

OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS

LAWS AND STORIES FROM
THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Fully Revised and Expanded Third Edition

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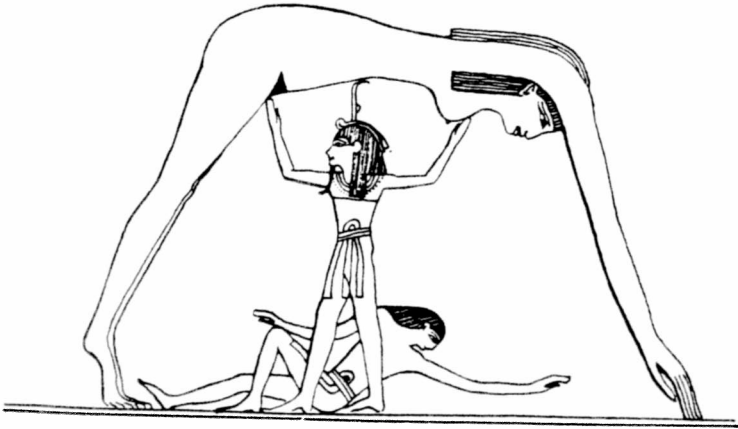


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HYMN TO ATUM

☰ A hymn to Atum was recovered by British archaeologists in 1865 and is preserved today in the British Museum in London (*Papyrus Bremner-Rhind*, BM 10188). The hymn is written in hieroglyphics on sheets of papyrus. Although the origins of the hymn date to the Old Kingdom (2575-2134 BCE) at Heliopolis in the Cairo of today, this is a version as it was sung after 400 BCE at Thebes in Luxor, which is some three hundred miles south of Cairo.

Egyptians honored Atum as the creator and ruler who accompanied them, their pharaoh, and their land from birth to death to rebirth. Heliopolis, Hermopolis, and Edfu were the most important sanctuaries of Atum. Each day Atum sailed his boat along the clear blue body of Nut, the sky, toward the sunset horizon that was her mouth. At dusk, Nut consumed the sun.



Shu (the wind) supports the body of Nut (the sky) over the body of Geb (the earth)

Throughout the night, Atum navigated his boat through Nut's body, where the serpent Apophis waited to destroy him at the opening of her womb on the sunrise horizon. Like midwives, priests chanted a hymn to Atum as they waited for their creator to be reborn. Having completed the voyage, the reborn Atum would re-create Egypt, thus allowing a new day to dawn and the pharaoh to continue to rule the land in peace. The sun, or its glyph, which was a circle with a dot in the center, the cone-shaped benben stone, the pyramid, the obelisk, the sun temple, and the scarab beetle were among the artistic and architectural symbols connected with Atum. Beetles lay their eggs in balls of manure and roll them from place to place while the eggs gestate. Egyptians described Atum as a beetle rolling the sun from dusk to dawn. Every living thing emerged from the sun, just as the newly hatched beetles emerged from the ball of manure.

Parallels to the Hymn to Atum appear in the stories of the creation of the heavens and the earth (*Gen 1:1–2:4*).

Columns xxvi:21–xxvii:5

At the moment of creation, Atum spoke:

I alone am the creator. (Exod 3:13–14)

When I came into being, all life began to develop.

When the almighty speaks, all else comes to life.

There were no heavens and no earth, (Gen 1:2)

There was no dry land and there were no reptiles in the land. . . .

When I first began to create,

When I alone was planning and designing many creatures,

I had not sneezed Shu the wind,

I had not spat Tefnut the rain,

There was not a single living creature.

I planned many living creatures;

All were in my heart, and their children and their grandchildren.

xxvii:1–15

Then I copulated with my own fist.

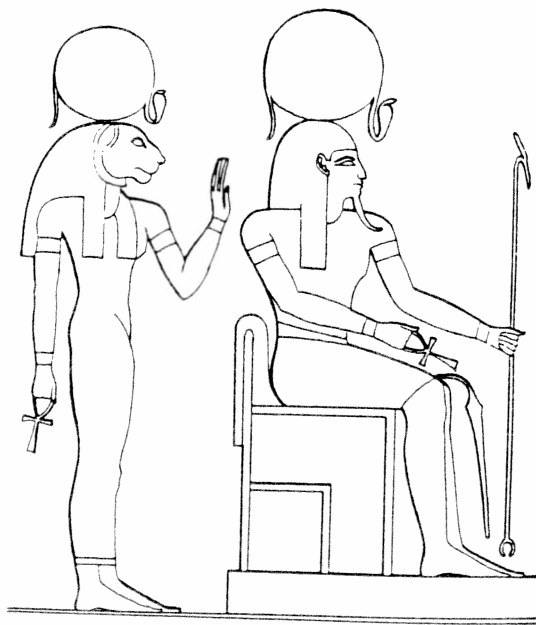
I masturbated with my own hand. (Gen 2:6–7)

I ejaculated into my own mouth.

I sneezed to create Shu the wind,
 I spat to create Tefnut the rain.
 Old Man Nun the sea reared them;
 Eye the Overseer looked after them

In the beginning, I was alone,
 Then, there were three more.
 I dawned over the land of Egypt.
 Shu the wind and Tefnut the rain played on Nun the sea

With tears from my Eye, I wept and human beings appeared
 I created the reptiles and their companions.
 Shu and Tefnut gave birth to Geb the earth and Nut the sky.
 Geb and Nut gave birth to Osiris and Isis, to Seth and Nephthys.
 Osiris and Isis gave birth to Horus.
 One was born right after another.
 These nine [Greek: *ennead*] gave birth to all the multitude of the land.



