

MONO-, PAN-, AND COSMOTHEISM: THINKING THE 'ONE' IN EGYPTIAN THEOLOGY

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That we may speak of Egyptian 'theology' is everything but self-evident. Theology is not something to be expected in every religion, not even in the Old Testament. In Germany and perhaps also elsewhere, there is a heated debate going on in OT studies about whether the subject of the discipline should be defined in the traditional way as "theology of OT" or rather, "history of Israelite religion".⁽¹⁾ The concern with questions of theology, some people argue, is typical only of Early Christianity when self-definitions and clear-cut concepts were needed in order to keep clear of Judaism, Gnosticism and all kinds of sects and heresies in between. Theology is a historical and rather exceptional phenomenon that must not be generalized and thoughtlessly projected onto other religions.⁽²⁾

If theology is a contested notion even with respect to the OT, how much more so should this term be avoided with regard to ancient Egypt! The aim of my lecture is to show that this is not to be regarded as the last word about ancient Egyptian religion but that, on the contrary, we are perfectly justified in speaking of Egyptian theology. This seemingly paradoxical fact is due to one single exceptional person or event, namely to Akhanyati/Akhenaten and his religious revolution.

Before I deal with this event, however, I would like to start with some general reflections about the concept of 'theology' and the historical conditions for the emergence and development of phenomena that might be subsumed under that term. The word 'theology' comes from Greek *theos* = God and *logos* = speech; it is first of all a discourse about god. For such a discourse to arise and to develop, several conditions must be fulfilled. First of all, there must be the context of a religion that is based upon the distinction between true and false.

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Such a religion is constantly concerned with delimitating the truth and establishing demarcation lines against inner and outer forms of wrongness. Outer forms are typically referred to as 'idolatry', 'paganism', 'unbelievers', 'atheism'; inner forms are called 'heresies', 'sects', 'witchcraft', and 'superstition'.⁽³⁾ This is the proper climate for theology to thrive. Secondly there must be a central question or problem such as, e.g., incarnation or the trinity in Christian theology. Nothing of this sort occurs in tribal religions or so-called 'natural' religions that were not founded but developed naturally out of more primitive forms. These religions are based on the distinction between pure and impure, or the sacred and the profane, but not on the distinction between true and false. The rites may be improperly done, but this is quite a different question. We must distinguish between orthopraxy relating to rites and orthodoxy relating to concepts and beliefs. Orthopraxy is universal, orthodoxy, on the other hand, is something rather special and exceptional. It seems to require a set or "canon" of normative texts, typically in written form. The distinction between true and false can only be established, transmitted and elaborated on the basis of written texts and in the form of written and oral commentaries. Theology implies writing to a degree that one should perhaps rather speak of "theography" (like "historiography"). It seems as if the distinction between true and false can not be maintained through generations without the means of normative texts and commentaries. For religious truth to be established in the form of orthodoxy there must be a "canon" and a culture of exegesis.⁽⁴⁾

Traditional Egyptian religion belongs to those religions which do not know any forms of orthodoxy based on the distinction between true and false. In such a religion, questions of ritual and purity are in the center rather than questions of theology such as monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, transcendence, immanence and so on. Normative texts defining and delimitating what had to count as absolute truth did not exist. The pyramid texts, for instance, prescribed what to recite but not what to believe. They were normative in terms of ritual correctness but not of conceptual truth. There was no problem in this, consequently there was no discourse. Traditional Egyptian religion was not concerned with establishing conceptual borders, neither against other religions condemned as "paganism" nor against internal deviations condemned as "heresy" or "superstition."

But there was Akhanyati, the "heretic king" who, in the middle of the 14th

c. and thus apparently for the first time in recorded human history overthrew traditional religion and established a new religion based on absolute truth and rejecting everything else as lie, falsehood and evil.⁽⁵⁾ This was no longer a question of mere ritual purity and correctness. Ritual mattered little in this revolution. What mattered was the nature of the divine and the anxiety not to worship false gods but exclusively the one, true, living sundisk. This event changed in a most radical way the state of religion in Egypt and established a climate where it makes not only sense to speak of Egyptian theology but where questions of theology were right at the center of religion and reality.

