the form of the thoughts in question and

not just the invention of the Memphite theologians of the New Kingdom),¹⁹ then clearly the origin of these ideas (perhaps not documented) could bring us back to the Middle Kingdom or perhaps to the Old Kingdom, to Grimal's Vth Dynasty dating, when the Heliopolitan view predominated. Can the age of the hermeneutical levels be established on the basis of Old, Middle & New Kingdom texts with reliable comparative elements, themes & contents ?

4 The 3 layers of Egyptian cognition

Early 20th century egyptology was modernist, positivist, antiquarian, Hellenocentric (if not Europacentric) and reluctant to accept the fact Ancient Egyptians were also able to speculate, think and be truly spiritual and philosophical. Hellenocentrism, Europacentrism and a refusal (and/or inability) to understand figural and analogical thought by its own standards, compromised the understanding of ancient religious, philosophical & spiritual texts. This mentality is not extinct, although the old crocodiles are nearly all gone to meet the Balance.

For nearly a century, the Shabaka Stone and its inscription remained unconsidered by egyptologists. In 1901, James Henry Breasted wrote his brief article "Philosophy of a Memphite Priest", which prompted other scholars to study the extant text. In 1909, Adolf Erman first put the word "memphitischer" and "Theologie" together in his "Ein Denkmal memphitischer Theologie". However, it was Breasted who first rendered the text of the Shabaka Stone and who copied the inscriptions by hand for his contribution to the Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache. He also discovered the text did not read from right to left but in "retrograde form", characteristic of religious texts on papyrus (the order in which the columns are to be read is reversed even though the arrangement of individual hieroglyphs remains facing to the right).

The layout of the inscription made Breasted date the textual original to the early XVIIIth Dynasty. *But he and others soon realized this text was of one of the most important documents in the history of Ancient Egyptian thought !*

Breasted, who admired the sensitivity of the Ancient Egyptians, and who defined the inscription on the Shabaka Stone as "the oldest known formulation of a philosophical *Weltanschauung*"¹⁴, nevertheless writes :

"I have tried to express in English the thoughts of the Egyptian in all their crudity, as he thought and expressed them. That they thus exhibit numerous paradoxes, is only in harmony with what

we know is everywhere common in Egyptian religious thought, thus illustrating again what is almost an axiom in *modern* anthropology, that *the mind of early man unconsciously and therefore without the slightest difficulty, entertains numerous glaring paradoxes.*"

Breasted, 1901, 39, p.50f, my italics.

Other egyptologists, however, acknowledged the imaginal (Assmann would say "constellational") nature of the mythical mode of thought in Ancient Egypt :

"Images are not ornaments of adjuncts of ancient thought. They are inseparable from it because the ancients reached their insight in a manner which was intuitive and imaginative as much as intellectual."

Frankfort, 1978, p.28.

My own contribution comes from the side of [critical epistemology](#), [postmodern logic](#) and [process metaphysics](#), layering cognitive growth in modes of thought which develop in stages (cf. the genetical approach of Piaget). To understand [Ancient Egyptian thinking](#), one is much helped by the analysis of the *earliest stages of cognition*, characterized by mythical, pre-rational and proto-rational modes of thought and their prelogical, pre-conceptual and concrete operational standards.

For more specifics on the layers of Egyptian thought, also consult : [To Become a Magician](#) (2001), and the [neuropsychological studies](#).

The earliest, ante-rational modes of thought can be seen at work in the inscription of the Shabaka Stone. The way distinctions are bridged by the universalizing concept of Ptah is also typical for proto-rational activity (cf. the introduction of a universal, like Anaximander's "to apeiron", the boundless). It would therefore be unfair to deny Ancient Egyptian civilization its metaphysical, theological or mystical intentions & cognitive activities, albeit mythical, pre-rational & proto-rational, the cognitive activity founding pre-Hellenistic ante-rationality.

These early layers of cognitive growth explain why their speculations do not imply a clear-cut & stable division between object & subject as we can see at work in the texts of Plato & Aristotle (cf. the intermixing nature of the Egyptian image versus the abstraction of the Greek sign - cf. [Hermes the Egyptian](#)). This shows the importance of multiple approaches (typical for the Egyptian mind) and the power of images when dealing with this (and other) ancient civilizations.

"But we have found on closer inspection of the evidence that the ancients' adherence to quasi-contradictory opinions was not due to any inability on their part to think clearly, but to their habit of using several separate avenues of approach to subjects of a problematic nature. They did

justice to the complexity of a problem by allowing *a variety of partial solutions, each of which was valid for a given approach to the central problem.*"

Frankfort, 1961, pp.91-92, my italics.

5 Elements of Egyptian theology

Although Hornung thinks it impossible to define "god" in terms of Ancient Egyptian thought, he nevertheless writes :

"Les dieux égyptiens ressemblent, de par leur nature et leurs manifestations *en mutation constante*, aux temples du pays, qui n'étaient jamais achevés, mais *toujours 'en construction'*. La forme axiale des temples en Égypte est clairement ordonnée, articulée, et pourtant n'exclut jamais la possibilité d'extension et de transformation continues. (...) En cela, l'Égypte diffère considérablement de la Grèce, où temples et dieux sont relativement finis et complets."

Hornung, 1986, p.235, my italics.

Considering the Ancient Egyptian pantheon from Early Dynastic times until the Late Period, we discover the word for "god" or "nTrj" ("netjer") was used in the *singular* (one flagpole with stroke, "god", "goddess"), in the *plural* (three flagpoles, "the gods", "the goddess"), as a *company* of nine deities, called an "Ennead" (three flagpoles on top of which are drawn a circle and a loaf), or as a company of Enneads ... The presence of a singular use does however not imply monotheism ...

In the Old Kingdom, national deities such as Horus, Atum-Re, Ptah & to a lesser extent Thoth, Khnum & Osiris emerged (each with their consorts). In the Middle Kingdom, Amun-Re became Dynastic. These deities were given the epithet "Great One" because of their "firstness" and to point to their role as creator of the "Two Lands". This "firstness" was linked with the mythical state before creation, the primordial ocean (the eternal flood), associated with the cultless "Nun". Consistent with the pre-rational logic put into evidence in the Late Vth Dynasty Pyramid Texts, the confusion between *more than one* "Great One" did not trouble the Egyptian mind, for pre-concepts indeed lack the stability necessary to impress their thinkers with their flagrant contradictions. The conflicting terms *are put side to side* and dealt with inefficiently but often symmetrically (cf. [To Become a Magician](#)).