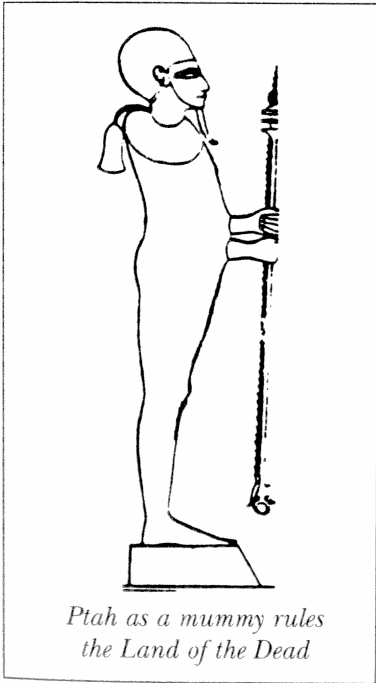
Tefnut standing behind Atum

HYMN TO PTAH

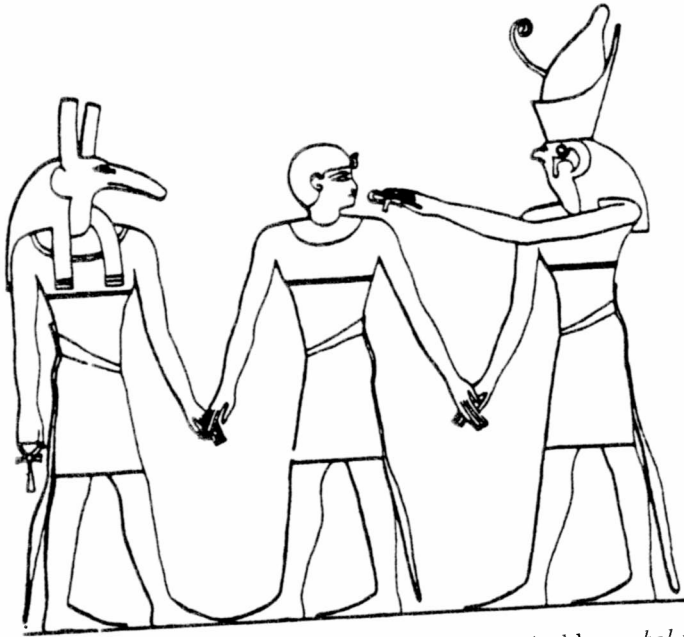
☞ The origins of a hymn to Ptah date to the Nineteenth Dynasty (1307-1196 BCE) at Memphis. One version, copied on a slab of black granite known as the Shabaka Stela, was recovered by British archaeologists in Egypt in the 1830s. It is written in an archaic style similar to the Pyramid Texts and is preserved today in the British Museum in London (BM 498).

The Hymn to Ptah contrasts how the divine patron of Memphis creates with the way Atum, the divine patron of Heliopolis, creates. The people of Heliopolis imagined Atum to be an artist who physically worked creation into existence. The people of Memphis imagined Ptah to be a judge who pondered and then simply called creation into existence.

When the Hymn to Ptah opens, the Ennead, which is a divine assembly of the nine most important divine patrons of Egypt, is ratifying the unification of northern and southern Egypt as a single state. Horus, the divine patron of northern Egypt, assumes the responsibilities of Seth, the divine patron of southern Egypt, and becomes the absolute ruler of Egypt. The hymn goes on to tell how Horus also assumes



*Ptah as a mummy rules
the Land of the Dead*



Anubis (left) and Horus (right) touch a priest with the Ankh symbol to raise him from the dead

the responsibilities of Ptah to become the absolute ruler of the Ennead.

The dramatic quality of the Hymn to Ptah parallels the stories of the creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1–2:4). The hymn also authorizes the existing political order of Egypt in which Ptah is the ruler of the Ennead and Memphis is Egypt's sacred center and the capital of a newly united state.

Geb the earth commanded the Ennead to assemble.
 Geb ended war by dividing Egypt between Horus and Seth.

Horus would rule over Lower Egypt in the north;
 Seth would rule over Upper Egypt in the south.

Geb gave the Land of Horus rule over the Land of Seth,
 Horus united Upper and Lower Egypt.

Osiris marched through the Gates of Death,
Horus conquered the Land of the Living.

Isis proposed an end to wars
Nephthys decreed that Horus and Seth become brothers.

The *ka*-souls of all the living were created in the image of Ptah.
All formed in his heart and by his tongue. (Gen 1:3)

Horus was created from the thoughts of Ptah's heart.
Thoth was formed by the words of Ptah's tongue.

Ptah's heart guides the Ennead,
Ptah's tongue directs humans.

Ptah creates the Ennead with only teeth and lips,
Atum must create with hands and semen.

Atum had to masturbate to bring forth the Ennead.
Ptah had only to speak, and the Ennead came forth.

Ptah called the names of Shu and Tefnut,
The wind and the rain gave birth to the Ennead.

Sight, hearing, and smell all report to the heart,
the heart is the source of all knowledge.

The tongue speaks only what the heart thinks.
Atum thinks only the thoughts of Ptah.

The Ennead speaks only the words of Ptah . . .

Ptah's heart grants the gift of life,
Ptah's tongue organizes life's abundance.

Ptah's heart grants life to the steady heart,
Ptah's tongue orders death for fools. (Prov 20:9; 22:11)

Ptah is the creator of all crafts and trades.
Ptah is the ruler of the Ennead.

Ptah gave birth to the Ennead and all things.
Ptah is the ruler of the Ennead.

Having done all these things,
Ptah rested and was content with his work.

(Gen 1:31—2:1)



*A limestone relief at Karnak
depicts Senwosret I (1971–1926 BCE)
honoring Ptah*