However, two qualifications have to be made concerning the notion of "theology". Firstly, there is no explicit rejection of the discarded tradition. Rejection is only negatively expressed by exclusion but not positively by explicit refutation. In the Gathas, the founding texts of Zoroastrianism, we find a very strong and explicit rejection of what was deemed to be wrong; the same (if to a somewhat lesser degree) occurs also in the Torah and in the Quran. Nothing of the sort do we find in the Amarna texts. But there are many traces of practical persecution. These were, indeed, drastic enough. The traditional cults and feasts were discontinued, the temples closed, the names and images of the gods destroyed, above all the name of Amun, which was erased wherever Akhenaten's militia could find it, the capital transferred, a new style introduced into language and representational art etc. These radical measures of persecution and innovation show beyond any doubt that the Amarna movement viewed itself as a new religion, absolutely incompatible with any continuation of traditional forms of religious life.

The silence of the texts concerning traditional religion is due to the fact that the new religion had no time to develop a tradition of its own. It lasted for merely 15 to at most 20 years. There was never a second and third generation to be educated in the new belief. Had there been more time, the few initial texts would inevitably have developed into a kind of canon and commentary where the rejection of false beliefs would have found strong and explicit expression.

The second qualification of the notion of theology with regard to Amarna religion concerns the indistinguishability between questions of theology and those of cosmology. The truth which Akhenaten sought to establish in the form of a new religion concerned first of all the nature of the universe. His primary insight or discovery or revelation was that everything depended on the sun. The whole of reality was to be reduced to the visible, that is, to the "here-and-now"

and everything that was not-here and not-now has to be excluded from the notion of reality. For reality thus defined there was but one and only source, origin and explanation which was the sun. The initial insight or "revelation", which induced Akhenaten to abolish traditional polytheism and to found a new religion based on the idea of divine unity and uniqueness was the discovery that not only light but also time are to be explained as manifestations of solar energy. Akhenaten understood and praised the sun as the source both of light and of time, generating light by its radiation and time by its motion. With this discovery, absolutely everything could be explained as workings, "emanations", "becomings" of the sun. In this system, the concept of "One" had not a theological, but a physical meaning: the One is the source of cosmic existence. There are no other sources besides this One, and everything can be reduced and related to it.

This truth is not a question of faith and fidelity such as the truth of Biblical monotheism. In the Bible, man is requested not to have other gods beside Yahweh in the same way as a wife is requested not to have other lovers beside her husband or a vassal not to form other alliances beside the one with his overlord. This is not Akhanyati's problem. His truth is a question not of faith but of cognition. In this respect, Akhanyati belongs more in the series of cosmological discoverers from Thales to Copernicus and Einstein than to the series of religious founders such as Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. However, he himself considered his discovery to be a theological one and drew theological consequences. He destroyed the temples, abolished the cults and banished the names of the traditional gods from the space of inscriptional memory. Therefore, Akhanyati's revolution cannot be reduced to natural philosophy as Jim Allen proposed some years ago.⁽⁶⁾

Cosmologically speaking, the question is about the one *arché* or principle of reality. Reality is defined as the totality of things visible and things existing. Everything visible is a creation of light and everything existing exists in time. That the sun is the source of light belongs to traditional knowledge. The revolutionary discovery was that the sun generates time as well. Theologically speaking, the question is about one god and many gods. Akhanyati's cosmological insight does not automatically preclude the assumption of many gods. The sun could be conceived of as the source of a reality comprising a host of other, if minor, gods. This seems to have been the position of what I have called the "New Solar Theology", a movement that arose under Amenophis III

some years before the ascension of Akhanyati and which continued to be influential after the fall of the Amarna religion. This movement did already away with the polytheistic conception of the solar circuit and viewed the sun god as the solitary source of life circulating around and maintaining the world to which, however, the gods belonged together with animals, plants and minerals.⁽⁷⁾ Akhanyati's position was a purely theological radicalization of this *New Solar Theology*, excluding the gods from the world. This position may rightly be called "monotheism". It not only states that there is only one god who is the creator and maintainer of all, but also holds that there is no other god among this notion of "all". Monotheism, pantheism and cosmotheism, the three notions appearing in the title of this lecture, are three different but related forms of conceiving the relationship between the "one" and the "all". Monotheism proclaims the Oneness of the Divine, pantheism proclaims the identity of the divine and the "all", and cosmotheism proclaims the identity of the divine and the cosmos.

