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The Ancient Egyptian Conception of God: From the Predynastic Through the Old Kingdom (ca. 3800–2135 B.C.E.)

Leival Richards

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8443-4628>

University of South Africa

richarlb@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

It is not clear what an Egyptian god was, what was believed about them, or how people responded to them. This qualitative work induces the nature of gods from the fourth and third millennia B.C.E. culture with the intention of stating what Egyptians believed. Framed in a philosophical design, it explores three features. First, using language, archaeology, and iconography the essentials of the god identity are outlined for original qualification. Second, god existence is argued using classical proofs. Third, god character is examined to reveal the specific psychological archetype that dictated their behaviour in myth. Then, delineated by the essential qualities of all three features, the nature of the gods is consolidated and filtered through an Old Kingdom value structure to reveal their conception—habitual ideal individual behaviour. The ancient Egyptians had a monistic idea for god that was internalised by every individual thus creating a system of internal equality despite the external inequality.

Keywords: ancient Egyptian mythology; predynastic; Old Kingdom

Introduction

Despite a deluge of information on ancient Egypt's gods, our knowledge about them is inadequate. Her gods are apprehended in language and archaeological remains; they are discernible in artistic images and described in texts, yet nothing is known about their nature or what the Egyptians thought these omnipresent beings were. The main aim of this study is to provide a satisfying answer to the following question: exactly what idea about god(s) did the ancient Egyptians—with their distinctive cultural conservatism—conceive and stabilise in the early stages of their state? Subordinate questions are: what are the essentials of an original Egyptian god's identity, how was their myth arranged to stabilise belief in the existence of gods, what basic principle constitutes the character of Egyptian gods, what are the essential qualities of an Egyptian god, and what cultural idiosyncrasy, if any, did their conception of god inspire?

The thinking behind this work follows Russell's (2009, 566–78) precedent for understanding what it is that an identifiable group believe about their gods, and the consequences of their belief. The reasoning is that across the designated timeframe, an idea for gods can be abstracted and consolidated into an essential nature. This nature can be filtered through the value structure of a representative individual. The result is an acceptably informed and stabilised conception about gods.

The focus of this study is a religious concept, as expressed through different forms of culture, namely language, archaeology, art, and literature. The goal is to find the original idea for an Egyptian god. This is therefore a qualitative study of a religious concept that was expressed in various evident forms. It is consequently focused on interpretation and meaning. Within the coherent philosophical framework, the various god features will be systematically approached through some of the fundamental schools of enquiry into any ancient Near Eastern mythological concept: linguistics, archaeology, iconography, philosophy, and psychology. This combination of archaeological and textual approaches should prevent the present study from the confirmation bias evident in Russell's (2009) work.

Our title is intended as an exploration of the original ancient Egyptian idea for a god spanning the time period ca. 3800–2135 B.C.E. The period is understood as a progression from prehistory (predynastic) through the initial formalisations (Old Kingdom) of the concepts that would be conserved as Egyptian culture. This acknowledges a characteristic of the ancient Egyptians: they were intellectual conservatives, who conserved what they believed had value. The sources are limited to the Hierakonpolis site, Narmer Palette, Memphite Theology, and The Instruction of Ptahhotep.

God Identity

Language

The word for god and its hieroglyph are *ntr* and ꜥ, respectively. Early scholars like Champollion—according to Hornung (1982, 34)—and Budge (1969, 64) thought the symbol was an axe, and, therefore, a representation of god using an axe as a symbol of Nietzschean power—man overcoming nature. Gardiner (1957) and Faulkner (1991) provide a variety of options. A flag, a cloth on a pole, a staff are all possibilities. Hornung (1982, 33–42) provides a list.

Gahlin (2014, 222) provides meanings and context. The symbol was highly valued. This is evidenced by its honorific transposition. However, another ideogram, ♂ *niwt* (city), had the effect of limiting what was inherent in ꜥ. The determinative effect of ♂ on ꜥ, combined with the idea that people like Imhotep and Amenhotep son of Hapu were deified in later periods refers to the idea of scholars like Budge (1969).

Production or creation, wisdom or charisma were requisite to deification regardless of representation. *ntr* and ꜥ signal divinity which, according to Meltzer (2014), is the main principle for god qualification. But divinity is just another word for the same broad idea. In consideration of accumulative scholarship, and the idea that people became gods through endeavour, actionable power is a better working definition.