Only with the naturalization of the pantheon in the New Solar Theology (XVIIIth Dynasty), did

"god" in the singular point *to Re and only to him*. In the Ramesside worship of [Amun-Re](#), we see a proto-rational conceptualization rise, in which a stable -albeit concrete & contextual- concept of worship in Egyptian style is a cultural form of civilization (which can be exported - cf. the egyptianization of Upper Nubia).

The shortlived eradication of the plural under [Akhenaten](#)²⁰ is particularly revealing. His religion was exclusive. No other deity but Aten could claim divinity, and only the sonless Pharaoh had access to his father. In his theology, the contextualizations of proto-rationality are gone. Replace Akhenaten's "Aten" by Plato's "Idea of the Good", and an Egyptian form of conceptual rationality emerges. However, we know Akhenaten's religious experiment was disliked by his people and repressed after his death.²¹ The old ways were quickly "restored". Mythical, pre-rational and proto-rational modes of thought could not be relinquished. The time of rational, stable and decontextual concepts was not at hand (we have to wait for this until the [Ptolemaic Age](#)).

The Theban Amun-Re became the "Great One" of the post-Amarna henotheist system of religion, which would continue to exist in Egypt until the last temple closed. The proto-rational features of this model are evidenced by the possibility of replacing the name of the "Great One" by another ... The theology of Memphis was probably written to show Ptah is even greater than "Atum-Re" (the later "Amun-Re"). In this mode of thought, this conflict in greatness can not be resolved, for the proto-rational New Kingdom theology of Amun-Re as well as that of Ptah were rooted in pre-rational and mythical considerations. Of both, the theology of Memphis is intellectually superior and nearest to a naturalistic approach, superseding the "first time" of myth and the flagrant conflicts of pre-rationality. In it, the conflict of proto-reason is mediated (harmonized) by simultaneity of the contents of mind (heart) & the proclaiming speech (tongue) of Ptah, the all-encompassing creator and fashioner. However, to make the leap to the rational mode of thought, nothing less than the eradication of all plurals will do (as Akhenaten so admirably conceptualized in the "free" and elastic Amarna style).

► the theologies of Re, Thoth & Ptah :

In Ancient Egypt, the earliest traces of stable "schools" of cognitive reflections regarding the divine are the mythical & pre-rational theologies of the Old Kingdom, developed in Heliopolis (or "Ôn"), Memphis (or "Men-nefer") & Hermopolis (or "Khemenu")²² In the Old Kingdom, the Heliopolitan scheme is best documented (Pyramid Texts) and dominant. The only clear-cut theological text of the Memphite school we have, is the inscription on the right hand side of the Shabaka Stone, the so-called Memphis Theology, referring to a Late New Kingdom original copy. Ptah is mentioned only three times in the Pyramid Texts, and he is referred to as "[the greatly noble](#)" (Utterance 573, § 1482). The Hermopolitan scheme is first known through Early

Ramesside sources (Early XIXth Dynasty), although traces of it can be found in the Pyramid Texts. It develops considerably in the Late Period (cf. [Hermetism](#)).

In all three, creation emerges as "the risen land" or "ta-Tenen" *out of Nun, the chaotic state before creation*. Upon this sacred hill, in Heliopolis, Atum-Re, the creator-god manifesting as the Sun, rested when he rose for the first time. "Nun" being the inert primordial ocean and the primordial hill being the mount of creation. This pictorial representation refers to the mythical mode of thought. This "risen land" was a central metaphor, an example of *the emergence of creation and light out of the undifferentiated waters*, in which inert chaos lay dormant and hidden by darkness, in which the autogenetor "floated" (i.e. Atum, the ba or "soul" of chaos). It was a metaphorical sublimation of the natural environment, in particular the chaotic "strange attractor" defining the phase-space of the annual level of the inundation of the Nile (the presence of "Nun" in the "deep" of creation itself) and the phenomenon of the receding floodwaters leaving exceptionally fertile black silt behind (the black land, or "kemet") ; out of chaos springs the light, out of death new life emerges, and the cycle is eternal (repetition).

Heliopolitan theology stressed the self-creation of Atum-Re and his creation of all by means of his hands and his semen. In the Old Kingdom, Ptah was "speaking" on the behalf of Pharaoh and providing the latter with supplies (Pyramid Texts, Utterance 573, § 1482). In his mythical form, Ptah fashions the primordial egg out of which Atum hatches (in Hermopolis, the Ogdoad is said to fashion the egg). He is the patron of artists & artisans. Does his noble speech refer to the "sia" (understanding), "hu" (authoritative speech) & "heka" (magic) of the Pyramid Texts (which incorporated this element, as did Hermopolitan and Osirian thought) ?

► the Heliopolitan scheme :

Nun ⇒ Atum
 zep-tepy ⇒ the Ennead ⇒ creation

In Hermopolis, Thoth was the "Vizier" of Re and as sacred ibis he dropped the creative word to create the world out of the primordial chaos of the Ogdoad of pre-creational, chaotic deities. The "peace of Thoth" was the balance between the rather subjectifying Heliopolitan scheme (self-creation) and the objectifying Memphite answer (generative command and all-comprehensiveness). But in essence, the Hermopolitan scheme, with its emphasis on *creation-through-the-word*, is easy to combine with the Memphite, which became Dynastic in the IIIth Dynasty (Memphis had become the capital of Egypt).

► **the Hermopolitan scheme :**

Nun Thoth
Ogdoad ⇒ great word ⇒ the Ennead ⇒ creation

Heliopolitan theology became dominant in the Vth Dynasty, but it did not repress the theology of Memphis or Heliopolis. In fact, the three can be read as *complementing each other*, although differences were obvious.

In the New Kingdom, the New Solar Theology tried to promote an all-comprehensive approach of Re, leading to the shortlived [radical monotheism of Amarna](#) and the [Ramesside henotheist theology of Amun-Re](#). The original text mentioned in the extant text on the Shabaka Stone can be read as the answer of Memphis to this New Solar Theology. This is probably also the case for the [Hymns to Ptah](#) written under the Ramesses, where we read about Ptah : "[who made heaven as a creation of his heart](#)" & "[who made the Earth according to the plan of his heart, whose manifestations came into being](#)" ...