So far, we have concentrated on the aspect of monotheism in which respect Akhanyati's theology can be compared to Biblical theology. Let us now ask for the other two aspects. In the Bible, pantheism and cosmotheism are explicitly rejected. The distinction between god and the world, creator and creation, is drawn in the most sharp and unambiguous way. The Amarna texts are very different in this respect. The link between god and world is not only conceived of and expressed as "creating" and "generating" (eg. *jrj* and *šhpr*) but as "transformation" (eg. *hprw*). Thus we read in the Great Hymn verses 100-102:

You make millions of forms (*hprw*) from yourself alone,
Towns, villages, fields,
Road and river.

The million forms of the visible world such as towns, villages, fields, road and river are explained as transformations of the sun made out of himself (and not out of some material stuff). We shall see that this concept of a *creatio ex Deo* (as opposed to *creatio ex nihilo* or *creatio ex materia*) will become most important in the context of post-Amarna theology. The Shorter Hymn relates the One and the Millions even more closely:

You are the One yet a million lives are in you,

To make them live. The sight of your rays
Is breath of life to their noses.⁽⁸⁾

The millions are not, or not only, out there in the world but inside god himself as they are inside everything existing. There is a strong pantheistic or immanentistic element in Akhanyati's monotheism, to use the language of 17th and 18th c. theology. The same applies to the aspect of cosmotheism. Akhanyati's god is not the cosmos, but a cosmic phenomenon or energy, in fact, *the* cosmic principle on which the whole cosmos depends. This god is called the living sundisk. He is not the invisible creator, but the overwhelmingly visible source of existence in and through light and time. Akhanyati's god is pantheistic and cosmotheistic in that he is more of an energy or a principle than of a person. He is a person only in relation to the king, not to the people. Never is he shown extending the sign of life to the noses of common people as he does to the king and queen. The life and existence which the millions owe to the sun cannot be converted into a form of personal devotion. For this reason, Akhanyati's religion shows the traits of what in the 18.c. came to be called "deism", rather than those of "theism", the belief in a personal God.

I would like to insert here a remark of a more general character. I am applying not only the term 'theology' to ancient Egyptian religion but even some of the terminology of Western theological and philosophical discourse as it developed during the 17th and 18th centuries. None might object that applying late Western concepts to early Oriental and African phenomena can only lead to disfiguration, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding.⁽⁹⁾ However, East and West, Africa and Europe, Early and Late are relative terms. We are not dealing here with the physical map of the globe but with a cultural map, that is, with the map of memory. Egypt belongs to Africa - in a cultural sense - to the degree that there was, or is, a tradition (or, 'memory') basing itself on ancient Egyptian concepts.⁽¹⁰⁾ The same applies to Europe. Egypt belongs to Europe to the degree that it plays a role in European traditions. Remarkably enough, this is true to a quite amazing degree, and not only after Napoleon and Champollion, but ever since Late Antiquity, right through the Middle Ages, with strong revivals in the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th centuries respectively.⁽¹⁰⁾ The very terms which I am using with respect to ancient Egypt such as monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, cosmotheism, deism, theism and so on arose in the context of those revivals and ancient Egyptian religion had an important part to play in these theological

debates.⁽¹²⁾ What I am trying to show in this lecture is the fact that there is some - however faint - continuity or red thread that runs through apparently very different traditions from Akhanyati and the Ramesside theologians via Egyptian Hermetists and Neoplatonists of Late Antiquity to Renaissance Hermetists and Neoplatonists and from them to 17th and 18th c. theologians, historians, philosophers, and that this continuity allows us to speak not only of Egyptian theology but also of monotheism, immanentism and so on with regard to ancient Egypt without committing too grave crimes of anachronism and misrepresentation.