Archaeology

Hierakonpolis was the first settlement that can legitimately be called Egypt because it presents the first signs of social dominance. Animal imagery for displays of actionable power are evident here. Archaeological remains are as close to the real experience as this study can claim to get.

Gods are perceived, not visible. Therefore, predynastic material expressions of actionable power were investigated. Hierakonpolis revealed socially supreme, historically inconspicuous elites, who made ostentatious displays of control over the natural world. The visual statements made by their manipulation of animals is consistent with the iconographic language used to communicate divinity. Friedman's (2011, 33–44) interpretation is this: the site's elite ran a centralised redistributive economy, they were revered through the ritualised idea that they could overpower and control the chaotic natural world; this religious concept was actionable in the real world and illustrated by their ostentatious maintenance of, and association with, statement animals.

In other words, they incorporated animals into their actual identity and used animal icons to represent themselves in an ideological narrative. In terms of identity, this suggests that predynastic elites could be perceived as the inconspicuous beings—conspicuous only through divine beast imagery—displaying varying degrees of actionable power and existing in a social hierarchy.

Concluding the archaeological level of resolution, what is evident about the actual perception of divinity is that a power narrative existed in the progression of material culture toward the 3100 B.C.E. watershed. Animal imagery was used as a representation of the actionable power of socially designated people.

Iconography

The creation of the unified state by the first god-king is abstracted in a sophisticated story depicted on the Narmer Palette. Instead of back-tracing myths, rituals, images, and language from later periods to presume an identity for the characters in the unification narrative, it would be more reasonable to use the predynastic's evident visual code.¹

The obverse shows serpopards overpowered and controlled to satisfy progressively urbane requirements—the cosmetic grinding primary function of the piece. The reverse has Narmer wielding the characteristic mace of the period above his overpowered enemy. The most consistent theme throughout the entire artistic arrangement is “conquest” (Kemp 2006, 84). And the conventional interpretation assumes that ideology is the driving force behind war and conquest.² But Hierakonpolis was primarily an economic success, and the temple itself functioned as the hub of a redistributive economy,³ so we can assume that the driving force behind unification was wealth-creation and control.

As an economic statement the scenes of conquest become threatening displays of actionable power in an economic hierarchy.⁴ The reverse depicts the king of Upper Egypt threatening violence and presented with control of Lower Egypt, which is represented by that region's characteristic resource—papyrus plants. The obverse shows him in control of Lower Egypt. The standards of the various regions are carried ahead of him while the people of those prostrate regions are systematically ordered in his line of vision. Vanhulle (2018) submits the predynastic boat icon as the indicator of an attentively “ordered social group” (Vanhulle 2018, 179). Narmer's size, in typically Horusian fashion, is indicative of his great vision—the ability to see further and oversee more than others.

The other divine beasts—represented by their various degrees of divinity—who are an invaluable contribution to the creation and control of the unified system could actually be a group of elites whose loyalty and active participation would be required to validate

1 Focusing on artefacts as the medium through which power messages were communicated, Morenz (2013) recognises that animal representations were part of a “highly formalized code, which included proto-writing” (Morenz 2013, 139).

2 Kemp (2006, 60–110) presents unification as violent proselytism for the sake of harmony.

3 As per Friedman's (2011, 33–44) interpretation.

4 Referring to the Scorpion mace-head scene, Engel (2013) notes the king's involvement in “large-scale agricultural projects” (Engel 2013, 21).

the emergent⁵ god-king of the state.⁶ That is to say, behind the curtain of this visual code, there are actual people who had a long-established practice of representing themselves this way. García (2013, 185–217) discusses just such hidden figures who evidently only become less discreet in the historical record around the end of the Fifth Dynasty—when they are unaccountably wealthy, and proudly inheriting control of provincial temples as well as agricultural and production domains.⁷ What García (2013) describes is an apparatus that involves regional intelligentsia who are loyal to the one god-king, in a similar way that the cooperation of local elites is a requirement for colonisers in order to legitimise a new state of affairs.