The Heliopolitan, Hermopolitan & Memphite systems of thought form a mythical and pre-rational triad :

- **Heliopolitan ritual (appearance)** : Atum-Re creates himself in the first time, Atum splits and the Ennead is made. This "first time" starts with Atum's autogeneration and ends with the emergence of Atum out of Nun (when the first ray of the Sun pierces above the horizon ? - cf. the "benben" or petrified ray of the Sun). His autogenesis instantaneously ($\{0\} = 2$) gives birth to Shu (air) and Tefnut (moist). Here pre-creation is left behind. Self-creative Atum-Re has understanding, wisdom (sia), authoritative utterance (hu, the Great Word), magic (heka), justice & truth (maat). His eternal rejuvenation is based on his being all-light, forever alive & mutating perpetually in his Solar Bark, although at night Re navigates on the Nile of the underworld, the depth of which [touches the primordial chaos of pre-creation](#). In Amarna theology, Re manifests as the disk of the Sun, called "[Aten](#)", and is the sole, all-comprehensive deity of the system (except for his son, Akhenaten). In Ramesside theology, [Amun-Re](#) is of essence hidden & one, but pluriform in expressions.
- **Hermopolitan magic (names)** : [Thoth](#) is the head of the pre-creational Ogdoad and when, as the sacred Ibis, he drops the creative Great Word from his beak, he creates everything. Here the mythical origin (before time and before the intermediate, transient, fugal first time) is placed under the command of the divine mind, word of Re and god of [magic](#). The primordial realm is characterized & personified. "Khemenu" means "the city of the eight

gods" or "Ogdoad" of primordial deities related to the state of affairs of the primordial ocean, the great, absolutely inert & undifferentiated Nun ;

- **Memphite unity (body)** : Ptah is one & all-comprehensive (Ptah is Nun, Atum & Re). With mind he speaks the Great Word and creates everything therewith. Pre-creation, first time & creation are all put into one category, an exemplaric summation. Ptah was before creation, during the first time, at the moment of creation and in every created god & goddess, in all Kas & Bas, in all temples and on every altar ... Just as Pharaoh was the only one facing the deities (everybody else had to face him), so was every member of the pantheon (the Enneads) a manifestation of Ptah.

The Memphis Theology attempts to supersede the Heliopolitan doctrine on three accounts :

- Ptah is all-encompassing : he is the Great One of pre-creation, first time & creation ;
- The Great Word spoken by Ptah creates the Ennead, whereas in the Heliopolitan view, Atum creates the deities through onanism ;
- mind in the heart and creative speech by the tongue are like the semen and the hands of Atum, i.e. the Great Word spoken is the first cause and not Atum's mythical & pre-rational initiatory act of taking semen in the hand and in the mouth.

► the Memphite scheme :

Ptah-Nun Ptah-Atum
Ogdoad mind/tongue the Ennead creation

⇒ ⇒ ⇒

In these theologies, the "**spoken word**" played a considerable part. In fact, take away the "Great Word" spoken by Re and his son and there is no creation and no Egyptian state. So both in the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, as well as in the Memphis Theology, we clearly find the rudiments of the notion of the "logos" as a creative agent.

► the cosmological difference : the time before creation ...

Nun is the *watery abyss from which everything emerged*. Therefore Nun, the Greek "chaos", is the "father of the gods", especially of Atum, his soul, and had no cult. In Memphis, Nun was Ptah-Nun, whereas in Middle Kingdom Thebes, Nun was identified with Amun, the hidden (mentioned only once in the Pyramid Texts). In Hermopolis, Nun received a consort (Naounet or Nenet).

All three cosmologies acknowledge the *double cosmological difference* between, on the one hand, creation itself and *that which was before time & space* (the undifferentiated primordial ocean) and, on the other hand, the difference between the mythical "first time" ("in the beginning") and the actual historical time of the two and the millions (i.e. the eternity versus the temporality of the created world).

In the Pyramid Texts, dating end Vth & VIth Dynasty and written by Heliopolitan scribes, we find :

"(...) I was born in the Abyss before the sky existed, before the Earth existed, before that which was to be made firm existed, before turmoil existed, before that fear which arose on account of the Eye of Horus existed."

Pyramid Texts, utterance 486 (§ 1040).

The "abyss" or "chaos" is another name for "nwwn", "Nun" (Nououn, also Nu, Noun or Niu), the inert and undifferentiated primordial waters. In the Old Kingdom, the pre-creational world was pictured as a deep, boundless & uncreated watery mass. No gods were present. No Earth, no sky, no humanity. In it, nothing is born. The primordial waters are beyond turmoil, because no opposition or movement occurs in this undifferentiated, inertia. The great battles between Horus & Seth are not. The fact Pharaoh claims to be born in the Abyss, refers to the "zep tepy" or "first time", the emergence of creation out of the inert (in particular the autogenetic rise of the Sun-god Atum), which is *simultaneous* with the coming into the light of the gods & goddesses and the actuality of creation.

"(...) for vindication which was born before anger came into being ; which was born before noise came into being ; which was born before strife came into being ; which was born before tumult came into being ; which was born before the Eye of Horus was gouged out, before the testicles of Seth were torn off."

Pyramid Texts, utterance 570 (§ 1463).

Furthermore, in the language of the Old Kingdom, the pre-creational realm is invoked using what Gardiner calls a "virtual adverb clause" as in "he has had not yet ..." (Egyptian Grammar, § 402). This virtual adverb is suggestive of the distinction, or difference between a realm before and after creation. What can be said about the pre-creational realm ?

"Sur le plan de la philologie, nous évoluons sur des bases fermes car des termes égyptiens tels que *tm wnn* et *nn wn* sont sans conteste des négations du verbe 'être' - le premier refermant un verbe négatif, le dernier une particule. Il y a aussi l'adjectif relatif négatif (*jwty / jwtt*) et un substantif qui en dérive ; littéralement, ces termes ne peuvent signifier que 'ce qui n'est pas' ou

'ce que n'existe pas'. Les Égyptiens établissent, en outre, une distinction nette entre le verbe 'être', 'devenir' et 'vivre'."
Hornung, 1986, pp.157-158.

The pre-creational is without spatial division, for Earth & sky are not yet separated. The ascension of the god of air, Shu, has not happened yet. The primordial elements of this world of pre-creation are united and there is no place where a creator-god could exist and make creation emerge. Although Nun is inert and undifferentiated, the virtual, pre-creational matrix of creation (Atum) lies dormant in it. Hence, Nun is the passive, inert, undifferentiated set of "all possibilities", which is not the same thing as an absolute non-existence, emptiness or void. For in Nun lies also the capacity to create eternal repetition, the foundation of order and creation as a whole.