We shall come back to this question at the end of this lecture. Let us now return to Akhanyati. After the death of the heretic king, the new religion disappeared completely from the surface of Egyptian culture. The Atonist temples and monuments were erased, the old temples were reopened, the cults reestablished, the priests reappointed. Everything looked like a complete return to traditional polytheism. With one exception: theology persisted, the theological discourse continued, hundreds of hymns were composed, some of them highly important theological treatises. The shock of Amarna led to a persistent change of Egyptian religion. It never turned into orthodoxy and never excluded any belief or practice as heresy. But theology remained as a central concern.

This was due to the persistence of a central problem. In the introduction, I identified two factors promoting the rise of theology. One is the distinction between true and false, the other the existence of a central problem. The first factor applies, at least to a certain degree, to post-Amarna religion, because Egypt went through the experience of something which must have been considered as extremely false and wrong. Although traditional religion even after Amarna never developed a set of normative texts, a culture of interpretation and an orthodoxy, the experience of religious wrongness sharpened its theological awareness. The second factor, however, applies fully to Egypt and much more so than to Israel. The problem of the 'One', the gods and the Universe, or the One, the many, and the All, which the Amarna religion had tried to solve in the form of an exclusive monotheism (i.e. by negating the many), remained and could not be solved just by erasing the new and restoring the old.

The solution which the post-Amarna theology found for the problem of the One, the Many and the All, was rather ingenious.⁽¹³⁾ The Amarna solution -

negating the many - was, of course, out of the question. For the Egyptians, the reality and irreducible plurality of the many was overwhelmingly evident. There was life and death, light and darkness, good and evil. Every monistic reduction of reality would fall short of providing the necessary semantic and pragmatic orientation for people to live, and act, and die in this complex world.⁽¹⁴⁾

Let us start with what I would like to call the 'One-million-formula'. It plays an important role in post Amarna theology. One of the most important Amun-Re hymns starts with the following invocation:

Hail, one who makes himself into millions,
Whose length and breadth are limitless!
Power in readiness, who gave birth to himself,
Uraeus with great flame;
Great of magic with secret form,
Secret ba, to whom respect is shown.⁽¹⁵⁾

Unusually enough, the God is not invoked by his names but as a hidden nameless power, for whom neither the divine name Amun (-Re) nor the description (usually translated as "god") appear sufficient. For this reason, circumlocutions are used such as "power," "uraeus," "great of magic" and, finally, what has to be regarded as the nomen ipsum of this concept of God, *Bꜣ* *štꜣ* "hidden *Bꜣ*." As a nameless and secret ba the god is unlimited and omnipresent. The forms in which his power manifests itself are the million-fold Totality.

The hymn uses a formula that appears very frequently with reference to this hidden, universal creator: "The One who made himself into a million." The problems presented by the interpretation of this formula can be summarized as follows:

(a) "the One": does the predication of "oneness" refer to the "aleness" of the primeval god before creation or to the all-oneness of god as manifested in creation?

(b) "who transforms himself": does this refer to the creation at the beginning or to the continuous emanation of the all from the one?

(c) "into millions": does this refer to the millions of gods or to the totality of living creation or, finally, a concept of 'All' (Greek *pan*/ Latin *omnia*)?

In order to make things a little clearer, let us introduce a distinction which,

with regard to Egyptian conceptions, may seem somewhat artificial because it is constantly (and deliberately) blurred in Egyptian texts: the distinction between a paradigm of creation and a paradigm of manifestation. Within the paradigm of creation, the formula of the One and the Millions refers to the primordial One who creates, generates or emanates out of himself millions of beings (*creatio ex Deo*). Within the paradigm of manifestation, on the other hand, the formula refers to the hidden One who manifests himself as millions of beings.