These proxies of the crown represented the royal central authority in the various productive regions. With local elites practising the established visual language of the predynastic, the use of bovine and falcon icons with various degrees of merged features may well represent the invisible regional ruling families whose initial obscurity would be essential to the success of the new bureaucratic system, as well as the relative stability and longevity of the Egyptian state. Therefore, when observing the actively engaged birds and overseeing bovines on the Narmer Palette, on both sides all activities are directed toward the visionary central authority. Meanwhile, the presence and activity of the other requisite high order beings can only be perceived through venerable animal images, a diversity of which, according to Engel (2013, 26–27), is depicted on administrative seals from the first four dynasties.

In consequence, there are three essentials for Egyptian god identification at the beginning of the state: actionable power, a perceived existence through animal imagery, and productivity.

God Existence

First Cause

Following god identity to its theological articulation we consider the Memphite text within simple reasoning. According to Russell (2009): “It is maintained that everything we see in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further you must come to a First Cause, and that First Cause you give the name of God” (Russell 2009, 568).

5 Frankfort (1948, 15–23) attributes semi-divinity to predynastic kings, and comments that they attempted to achieve what Narmer is credited with.

6 The highest conception of being at this starting point in Egyptian history.

7 In other words, they only become visible when—to conservatives—their wealth would be both justifiable and irreversible. Coincidentally, this is the historical period when the god-king’s power starts to wane under “increasing religious and economic pressures” (David 2007, 57). Assmann (2002) also acknowledges it as “a turning point in the understanding of the institution of kingship and a change in its structure of legitimacy” (Assmann 2002, 23).

The reason to doubt existence from this perspective is: why stop the regression at the god? First cause reasoning does not appear to have been beyond the imaginings of the author of the Memphite Theology, nor was the theological solution to the internal error. According to Lichtheim (2006, 51–67), competent Ptah caused everything, and everything is because Ptah made it so. But then, shouldn't Ptah have a cause?

This is dealt with when the text presents Ptah as the initial chaos of Nun and Naunet—primordial gendered parents. He is thus, self-created. This means that not only is his self-begotten nature explicitly accounted for, but the actual process of it is imagined through an acceptable human convention. Ptah, when imagined as primordial chaos, does not need a cause because the existence of original disorder is exempt from the rule. That is, by its nature, chaos does not need a cause. By this description, an inherent theological contradiction was reconciled in the structure of the myth.

The Memphite Theology's logic compensates for doubt. It may have been arranged for the occasion that Ptah should be examined through the ubiquitous mode of reasoning that would require his existence to have had a cause.

Moral

“One form is to say that there would be no right and wrong unless God existed” (Russell 2009, 571). The moral argument has the god's existence attached to correct thought and behaviour in humans.

The error, according to Russell (2009, 571–72) is this: with the god having created the difference, for the god there is no difference between them. For the creator god he cannot be described as good, which gods invariably are. The contradiction is that for the mightiest supreme creator god to exist by the reasoning that he made good and bad, and be described in those terms, another independent and greater concept would have to be presupposed but not directly acknowledged by the theologian.

Order versus disorder is the fundamental principle of Egyptian society. When chaos and order are moralised as they are in the text, and with human speculation in general, order is good, disorder is bad. The theology has Ptah generate a self-satisfactory order from his own thoughts. But Ptah also embodied disorder or chaos. Ptah therefore requires an independent superstructure to establish his moral value. For the theologian to make Ptah exist, as the creator of a good order which is more desirable than disorder, he requires an essentially independent moral standard. But in order that Ptah should remain “Ptah the Supreme God,” the anterior being should be axiomatic and unacknowledged (Lichtheim 2006, 54).

m³t (*maat*) in this theology operates as a domain in which Ptah exists to exercise justice and punishment, as well as distinguish between peaceful and criminal behaviour.⁸ This reasoning allows Ptah to exist simply because right and wrong behaviour exist.

Ontological

According to Russell (2004), “The ontological argument depends upon the distinction between existence and essence” (Russell 2004, 535). But it is the acknowledgement of distinction, definition, and description—master wordsmithing—that is significant when applying this model to the Memphite Theology.

The acknowledged improved version, the coherence, the lack of superfluity and very careful articulation of Ptah as an un-caused first cause and moral standard imply that his essence will be more cogently defined, described and delineated than assumed ambivalent perfection and its predicates. Ptah’s wordplay derived existence is more concrete and compensates for a more specific ontological question: how exactly does he fit into being?