In the Pyramid Texts, the pre-creational, chaotic realm is not presented as unstructured. The pre-creational, is given, in Hermopolitan style, primordial gods & their consorts. Faulkner translated "Hh", which occurs in Utterance 558 as "Chaos-god". A plural ("hyw.f" & "hhw.f") occurs in Utterance 406, rendered as "Chaos-gods". In later texts, they are called the "eightfold company" of gods, the "Ogdoad" of the *primeval chaos before creation*. These two read as follows :

"(...) May I see you go forth as Thoth, when a waterway is prepared for the Bark of Re to his fields which are in a part of the sky, may you rush on as one who is at the head of the Chaos-gods."

Pyramid Texts, utterance 406 (§ 709).

"O King ! Hail to you, you Chaos-god ! The travelling of the Great Black One is travelled for you, you stop a stopping of the Eldest God, there is censed for you the censuring of 'kAi-smk' in Ôn. Be alive ! Have dominion, dominion ! Life is raised up behind you, so live !"

Pyramid Texts, utterance 558 (§ 1390-1391).

The Old Kingdom tried to produce images & personifications of this world (Nun, Naounet, Amun, Amaunet, chaos-gods). The need to understand *how creation came into effect* can only be satisfied when Nun is characterized *in a way allowing for creation*, even if the essential inert nature of Nun is left untouched. This happened by structuring the pre-creational and attributing creative power to it.

This primordial structure is made clear in Hermopolitan theology, which allows the primordial ocean *to be characterized & personified*. In this scheme, the "chaos-gods" (Faulkner)²³ of pre-creation form the "Ogdoad" or company ("paut") of eight deities. They create the primordial egg out of which Atum hatches. They are hence *before* time and space. *They beget and establish the*

gods & goddesses. These primordial deities are unlike the gods & goddesses of creation, who are as it were always "on the move". They are more like characterizations (attributes, accidents) of Nun and unlike the gods & goddesses, who come forth from Atum-Re, for they keep their unique style & profile.

The actual names of these primordial deities, the so-called list of the "paut" of Thoth are mentioned at Edfu, Dendera, Karnak, Philae etc. The oldest pictorial evidence of their form date from the reign of Seti I (ca.1290-1279) in the Early Ramesside Period of the New Kingdom (Early 19th Dynasty).

The list below is of the Late Period, taken from the texts of the walls of the temple the Persian Darius II (424 - 404 BCE) built in the Oase of Khârga (Hebet).

1. **Nun and Naounet** : primordial waters ;
2. **Hou and Haouet** : boundless, undefined ;
3. **Kouk and Kaouhet** : total darkness, potential light ;
4. **Gereh and Gerhet** : absence, negation, potential creation.

In the primordial state of boundless inertia (Nun, Hou), a dark & passive potential (Kouk, Gereh) exists. The undifferentiated Nun holds dormant seeds. Kouk & Kaouhet (male & female sides of the power of darkness of Nun) were related to the cycle of the Sun. Kouk (Kekui) is later called "the raiser up of the light" (period of night which precedes the day), Kaouhet (Kekuit) the "raiser up of the night" (period of night which follows the day). In this sense, they announce the "first time", the emergence of Atum out of Nun, the dawn of a new Sun over the Nile after it set. Absolute darkness and negation are understood when *contrasted* with light & affirmation.

The first three chaos-gods (Naounet, Hou and Haouet) do not step outside the characterization of Nun as boundless & undefined. The last four chaos-gods seem to form *the primordial quaternio* preparing the emergence of Atum-Re and the start of the "first time". However, they too are in actuality inert.

The "inert" qualities of Nun are associated with the *even pairs* of gods & goddesses which form the primordial Ogdoad. Created "companies" are usually trinities or trinities of three (or enneads, nine being the original number to which a "head" is added), i.e. *uneven, essentially unbalanced or dynamical*. Nun & its ogdoadic matrix is without duality, split, generation, time, life, death. All is absolutely undifferentiated, finished & complete. In physical terms, we could say the world before creation is understood as absolutely chaotic, i.e. the measure of entropy is infinite (implying homogeneity and with no flux).²⁴ In Nun there is no heterogeneity between objects. The asymmetrical balancing-principle (the two moving scales of the balance) characterizing

creation is totally lost. Symmetry is maximal. This is in accord with recent chaostheory.²⁵ The head of the Ennead of Hermopolis is Thoth, the god of writing, learning, medicine & wisdom.²⁶

According to Budge, the priests of Heliopolis and the authors of the system developed in the Pyramid Texts, intended a "company of gods" (or "paut") consisting of nine gods.²⁷ In Hermopolis, they had arrived at that number by adding their leader Tehuti or Thoth to a group of four pairs of primordial deities. In Heliopolis, they had added Atum. Budge dates the oldest representations of their forms not older than the reign of Seti I (cf. supra). But the way they are mentioned is suggestive of traditional ideas with a very ancient character.²⁸ These gods (forming a primordial ogdoadic structure) represented concepts, faiths & beliefs which even at that remote period had been long dead.²⁹

The Memphis Theology acknowledges the primordial ground (Nun) & its matrix (the Ogdoad of chaotic pre-existence) for Ptah is called "Ptah-Nun, the father who made Atum" (LINE 48a).

► the phenomenological difference : the "Urzeit" (zep-tepy) or "in the beginning" ...

In the Coffin Texts, dating Middle Kingdom (ca. 1938-1759 BCE) we read :

"I am a living one, possessor of years, and I live for ever and ever. Atum achieved eldership through his power when he fashioned Shu and Tefnut in Heliopolis ; *when he was alone in his existence, without me ; when he separated Geb from Nut, before the first generation had been born, before the primeval Ennead had come into being.*"

Coffin Texts, spell 80 (II, 39), my italics.

The words "zp tpîi" ("zep-tepy", the first time) indicate a *liminal* stage or realm *between* non-existence (Nun) and actual existence (Re and creation). We learn creation is not viewed as a unique event but as something which may repeat itself, so the world may return to be as perfect as it was "in the beginning". The first time never ends. It is mythical and reflects eternal repetition (whereas "Nun" is eternal sameness or everlastingness). The same notion of a return to the source is suggested by the Heb Sed Festival, a jubilee commemorating the accession of Pharaoh and a "true renewal of kingly potency, a rejuvenation of rulership *"ex opere operato"* (Frankfort, H. : Op.cit., p.79) and it also occurs in the theology of the course of Re (cf. Amduat). In the cosmology of Heliopolis, Atum self-engenders "in the first time". Atum emerges out of Nun, as Re out of the first time. Both Nun and Atum are called "father of the gods". Nun is the passive side of universal fatherhood (Nun as father of all possibilities & potency), Atum the active, actual creation of all beings, the autogenetic capacity of chaos.