Erik Hornung has dealt with the meaning of this formula in his book which appeared in English under the title *God*. He relates the formula to the paradigm of creation and interprets it in a temporal sense. He regards

- (a) "oneness" as the condition of the god before creation;
- (b) the verbs describing the creation or emergence of the many from the one as a description of primeval creation;
- (c) the "millions" as the polytheistic divine world that represents existing reality.⁽¹⁶⁾

By and large, these views are supported by the texts, almost all of which refer to creation, specifying creation in the sense of *creatio ex Deo*. Occasionally, the temporal relationship between oneness and allness is also expressly emphasized by the additional statement that all gods emerged after the one. Therefore it is not a matter of disputing Hornung's doubtlessly correct interpretation, but of asking whether the formula, apart from its undeniable reference to creation (which introduces nothing new in Egyptian religious history), also implies a 'manifestational' concept of God. This is precisely the meaning of the Egyptian word "Ba". Whereas the lexeme *hprw* "transformation" which the Amarna texts had used for the relation of God and world is equivocal and may function in both paradigms, the word Ba is exclusively and unequivocally related to the paradigm of manifestation. One could even say that it is the Egyptian term for "manifestation". Ba refers to a hidden power animating a visible object, e.g. the divine presence residing in a cult statue, and it refers reversely to a perceptible phenomenon, e.g. the wind, as the "Ba", that is, the manifestation of an invisible deity, the god Shu.

The word "Ba" with reference to god is missing in the Amarna texts. Two explanations for this absence can be offered. One reason may be that it is deliberately avoided. The "ba"-relationship between god and world functions only in a polytheistic universe, because it refers to the relationship between the one and the many. Another reason may be that the application of the Ba concept

for god in the context of theology is an innovation of the post-Amarna age. The Ba concept and the paradigm of manifestation is, of course, deeply rooted in traditional Egyptian religion. But in the context of the theological discourse and with reference to the relationship between god and world, it appears only in texts dating from the Ramesside period. This is doubtlessly true for the expression $B^3 \text{ } \text{št}^3$ "secret Ba". There are some pre-Amarna instances where a god is called "Ba", but "secret, or hidden, or mysterious Ba" is definitely post-Amarna and the hall-mark of a new theology.

This theology can be explained as the Egyptian reaction to Akhanyati's monotheistic revolution. In opposition to Amarna religion, which emphasized the element "mono", the aspect of oneness, the Ramesside theology emphasizes the aspect of pantheism. However, the idea of Oneness is saved by introducing the paradigm of manifestation. The world comes to be seen not as the creation, but as the manifestation of the One. However, "not x but y" is not the adequate form to render the Egyptian concept; rather, it should read "both x and y". The paradigm of manifestation is not introduced in order to replace, but to complement the paradigm of creation. The overarching concept is the concept of transformation, eg. *hpr*. God creates the world by transforming himself into the world. Traditionally, this idea had been expressed in terms of creation. Amarna went a step further and emphasizes the aspect of transformation by privileging the term *hprw*. On the other hand, this transformation is fleshed out in terms of transitive creativity. Aton creates millions of *hprw* out of himself. Post-Amarna theology interprets the idea of transformation in the light of the manifestation paradigm. God as One is hidden, he is the $B^3 \text{ } \text{št}^3$, the unapproachable, unnamable, invisible, ineffable power not before, but within, behind and encircling the manifest and millionfold plurality.

