

Egyptian Creation Myths

Different creation myths abounded in Ancient Egypt. Although most Egyptians accepted the first myth below, Creation by Atum, the sun god, different geographical areas favored and built temples for their local deities and, of course, assembled their own versions of the creation story.

Religion in Egypt was highly politicized. If priests could obtain recognition of their local god's importance from high-level authorities, such as the Pharaoh and his advisers, they could build on that recognition and bring prestige, power, and wealth to their god's temple and city, not to mention to themselves.

The second creation myth, Memphite Theology, resulted from special recognition of Ptah, the chief god of the city of Memphis. His standing as a god of creation has significance because Ptah approached creation intellectually rather than simply physically, unlike other gods. Memphite Theology marked the first known instance of the thought process that developed into the Logos Doctrine.



Creation by Atum

Scroll of knowing the development of the Sun and of Overthrowing Apophis.
Recitation of the Lord to the Limit, which he spoke after he developed:
For my part, the fact is that I developed as Developer.
When I developed, development developed.

All development developed after I developed,
developments becoming many in emerging from my mouth,
without the sky having developed,
without the earth having developed,
without the ground or snakes having been created in that place.

It was out of the Waters, out of inertness, that I became tied together in them,
without having found a place in which I could stand.

I became effective in my heart,
I surveyed with my face.

I made every form alone,
without having sneezed Shu,
without having spat Tefnut,
without another having developed and acted with me.

When I surveyed in my heart by myself,
the developments of developments became many,
in the developments of children
and in the developments of their children.

For my part, the fact is that I acted as husband with my fist,
I copulated with my hand,

I let fall from my mouth by myself,
I sneezed Shu and spit Tefnut.

It is my father, the Waters, that tended them,
with my eye after them since the time they became apart from me.

After I developed as one god,
that was three gods with respect to me.

When I developed into this world,
Shu and Tefnut grew excited in the inert waters in which they were,
and brought me my eye after them.

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Then Shu and Tefnut gave birth to Geb and Nut.
Then Geb and Nut gave birth to Osiris, Horus the Two-Eyed, Seth, Isis and Nephthys,
from one womb, one after the other,
and they gave birth to their multitude in this world.

Memphite Theology

Through the heart and through the tongue something developed into Atum's image.
And great and important is Ptah, who gave life to all the gods and their kas as well
through this heart and this tongue
through which Horus and Thoth both became Ptah.

It has developed that the heart and tongue have control of all limbs,
showing that he is preeminent in every body and in every mouth---
of all the gods, and all people, all animals, and all crawling things that live---
planning and governing everything he wishes.

His Ennead is before him, in teeth and lips---
that seed and those hands of Atum:
for it is through his seed and his fingers that Atum's Ennead developed,
but the Ennead is teeth and lips in this mouth
that pronounced the identity of everything,
and from which Shu and Tefnut emerged
and gave birth to the Ennead.

The eyes' seeing, the ears' hearing, the nose's breathing of air send up to the heart,
and it is what causes every conclusion to emerge;
it is the tongue that repeats what the heart plans.

So were all the gods born,
Atum and his Ennead as well,
for it is through what the heart plans and the tongue commands that every divine speech has developed.

So were the male life-principles made
and the female life-principles set in place---

they who make all sustenance and every offering---
through that word that makes what is loved and what is hated.

So has life been given to him who has calm
and death given to him who has wrongdoing.

So was made all construction and all craft,
the hands' doing, the feet's going, and every limb's movement,
according as he governs that which the heart thinks,
which emerges through the tongue,
and which facilitates everything.

It has developed that Ptah is called "He who made all and caused the gods to develop,"
since he is Ta-tenen, who gave birth to the gods,
from whom everything has emerged---
food-offerings and sustenance, gods' offerings, and every perfect thing.

So is it found and recognized that his physical strength is greater than the gods'.

So has Ptah come to rest after his making everything and every divine speech as well,
having given birth to the gods,
having made their villages,
having founded their nomes [provinces of Ancient Egypt],
having set the gods in their cult-places,
having made sure their bread-offerings,
having founded their shrines,
having made their bodies resemble what contents them.

So have the gods entered their bodies---
of every kind of wood, every kind of mineral, every kind of frit,
everything that grows all over him, in which they have developed.

So were gathered to him all the gods and their kas as well,
content and combined in the lord of the Two Lands.

Both myths translated by J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1988), pp. 28-29, 43-44.