In fact, creation happens when *the inertness of Nun is overcome* and the beings may come into existence. Except for the dormant powers, there is nothing in the abyss which could trigger this. However, the dormant nature of the power of the chaos-gods is such *nothing can escape out of it*. So how creation started can *not* be explained by Nun or the other chaos-gods. Headed by Atum, the Heliopolitan *self-created creator*, the Ogdoad becomes an Ennead and the problem is solved for Atum is "*causa sui*" (his own cause).

In Ancient Egypt, the notion of the emergence of creation is linked with the rise of the "primordial hill", the coming into being of the "risen land" or "Ta-Tenen". Everything is erected upon the risen land, a mount above the (receding) waters of chaos, bringing fertility. The risen land remains surrounded with the primordial waters, for creation itself does not eliminate the presence of Nun. The chaos-gods are the *irreducible background* of creation, growth, decay, death & resurrection.

"O Atum-Kheprer, you became high on the hill. You rose up as the Benben in the Temple of the Phoenix in Heliopolis. You spat out Shu. You spew out Tefnut. You put your arms round them as the arms of the Ka (sign), so that your Ka-power may be in them."

Pyramid Texts, utterance 600 (§ 1652 - 1653).

The "first time" ends with the emergence of this risen land. "Ta-Tenen" ("ta" or "Earth" & "enen", "enen", "nen" or "inertness, rest, inactivity") emerges out of this golden age of the deities and establishes a firm foundation for creation to be erected upon. "Ta-Tenen" is a personification of the natural forces related to the *constancy of the Earth* and the ability of the risen land *to hold together*. "Ta-Tenen" represents the physical constants opposing chaos. "Ta-Tenen" or "Tenen" is the material cause of creation, not its efficient and final cause, which is Atum, and his eternity-in-everlastingness (eternal repetition).

6 Fugal monotheism ...

Atum, Atem, Tem or Temu was depicted in human form. In the Pyramid Texts, Atum is associated with Re, the god of the Sun. In fact, in the Heliopolitan view, the dead wait in the Netherworld until the Boat of the Setting Sun, or Re in the form of Temu, appears (a theme also found in the later Amduat). In Memphis, Nun was called "the father of Atum". Indeed, Atum emerges out of Nun. Atum is active and originator of creation, Nun is the all-comprehensive passive & chaotic watery mass upon which the primordial hill (Atum's erect penis) as it were floats. Atum is eternal repetition ("neheh"), Nun is eternal sameness. Atum is eternity-in-

everlastingness, Nun is everlastingness ("djedet").

"Atum is he who once came into being, who masturbated in Heliopolis. He took his phallus in his grasp that he might create orgasm by means of it, and so were born the twins Shu and Tefnut."

Pyramid Texts, utterance 527 (§ 1248).

Atum, the original father (in the sense he is the efficient cause of creation) came into being in a paradoxical way, for, in the old translations, "Atum is, in fact, defined as 'he who became, in coming lengthened, which he did in Heliopolis.'"³⁰ Atum created the world for *his own pleasure*, not parenthood. His progeny are *accidental* and the whole issue revolves around his *bi-sexual auto-erotic intent*. The lengthening and becoming stiff of his penis also refers to the emergence of the primordial hill and the solidifying of the waters of chaos and the becoming of the risen land, i.e. the period of the "first time". The reason why something came out of Nun is thus explained as Atum *pleasing himself*.

"Atoum, le premier dieu créateur connu, semble également porter un nom définissant mais celui-ci est d'une interprétation plus complexe. Le verbe *tm*, dont le nom est une formation participiale, signifie tout à la fois 'ne pas être' et 'être complet'."

Hornung, 1986, p.56.

Atum is the alternation between pre-creation and creation. Anthes translates Atum as "he who is integral", Bonnet as "he who is not yet complete". Kees opts for "he who is not present yet", whereas Hornung chooses "he who is differentiated".³¹ Atum seem to me "he who is in-between" (Nun and creation).

Atum encompasses both pre-existence (he came out of potential existence) as well as existence (first time and emerging creation). *He is not*, because he is not caused like the other creatures (the gods, goddesses & other beings). *He is complete*, because he encompasses the chaotic (passively) as well as the orderly (actively), the chaos-gods (who remain dormant, Nun being Atum's body as Atum is Nun's soul) as well as the gods & goddesses of creation (who are always moving and changing), Maat before all.

This can only be because Atum is "the one" and "the greatest" ("ur").³²

Hornung is right when he claims that in the minds of the Ancient Egyptians, the absolute unity the divine *radically transcends* the order of creation with its gods, goddesses, natural kingdoms and human cultures. One of the necessary conditions of monotheism is fulfilled : to distinguish with ease between what is the truly Divine (the uncreated) and evidently worldly (the created),

or, in Egyptian terms, between the power of powers and the powers.

"L'état d'avant la création ne vaut pas d'être recherché, même pour le dieu créateur ; il y était seul et devait se contenter de dialoguer avec ce qui ne répond pas et en fait n'existe pas. En se différenciant et en accédant à l'existence il engage le dialogue et le processus d'échange permettant aux dieux et à l'humanité de vivre."

Hornung, 1986, p.181.

Before creation and before the first time, Atum is not active, but deemed floating alone in the primordial waters. Nun is inert. Atum self-engenders and so creates the transition-zone between pre-creation & creation (the "zep-tepy"). This pre-creational, pre-existent "unity" (Atum) finally manifests as Re when the primordial hill rises, but begins with the creation of Shu & Tefnut. They initiate the beginning of the "first time" between everlasting chaos and eternal creation. The first cycle of myths deal with Atum sending out his Eye to find these children in the vast expanse of Nun. In this mythical time, continuously & endlessly, millions of beings emerge out of chaos through the ongoing "masturbation" of Atum. Participating in this process of emergence and actualization is by itself life-giving.

"Les Égyptiens ne rencontrent l'unicité absolue de dieu qu'en dehors du monde et de la création, durant *la transition fugace* entre la non-existence et l'existence. Par ses travaux créatifs, le premier - et à l'origine le seul dieu, disperse l'unicité primordiale en une multiplicité et une diversité de manifestations : ainsi, en dépit de multiples caractéristiques communes, chaque dieu est unique et incomparable."