Our hymn opposes the hiddenness and the boundlessness of god.⁽¹⁷⁾ This boundlessness is not predicated of the world, but of God to whom the hymn is addressed. Accordingly, God is the million into which he has transformed himself. In other texts, "Million" is stated to be his body,⁽¹⁸⁾ his limbs⁽¹⁹⁾, his transformation⁽²⁰⁾ and even his name: "'million of millions' is his name."⁽²¹⁾ By transforming himself into the million-fold reality, God has not ceased to be one. He is the many in that mysterious way, hidden and present at the same time, for which this theology is trying to grasp by means of the Ba-concept. A common text even goes so far as to describe god as the Ba (and not the creator) of gods and humans (that is, "the millions").⁽²²⁾

The One Alone who created what is,
The illustrious Ba of gods and humans.⁽²³⁾

The paradigm of manifestation and Ramesside Ba theology reach their high point in the ritual of the ten Ba's of Amun addressing each Ba with a specific hymn. Fragmentary representations of this ritual can be found in the edifice of Taharqa at the Sacred Lake in Karnak and in the Amun temple at el-Hibe in Kharga Oasis built by Darius I. Unfortunately, of the ten cantos only the first three have been preserved. But an introductory hymn names all ten of them so that the system as such is recognizable.⁽²⁴⁾ This theology uses the Ba concept with regard not to the unity of the hidden power, but to the plurality of its manifestations. The first five Ba's refer to the theory of the life-giving elements which is another Ramesside reaction to Amarna reductionism. Whereas Akhanyati tried to explain everything as dependent on the effect of the sun, its radiation and its motion, the Ramesside theologians develop the idea of light, air and water as three elements in which the life-giving power of the hidden God is manifest in the world.⁽²⁵⁾ In the ritual of the ten Ba's, the first pair of Ba's are the sun and the moon, which can also be explained as the right and the left eyes of god. Then come the Ba's of Shu and Osiris for air and water. The fifth is that of Tefnut, the goddess of the flaming uraeus snake. The theological interpretation is given in the hymn. Sun and moon represent not light, but time, which also appears here as a cosmic life-giving energy. Light is attributed to the Ba of Tefnut. Tefnut does not seem to ever have been a goddess of "moisture" as which she is conventionally explained. She is the "flaming one", the fire-spitting Cobra at the head of the sun god, the lioness personifying the heat and aggressivity of the African sun and thus the very contrary of "moisture". Her creation at the beginning of the world, together with her twin brother Shu, refers to the primordially of light which is also the meaning of the Biblical creation account where the creation of light comes first. The life-giving elements in the ritual of the ten Ba's are thus time, air, water, and light. All five Ba's wear the insignia of their cosmic manifestation on their head: sun, moon, sail, three water bowls, and torch respectively. Up to this point we find ourselves on familiar ground, even if this Pentad is otherwise not attested.⁽²⁶⁾

The second group of five Ba's takes us into theologically new territory. They represent five classes of living creatures. Hence, this theology distinguishes between cosmic and animal life. The five life-giving cosmic

elements are paired with five classes of life-endowed animate creatures: human beings, quadrupeds, birds, creatures living in the water, and creatures living in the earth, such as snakes, scarabs, and the dead. The ba of human beings has human form and is called "royal ka"; the ba of quadrupeds is lion-headed and is called "ram of the rams"; the ba for birds has human form and is called Harakhty; the ba of aquatic creatures has a crocodile head and is called "ba of those in the water"; the ba of terrestrial creatures has the head of a snake and is called Nehebka. The system is illustrated in the following table:

First Pentad:

<u>Ba</u>	"in his name"	function
<u>Ba</u> in the right eye	Re of every day	time
<u>Ba</u> in the left eye	full moon	time
<u>Ba</u> of Shu	remaining in all things	air, wind
<u>Ba</u> of Osiris	Eldest Nun	water
<u>Ba</u> of Tefnut	The one who awakes the whole	light

Second Pentad:

symbol	class	"in his name"
human	human beings	royal-ka
lion	quadruped	falcon
falcon	bird	Harakhty
crocodile	aquatic creatures	<u>Ba</u> of those in the water
snake	terrestrial creatures	Nehebka

This theology understands the "Ba's" of God not as the visible world in itself, but as a decade of mediating powers that animate and sustain the world. A magical text from about the same time period as the ritual of the ten Ba's of Amun counts seven Ba-manifestations of Amun:

The "Ba's" with seven heads ...