The Egyptians envisioned him in entirely human form. And, as evidenced by the Hierakonpolis archaeology, when god and human identity are merged, that state of being is perceived as both in the natural world and in control of it—or outside of it—at the same time. Ptah’s being, as described in the text, is as pervasive as his method. He is, and is in,⁹ all the gods and men by means of his method—competence, cognition, and command.¹⁰ He can therefore exist in the habitable world he created, and exist outside and in control of it.

By coherently delineating Ptah, the theology, even by external standards of reasoning, espouses a specific dogmatic rule which intellectually stabilises his existence. A god, by Memphite Theology estimation, is a competent, cognitive, and commanding sovereign—with proxy forms.¹¹ The reverential ideology following this rule is that good behaviour is simply a matter of following a command or instruction from such a being or his proxy; consequently, there are three essentials, evident in the Memphite

8 It could be accepted that, to the author, *m³t* (*maat*) “was part of the cosmos as a constitutive principle; we might say, like physical reality, which it is not possible to deny” (Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004, 63).

9 “Thus heart and tongue rule over all the limbs in accordance with the teaching that it (the heart, *or*: he, Ptah) is in every body and it (the tongue, *or*: he, Ptah) is in every mouth of all gods, all men, all cattle all creeping things, whatever lives, thinking whatever it (*or*: he) wishes and commanding whatever it (*or*: he) wishes” (Lichtheim 2006, 54).

10 Wilson (1946, 31-121) elaborated Ptah’s self-created, thoughtful, and articulate method.

11 The other gods are conflated into Ptah.

Theology, that validate the existence of a being who was more perceived than observed in Old Kingdom Egypt: competence,¹² wisdom, and cogent speech.

God Character

The theology focuses on integrating the stereotypical story of Osiris, Horus, Seth, and Isis. It endeavours to clear the conceptual confusion that would result from the integration (or harmonisation, in religious terms) of a national economic and ideological system. In consequence, these gods are attributed an existence in service to and through Ptah.¹³ This condition is necessarily required to be tempered by the dignity of being a localised king. All Egyptians exhibit the competent behaviour of an archetypal king,¹⁴ with only minor qualitative differences, and the gods serve as exemplars of the behaviour to be imitated.

Osiris

Assmann (2001, 124) states, “Although Osiris was one of the most important deities, he was no ‘Supreme Being.’” And the Memphite Theology does not treat him as one. The state of being associated with death was his domain. “No other myth (or cycle of myths) was even remotely as intensely woven into the cultural life of ancient Egypt, or in so many ways” (Assmann 2001, 124). In short, the Egyptian god of productivity (or fertility, in religious terms), death, and a future transcendent state of being is also the most highly democratised god.

The text presents him as a defeated king but, with his body found by Isis and Nephthys at Memphis, he transcends his condition and is succeeded by Horus. “His son Horus arose as king of Upper Egypt, arose as king of Lower Egypt, in the embrace of his father Osiris and of the gods in front of him and behind him” (Lichtheim 2006, 56). In this way the author has Osiris as an essential but passive king in a state timeline. The personal transcendence of his condition is required to legitimise Memphis as a royal city and Ptah’s new system. Peterson (1999, 128–36), consolidating the Osirian cycle, presents this character psychologically, as the value of traditional thought¹⁵ in the personality of the whole state. For the individual personality living with the collective conscience that Ptah embodied, this element—the value of tradition—offers legitimacy and, in consequence, a passive acceptance of the subordinate condition. But it also offers

12 Although Ptah’s dominance, in this study, was derived from the theological refinement of actionable power into specifically inventive competence, the idea that competence in a specific domain can be perceived as power is deservedly credited to the psychologist, Dr Jordan Peterson (2018, 1–28).

13 Ptah as the “personality and social organization” of the state, embodied by the pharaoh (Peterson 1999, 135).

14 This is the unconscious archaic psychological structure that prevents a man from rebelling against a condition that he consciously associates with death.

15 Much like, for Anthes (1959), Geb is “the representative of the former kings” (Anthes 1959, 173).

hope for the future, in terms of the personal transcendence of a subordinate condition and a successor to one's characteristic domain.