Hornung, 1986, p.169, my italics.

The first Great One, Atum, creates himself (autogenesis) for his own pleasure and by doing so *immediately & simultaneously* gives birth to Shu & Tefnut, out of which the millions flow. Atum is the potentiality (capacity) of chaos to self-create (for he emerges out of Nun, called "father of Atum"). If Nun is equated with the set of all possibilities, or $\{0\}$, the Atum is the first to posit himself by his own powers, "*causa sui*", or (1). (1) is the sole creator (singular) of the first pair (dual) or $(1 + 1 = 2)$, differentiating (plural) into the millions $(2 + 1 = 3, \dots)$.

As soon as Atum splits to make way for Shu and Tefnut -created as a result of this split- Atum is the "head" of the Ennead, i.e. a multiplicity of deities. Absolute divine unity (1) is only *a fugal intermediary state* between chaos $\{0\}$ & order (2). But in and by itself, this absolute divine unity starting the "first time", is the mythical representation of both the eternal now & the perpetual (re)creation of creation (as characteristics of "neheh"-time, or eternal repetition of the cycle). In this sense, the "first time" is the eternal and divine part of creation which perpetually underlines the order of the gods & goddesses of creation (touching the pre-creational through Re-Atum).

The unity of Atum is essential to guarantee creation, but his ontological unity (essence) expresses itself *simultaneously with his own self-creation* in the existence of a multiplicity of gods & goddesses. This is unlike the quantitative approach of monotheism, a turn towards henotheism (albeit in an ante-rational mode of cognition). Atum's name "father of the gods" indicates that all gods & goddesses (via the "zep tepy") share in the original eternity and in the unity of the Greatest (Atum).

Is Atum ever aware of being Atum ? Is Re not this awareness of self, self-consciousness ? Are there any recollections made by Atum outside of the immediate differentiation of Atum in Shu & Tefnut *during the fugal, in-between state of his own self-creation* ? These are Atum's actual limitations : in time, he only exists fugally, and in space (when chaos is broken open by Shu), he immediately differentiates into millions of gods & goddesses. Atum "*causa sui*" means an endless (re)generative capacity rooted in the boundless chaos of the primordial ocean, creating everything *for its own pleasure*. Egyptian cosmology is clear : Atum creates to see things are good. Atum creates the world to please Atum and only Atum. Creation unfolds because Atum takes his semen in his mouth. Nothing ejected is lost to the dark Nun, and this act is endlessly repeated.

Because Seth, the power of "isefet" or "evil" present in creation, is part of Atum's Ennead, we may conclude Atum's efforts to keep things clean were not a complete success. Creation itself contains the seeds of corruption. As soon as creation manifests, Maat is present, but evil too. The order of creation is therefore not inert, but dynamic. It is a battle-ground between opposed powers, endangering its balance or even threatening its unity. However, even death is not the end, *for to end is to be able to begin again*.

Indeed, the actual presence of "isefet", "evil" or anti-life in creation is given by the god Seth. His "birth" only "disturbs the harmonious development of creation, wherein each pair of gods only produced one other pair. Thus the birthday of Seth is the beginning of confusion. (...) The idea of Seth's disorderly entry into the world appears to be already evidenced in the Pyramid Texts. It would seem that the word *m í* 'to be born' is deliberately avoided there with regard to Seth."³³ Sartre wrote about Seth : "Il sent le maudit : dès sa naissance il est le malaimé, l'inopportun, le surnuméraire. Indésirable jusque dans son être, il n'est pas le fils de cette femme : il en est l'excrément ... par sa faute un désordre s'est introduit dans le bel ordre du monde, une fissure dans la plénitude de l'être."³⁴ Te Velde connects Seth with homosexuality and anal intercourse in particular³⁵ and often he figures as the god of moral evil.³⁶ Even later, when he is overwon by Horus, Seth does not leave the stage. On the contrary. Eventually, the Ancient Egyptians worshipped Horus and Seth even as one god : "Horus-Set" (the Greek "Antaios") who

represents a "*coincidentio oppositorum*", a unity beyond good & evil.

7 The Solar Bark & the Gates : spatiotemporal differences.

"La création ne devient possible que par le non-existant, de sorte que les dieux et le roi en sont particulièrement dépendants pour *le renouveau perpétuel de leur oeuvre de création* et pour échapper à la finalité sans vie. Selon la conception égyptienne, l'existant a besoin d'une *régénération constante des profondeurs du non-existant* ; alors seulement il est en mesure de se préserver en tant qu'existant *vivant*. Il risque toutefois d'être perdu s'il néglige l'aspect négatif, corrosif, mortel du non-existant."
Hornung, 1986, p.165, my italics.

For Hornung, chaos is first of all non-existence, in the sense of absence of being. In my reading, the virtual adverb clause of the Ancient Egyptians refers to another pre-creational *mode* of being, a potential existence or *virtual reality* out of which the "first time" and actual existence emerge. By creation, chaos and order are separated from one another (day versus night) but do interact (destruction & regeneration). This is a nothingness becoming something.

These relationships between pre-creation and the place of Re after dusk is as explicit as the bond between the god of confusion, Seth, and the terrible giant-snake Apophis, who, each night again, tries to destroy Re. For thousands of years, priests offered prayers to the gods & goddesses to assist Re. Seth could be of immense help and called "the Eldest Sorcerer", for he was the only one who controlled this mythical beast of chaos (cf. [Amduat](#), VIIth Hour).

The original chaos is never done with, but *interacts with the living, dying & resurrecting order of being*. Chaos (potential "negative" existence) is imaged as a darkness divided by pylons, pillars, fields, hours, gates ... Only with the proper words of power ("hekau") could the demons be driven away and these gates be opened. He who was on the Solar Bark existed together with Osiris in eternal light, jubilation and an everlasting life of plenty and more.

In the New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld, the Solar Bark is visualized as travelling through the darkness of the "Duat" (or Netherworld), surrounded with light. Deep down the pathway of this Bark of Millions of Years, the Ancient Egyptians placed the "hetemit", the "place of destruction". It is treated in the same way as the original chaos-gods, and represented the most destructive aspect of chaos (translated in human terms as walking on one's head or have faeces

& urine as food & drink and the like). Above all this, the life-giving Solar Bark travels on the heavenly Nile, while in the deep, all possible darkness, chaos, night & destruction bring us back to the inert state of Nun, the primordial ocean and the corrosive effect of chaos.