Horus

Osiris—the antiquated father—remains in the underworld. The system is updated by his son and successor, Horus. According to Peterson (1999, 135): “This means that the hero/king who establishes, embodies and updates the social world is also the same force that establishes, embodies and updates the intrapsychic world, the *personality*—and that one act of update cannot necessarily or reasonably be distinguished from the other. In ‘improving’ the world, the hero improves himself; in improving himself, he sets an example for the world.”

With Horus as the hero/king, Peterson (1999, 135) continues: “It is incorporation of the ‘personality of the state,’ dominated by the figure of the hero that brings order to the inner community of necessity and desire, to the generative chaos of the soul” (Peterson 1999, 135). Otherwise stated: a heroic king colours the psychological mesh of the collective state as well as the individual mind that must act within that mesh.¹⁶ Thus the individual Egyptian is predisposed to imitate Horus. While Osiris embodied a legitimising past and therapeutic future idea for the inner condition of a subordinate, Horus embodies an existential meaning.

Seth

Assmann (2001, 134–41) presents Seth in general as the necessary antagonist for the protagonists. He is brother to both Osiris and Horus,¹⁷ which is to say, as Peterson (1999, 132–33) does, that Seth is the embodiment of the chaos that is active when tradition fails, and an upgrade is required in both the collective and individual psyche. This means that new ideas must be incorporated with the old so that chaos does not reign.¹⁸

However, Assmann (2001, 134–41) provides the idea of Seth as a competent—and even rightful—challenger for rule. That is, Seth behaves as a strong and rightful king with a valid claim. He is the embodiment of a failed hero king who is incorporated and integrated into another's vision, and in this way necessitates hierarchy in a combined system. The psychological integration of Seth provides value: “Values such as the overcoming of antagonism, the balancing of opposites, the reconciliation and uniting of contending parties, integration of portions, the achievement of an overarching whole,

16 This supports Anthes's (1959) inclination to present Horus as the template for the idea of a “universal god” (Anthes 1959, 188).

17 Another apparent contradiction which was noted by Anthes (1959, 174).

18 The conflict between Osiris, Seth, and Horus therefore provides the myth-based value structure of the ancient Egyptians, particularly regarding their characteristic—but not rigidly orthodox—conservatism.

the consolidation of rule in a *single* hand, and so forth, were a relevant evidence for Egyptians of all periods” (Assmann 2001, 139).

As derived from his local birth, Seth is a legitimate ruler. His right to rule, however, is superseded by Horus’s heroic king behavioural pattern. Consequently, based on Assmann’s (2001, 139) value estimate of Seth, his proper integration—rather than complete absence—in the Egyptian psyche at both state and individual level is essential to the maintenance of a stable, whole state of being.

Isis

Peterson (1999, 130) categorises Isis as a representation of the fertile potential of chaos, which is to say that, with Osiris’s death, chaos reigns, but Isis’s impregnation yields a new order through the endeavours of their son Horus. However, her self-impregnation implies that Isis herself is creating the new order. And her later activities during Horus’s struggles with Seth support the position that it is Isis’s competence, cognition, and command that provide Horus’s victories.

Casadio (2003, 254–59) acknowledges the unique complexity of Isis’s necrophilic and phallogocentric self-impregnation. In short: Osiris is dead and does not return from that state. He is castrated, passive, and subject to the exploitation of others. Although Casadio’s (2003, 258–59) evidence is from periods beyond the scope of this study, his opinion on the union of Isis and Osiris is a valid one. Though the logical progression of the myth extends from his phallus toward his successor, it presents her as the dominant partner, emanating actionable power while creating and controlling the new state of being. Casadio (2003, 257) even presents her animal imagery as dominant and above a prostrate Osiris. According to Peterson’s (1999, 128–36) general reasoning, this would represent Isis going into the chaotic underworld to create order for the posterity of the state through both past and future kings.

In short, Isis’s behaviour and character in the Memphite Theology is less archetypically wife/mother than it is hero/creator king. Overall, and accounting for her gender difference she is depicted as a sub-personality of the collective embodied by Ptah. In other words, she is a particularly vocal representation of the Anima.¹⁹

19 Peterson (1999, 430–31) elaborates on representations of the Anima, which is basically the feminine side of a masculine consciousness. Two aspects about Isis are certain regarding her as the Anima. The Memphite Theology provides both: the inherent water imagery, and her compulsory presence for the renewal or regeneration of the state.

The Archetype

All the gods are minor variations of a single shared archetype—Passive King, Hero King, Failed King, and Anima, consequently psychologically denying the hierarchical social structure. Each variant of this one personality of the state is king of his domain.

With the archetypal king as the basic principle of the character of each and every being in the state during this period the author has abstracted Ptah to the degree that this singular being is analogous to a motivational frame. From the heavenly king and personality of the state, the other gods derive their behaviour pattern. As a motivational frame for the behaviour of ideal beings like Osiris, Ptah provides a form of redemption for the individual's experience of castrating subordination during his life. Motivated by Ptah, acting in a manner consistent with his will and practising a localised level of divinity, the productive Egyptian follows the example of the co-opted gods and is therefore expected to have believed that he was doing something good and of the highest value. Thus, in Old Kingdom Egypt, acting out the belief that one could be a king of his own domain established character and made competent work its own reward.²⁰

Abstraction Through Values

The Instruction of Ptahhotep, as translated by Lichtheim (2006, 61–80), emphasises three values. These are assumed to be most important because they are repeated by the vizier, and their repetition implies a purpose.

Integrated Tradition

This value was revealed by Peterson's (1999, 128–36) psychoanalysis of Osiris in myth. At the collective level of the state, and at a personal individual level Osiris was central to the state of being Egyptian because he was basically a thumbnail representation for past success. Thus, Osiris is validation for any experience and guide for future action. From this myth-based idea the vizier begins his instruction. He describes himself as the past: a man who is broken down, and incapable of continuing normal activity. In his religiously phrased description, evil has won: "What age does to people is evil in everything" (Lichtheim 2006, 63).

What is required is an archetypal hero/king. "May this servant be ordered to make a staff of old age, (30) So as to tell him the words of those who heard, The ways of the ancestors, Who have listened to the gods. May such be done for you, So that strife may be banned from the people" (Lichtheim 2006, 63). However, the successor can only base his actions on integrating and imitating that which has already worked because

20 Thus, the inclination to admit, as Hornung (1992, 95) does, that "The Egyptians were the first to practice a Jungian psychology of archetypes and to recognise the fundamental restorative power of the unconscious."

although he is capable of acting, he is ignorant of success. “Said the majesty of his god: Instruct him then in the sayings of the past, May he become a model for the children of the great, (40) May obedience enter him, And the devotion of him who speaks to him, No one is born wise” (Lichtheim 2006, 63).

The last line of the prologue is sharp and direct about the value of integrated tradition. It validates the instruction and demands imitation as a collective future is the concern. The integrated tradition theme is ubiquitous throughout the body of the text and directly repeated in the epilogue: “A son who hears is a follower of Horus, it goes well with him when he has heard. When he is old, has reached veneration, He will speak likewise to his children, Renewing the teaching of his father. Every man teaches as he acts” (Lichtheim 2006, 75).

Social Cohesion and Individual Liberty

Russell’s (2004) understanding of social cohesion is of its antagonism toward “individual liberty” (Russell 2004, 3). This is the general understanding of social cohesion throughout Western thought: that the individual exists in society through a trade-off—part of the self must be conceded for the benefits of existing in the group.

Ptahhotep, throughout his text, repeatedly demands exactly this concession. “Don’t be proud of your knowledge, Consult the ignorant and the wise” (Lichtheim 2006, 63). Under the circumstance that one should be the dinner guest of a superior: “Do not speak to him until he summons, One does not know what may displease; Speak when he has addressed you” (Lichtheim 2006, 65). Frankfort (1961, 61) was correct to highlight a deeper understanding of the advice in this scene. The setting implicitly highlights personal ambition, eagerness and enthusiasm but explicitly demands their concession—particularly under the menial condition of dining.

During the most mundane of activities, there is a burden on the individual to exercise self-restraint. The cumulative result of this perpetual exercise is ultimate reward. The strength of Ptahhotep’s reasoning in these examples of compromising individual liberty for the sake of social cohesion at various levels of the social hierarchy comes from the conclusion that there is a direct personal gain to be achieved through the effort. This is not so much virtuous, as it is exceptionally pragmatic. In the two examples, wisdom and favour are respectively acquired by fitting in decorously with the socially superior, as well as those presumed ignorant.