Each night again, the soul of Re (and the body of Osiris), the noble dead, gods and goddesses and the dreaming are again confronted with the nightly underworld, separated from the realm of waking existence (not Earth, not sky). Each dawn, all gods, goddesses, deceased and living alike are *reborn with Re by having travelled with him on the celestial Nile, the Milky Way, radically protected from the corrosive powers of evil by the Bark of Millions*. In this way, the "night" represented a particular ritual dealing with the spiritual regeneration of the soul (as sleep rejuvenates the body). In this ritual, the potential hidden in the chaos-gods can be retrieved and fed as life-power to the continuous cycle of birth, death & rebirth (cf. the erection of Atum and His endless orgasms). It is this "power" and "life" which all gods & goddesses carry with them (cf. the "sekhem" staff and the "ankh" amulet). This force is not constant but needs to be regenerated each night (cf. the [Book of the Hidden Chamber](#)). As death is conquered, no scenes of dying itself or its pains were depicted.

COSMOLOGICAL

Nun - Atum / zep-tepy / Ennead

Creation is preceded by the primordial chaos of Nun, unlimited darkness & night, containing the dormant potential of creation, fully inert and beyond differentiation. This is the soul of Nun, or the latent, dormant Atum.

In the Nun, Atum autogenerates for his own pleasure and immediately and simultaneously gives birth to Shu and Tefnut. This is the first tume ("zep-tepi") which ends when the risen land (Ta-Tenen) emerges and a firm foundation for creation manifests.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL

from Atum to Re to Atum etc.

Creation is like the daily rising of the Sun, Re. The cycle of the Sun being an imaginal representation eternal repetition and self-creation. Re travels from Day to Night and returns every morning anew and fresh. Souls need to be on or near the Bark of Millions.

8 Ptah and the theology of creative speech of Memphis.

In the first Dynasty, the usual iconography of Ptah, the god of Memphis, was already established in embryo. On the calcite bowl from Tarkhan, we see Ptah as anthropomorphic, smooth-headed, dressed in a high-collared garment with a tassel holding a sceptre of authority (never was Ptah depicted otherwise), standing in an open kiosk (or "naos").

His austere presence on the temple walls of all kingdoms is obvious and hardly deviates from this early appearance. Although the form of deities changed, Ptah remained the same. His form is a metaphor for stability, continuity, fertility and authoritative command, the main features of Pharaonic kingship. However, his name was not written with any determinative for "divinity" until the New Kingdom. The three phonograms of his name "p", "t" and "h" sufficed. Its most probable etymology being the root-word of later verbs meaning "to sculpture", "to fashion".

His head is enveloped in a tightly-fitting skull cap, that leaves only his face and ears to view with forearms emerging from a linen wrapping that moulds itself closely around his form (compare it with the Heb Sed-garment of Pharaoh). In the Old Kingdom, the high priest of Ptah was called "wer kherep hemut" or "supreme leader of craftsmanship", indicating that Ptah, "he with the beautiful face", was the god of skills, design, sculpture and the making or creating of something in general (also the art of [well formed speech](#)).

In conjunction with "ta-Tenen" or "Tenen" he is linked with the foodstuffs & provisions given by the Earth. In the Heliopolitan texts, he is hardly mentioned, although Ptah is present during the crucial life-restoring "Ritual of Opening the Mouth" (performed on statues and the mummy). Ptah had however no other major role to play in the [funerary rituals](#) (except as the composite deity Ptah-Sokar, who ruled the Duat). Although Ptah created everything and was the god of the most ancient and holy town of Ancient Egypt (were all Pharaohs were coronated), he nevertheless had *no personal cycle of legends*.

Hymn to Ptah

Hail to You, You who are great and old, ta-Tenen, father of the gods, the great god from the first primordial time who fashioned humanity and made the gods, who began evolution in primordial times, first one after whom everything that appeared developed.

He who made the sky as something that his heart has created, who raised it by the fact the Shu supported it, who founded the Earth through that which he himself has made, who surrounded it with Nun and the sea, who made the Duat and gratified the dead, who caused Re to travel there in order to resuscitate them as Lord of Eternity and Lord of Boundlessness, Lord of Life.

He who lets the throat breathe and gives air to every nose, who with his food keeps all humanity alive, to whom lifetime, more precisely, limitation of time and evolution are subordinate, through whose utterance one lives.

He who creates the offerings for all the gods in his guise the great Nile, Lord of Eternity to whom boundlessness is subordinate, breath of

life for everyone who conducts the king to his great seat in his name :
"King of the Two Lands".

Papyrus Harris, British Museum, XXth Dynasty, ca.1150 BCE, painted papyrus,
from Thebes, height 42.5 cm., in : [Morenz](#), 1973, p.182.



Shabaka Stone : LINES 48 - 52 - notice
mummiform Ptah with skull cap & *was*-
scepter standing in a shrine.

LINE 48 : (horizontal) is the
heading of the theology of
Memphis. The inscriptions in
LINES 49a - 52a are each
followed by a special
determinative showing the
iconographic form of Ptah
standing in a shrine.
Underneath, in LINES 49b - 52b,
these specifications follow :
"(48) The gods who manifest in
Ptah :
(49a) Ptah-on-the-Great-
Throne, ---
(49b) [Ptah] --- who bore the
gods.
(50a) Ptah-Nun, the father who
gave birth to Atum.
(50b) [Ptah] --- who bore the
gods.
(51a) Ptah-Naunet, the mother
who bore Atum ;
(51b) [Ptah] ---
(52a) Ptah-the-Great, heart and
tongue of the Ennead ;
(52b) [Ptah] --- Nefer-Tem at
the nose of Re every day."

All deities mentioned in the theology of Memphis are epiphanies of Ptah. They manifest "in" Ptah, i.e. are all part of Ptah. All (pan) is in (en) Ptah (theos) : pan-en-theism. The deities next to Ptah represent operational laws of creation (natural differentials), and of them, only Atum touches pre-

temporal and pre-spatial pre-creation. Their names are so many "divine words" thought and spoken by Ptah. Creation and every thing in it are so many theophanies of Ptah *as supreme creator through mind and speech*. The spirito-political power of Pharaoh is modelled upon this mental and verbal theology and *vice versa*. Is this why Ptah's representation never changed ? Did he represent the all-encompassing "balance" of every duality (the "Two Lands"), as did Pharaoh and his Residence (the point of focus of the Egyptian state). It is likely so.

The coherence of this proto-rational henotheism based on the power of thought & speech (cf. the [Great Word](#)) is remarkable. Its constant dialogue with Heliopolitan theology (of Atum-Re) shows it was meant to be a complementary & more "cognitive" answer to the questions posed by Egyptian theology since the start of the Dynasties (creation, the pantheon, legitimation of Pharaoh, the status of Pharaoh and the establishment of Maat).

LINES 53 - 57 (or "logos-section", in detail studied in [On the Creative Verb in Kemet](#)) :



Shabaka Stone : LINE 53
(hieroglyphs in red are reconstructed)

The mental process suggested here is proto-rational, and aims at establishing a solid case for *ongoing creative speech* and the ontic supremacy of Ptah as "very great" (while allowing, consistent with henotheism, other deities to exist as such "in" Ptah).

"(53) There comes into being in the heart. There comes into being by the tongue. (It is) as the image of Atum.

Ptah is the very great, who gives life to all the gods and their kas. It all in this heart and by this tongue."

"Heart" is "mind" and "tongue" equals "speech".

The simultaneity of the mental (subjective) and material (objective) sides of the cognitive process, is indicated by the use of symmetrical writing.

The "heart" of Ptah is not a "nous" devoid of context, i.e. an abstract, rational Divine (Platonic) Mind. It is too early for that.

Rather, the contents of mind (the divine words) simultaneously *move* Ptah's tongue. Formal and material poles come together in Ptah's continuous actions, the overseeing "Great Throne" of Ptah.

Frankfort wrote :

"For such 'creative speech' turns each divine word into the *causa materialis*, *causa formalis* and *causa movens* of an element of creation all in one."

Frankfort, 1978, p.29.

"Horus came into being in him ; Thoth came into being in him as Ptah. Power came into being in the heart and by the tongue and in all limbs, in accordance with the teaching that it (the heart) is in all bodies and it (the tongue) is in every mouth of all gods, all men, all flocks, all creeping

things and whatever lives ; thinking whatever the heart wishes and commanding whatever the tongue wishes !"

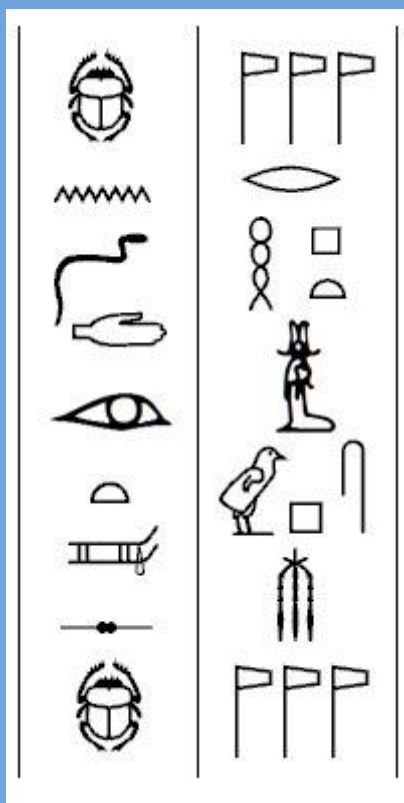
Shabaka Stone, LINE 54.

Horus is an epiphany of Ptah's mind. Thoth of Ptah's tongue. The divine order of words thought in Ptah's mind & spoken by his tongue (both "in the form of Atum") have as their concrete object the unity of the Pharaonic State, of which Horus was the ultimate deity (cf. the Old Kingdom "Followers of Horus", the confusion between Horus and Re, between Horus of Lower Egypt, avenger of Osiris, who is the justified Pharaoh of Egypt, and Horus the Old, the sky-god of the first Dynasties, the four sons of Horus in ritual, etc.). The art of divine speech, connected with [Egyptian magic](#), is epiphanized as "Thoth", the god of writing, learning, wisdom, magic, healing arts etc. He was the secretary of Re and the brother of Maat, goddess of truth & justice.

In the divine words thought & spoken by Ptah, everything (all possible being) has its place. All these beings are created by Ptah in Ptah while in the material process of speaking his immaterial mind. No mythical event is invoked, but only the fact that Ptah thinks and creates when he speaks.

Although the accomplishment of this amazing mentalizing proto-rational theology is impressive, the "form of Atum" proves also to be its ultimate limitation. For Ptah is unable to create the world without Atum. Although the "form of Atum" also exists outside creation "in the mind of Ptah", paradoxically, the "mind of Ptah" always creates "in the form of Atum". The concept here is concrete, not formal or decontextualized ... Atum is the "form" used by Ptah to create everything by speaking divine words. The "form of Atum" is a rest of mythical and pre-rational thought proto-rationality cannot eliminate without formal reason.

According to [Hare](#), "this text is written with special care to emphasize the intimacy, indeed the simultaneity and mutual implication of the intellective and the corporeal."³⁷ Not unlike what we know of Anaximander or Parmenides, the author of the Memphis Theology moves beyond mythical & pre-rational thought. Here we see proto-rationality at work, for both object & subject are distinguished, integrated and transcended by Ptah-Nun, a "*deus otiosus*" (the divine inactive of pre-creation).³⁸ But it can *not* be said of this author that he (like Plato) contemplated a realm of "pure" thought, outside the operations, conditionings or determinations of physical reality (a world of ideas, a "nous") and surely beyond contextual limitations (like "the form of Atum"). We have to wait for Greek rational thought for this.



Shabaka Stone : line 58

"(58) There came the saying that Atum, who created the gods, said concerning Ptah-Tenen : 'He gave birth to the gods.'"

Here Atum (as first, demiurgical cause) affirms Ptah-Tenen is the ultimate cause. Atum still creates the deities, but seems no longer self-created & auto-eretical (as he is in myth and pre-rational thought).

The distinction between "to create" (scarab) and "to give birth to" (three skins tied together at the top) is pertinent. Ptah gives birth and life to everything. Atum creates as does the Sun (in Heliopolis, Khepera was the self-creative aspect of Re). The creator-god Atum-Re of Heliopolis is not set aside. He is still the ever-splitting alternation-point between pre-creation and his Ennead (or set of laws fashioning creation). Everything is created "in his image", *but the latter rises in the heart and by the tongue of Ptah, the ultimate cognitive cause of every thing.*

"From him every thing came forth : foods, provisions, divine offerings, all good things. Thus Thoth knew and recorded that he is the mightiest of the gods. Thus Ptah was satisfied after he had made all things and all divine words."

Shabaka Stone, LINES 58-59.