Controlled Individual Expression

It stands to reason that without individual expression there is bound to be revolution. In a hierarchical system, appropriate behaviour and ideas cannot tilt too far in favour of the social ethic without redress from those affected relatively negatively. Disputes are inevitable, and personal gain is the disputant’s goal. According to Lichtheim (2006, 63–64), Ptahhotep details three levels of social disputation in which the solution is masterful

self-restraint. Regarding a superior: “Your self-control will match his pile (of words)” (Lichtheim 2006, 64). Against an equal: “You will make your worth exceed his by silence” (Lichtheim, 2006, 64). With a subordinate: “Do not answer him to relieve your heart” (Lichtheim, 2006, 64). He is not attempting to restrict free speech. Rather, as Frankfort (1961, 65–66) notes, Ptahhotep is preaching personal self-mastery. To overcome and control one’s own nature and natural instincts in the dispute is a display of power which ensures personal success.

The value of this self-control is often repeated in the text. But, because this would implicitly represent a breach of tradition from the myth-based value of democratised speech, Ptahhotep includes a clause. The right of the individual to express himself through speech is highly valued and evident in the three aforementioned levels of disputation, but: “Listen, if you want to endure in the mouth of the hearers, Speak after you have mastered the craft!” (Lichtheim 2006, 75).

Egyptian God Consolidated

God consolidated and outlined, from the language, archaeology, iconography, philosophy and psychology of Egypt across the predynastic and Old Kingdom periods indicates that the nature of an Egyptian god, as it is evidenced through all three levels of analysis (identity, existence, and character), is the nature of a king.

Abstraction Through Values

For Ptahhotep, integrated tradition, social cohesion, and controlled individual expression are the gold standard of being an Old Kingdom Egyptian. When the consolidated nature of a god is filtered through this subjective moral perspective, three specific points are cast in high relief. Their conception of god disseminated as wisdom has three axioms that are expected to be expanded into reality: identity that is an inherited and integrated condition, action that is consistent with the existent collective conscience, and strength of character that can substitute for social status.

Therefore, the state, a god, and the individual are perceived by their success rate in achieving the ideal expression of this behavioural sub-structure, which was evidently best exemplified in the form of the king and articulated in the form of Horus. This is the basis for the monistic implication, that Egyptian gods are variant representations of only one perceived behavioural sub-structure.

The nature of Egyptian gods and the specific value they have to Egyptians is that they are conceived from experience, outlined across time, and stabilised through speculative thought. Consequently, the individual Egyptian state of being was inextricably linked to their conception of their god and the integrity of their state. This is evidently the case for Ptahhotep.

It is therefore reasonable to make the statement: an Egyptian god is an intellectual outline of the best possible way for a person to act and represent himself in his immediate sphere of activity. That Old Kingdom Egyptians believed this to be true is evident in the *zeitgeist* of the period. Rather than a growing democratic inclination, Wilson (1946) specifically notes a growing: “individualistic ... trend throughout the Old Kingdom” (Wilson 1946, 98).

Conclusions

At every stage of analysis, the nature of Egypt’s gods was the nature of idealised individual human behaviour. Egyptian god was an outline of the best way for an Egyptian to act and represent himself in his world. This meant that Egyptian culture from her conception and through the Old Kingdom, acknowledged the integrity of the individual as the bedrock of collective order and prosperity.

Egyptian god as a behavioural axiom—more habit than belief—inspired an Egyptian cultural idiosyncrasy: internal equality—albeit, with an inevitable exterior inequality. The Egyptian individual not only imagined but aspired to be king of his domain through model behaviour. It was this level of considered and integrated thought that enabled their hierarchical state’s unparalleled longevity.

It is our opinion that this is an acceptably informed and stable conception. From this premise, further perceived contradictions in their mythology can be explored and resolved. By exploring the ritual form of a habitualised conception of god, for instance, or how natural but intelligible behavioural patterns fit into this premise, we may establish that there were no contradictions in Egyptian mythology—only our own incorrect premises.

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