He is (embodies) the Ba's of Amun-Re, lord of Karnak, chief of Ipet-Sut,

The ram with sublime face, who dwells in Thebes.
 The great lion who generated by himself,
 The Great god of the beginning,
 The ruler of lands and the king of gods,
 The lord of heaven, earth, underworld, water, and mountains,
 Who conceals his name from the gods,
 The giant of millions of cubits,
 The strong ... who fixed the sky on his head,
 Of whose nose the air comes forth,
 In order to animate all noses,
 Who rises as sun, in order to illuminate the earth,
 Of whose bodily secretions the Nile flows forth in order to nourish every mouth... ⁽²⁷⁾

This text illustrates what I would call the cosmotheistic turn of post-Amarna theology. God is the hidden power manifesting himself in the world. The seven Ba's of God are a symbolic expression of the polytheistic universe as an "interface" between God and the world. Ba's, the god of the mask, embodies this interface. The world, however, with sky and earth, sun, air and water, appears as the body of the One. The visible cosmos is the body of a God animating it from within.

The origins of this cosmotheistic theology reach back to the post-Amarna period. Its mature state is reached in the time of Ramesses III.

In pLeiden I 350 dating from the time of Ramesses II we read in a hymn to Amun:

His ba is Shu (air),
 his heart is Tefnut (fire),
 he is Harakhte who is in heaven (sun).
 His right eye is the day (sun),
 his left eye is the night (moon),
 it is he who leads the "faces" on all ways (light).
 His body is Nun (water),
 it contains the inundation,
 which brings forth everything that is and preserves all that exists.
 His breath is the breath of life to all nostrils.

He determines the fate and prosperity of everyone.⁽²⁸⁾

In the Hymn of Ramesses III, the identification of god and cosmos has become even stronger:⁽²⁹⁾

Your skin is the light, your breath is the "fire of life" (*'nh*t),⁽³⁰⁾

all precious stones are united on your body.

Your limbs are the breath of life to every nose,

inhaling you brings life.

Your taste is the Nile,

people anoint with the radiance of your light-eye (...)

Coming and going is possible when you appear

as earth god

In the Berlin hymn to Ptah, we meet with the same concept of the Cosmic God:

for it is from your nose that the air comes

and from your mouth that the flood comes.

The "tree of life" grows upon you,

you make the earth green, so that the gods have more than enough,

as well as human beings and animals.

It is your light that makes them see.

When you set, the darkness comes.

Your eyes create light (...)

Your right eye is the sun,

your left eye is the moon.⁽³¹⁾

In a hymn from the tomb of Imiseba (TT 65, time R IX):

Your eyes are the sun and the moon,

your head is the sky,

your feet are the underworld.⁽³²⁾

We are dealing here with the origin of a conception of the divine which was to become supremely important in Late Antiquity: the "cosmic god", the supreme deity in Stoicism, Hermetism and related movements,⁽³³⁾

whose head is the sky,
whose body is the air, whose feet are the earth.
You are the ocean.⁽³⁴⁾

With this last quotation, we have already entered another time and another language. This text and many similar ones are in Greek and date from Late Antiquity. They belong to a syncretistic religion combining elements of Egyptian theology with Stoicism, Neoplatonism and various other influences. Its most explicit codification is to be found in the texts forming the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In spite of all these changes, however, the theological discourse continues and there is a remarkable constancy of questions and answers. The “pantheistic” motif of the One and the million appears in the Greek texts as the One and the All, *to hen kai to pan*, or *hen to pan* etc. and in a latin inscription for Isis as *una quae es omnia*. The cosmotheistic aspect is expressed in statements about the world as the body of God such as the oracle reported by Macrobius:

The celestial universe is my head,
my body is the ocean,
the earth is my feet,
my ears are in the ether,
my far shining eye is the light of Helios.⁽³⁵⁾

The monotheistic aspect is emphasized e.g. in other oracular formulae that typically proclaim particular gods to be one and the same together with other gods:

One Zeus, one Hades, one Helios is Sarapis.⁽³⁶⁾

One Zeus, one Hades, one Helios, one Dionysos,
One god in all gods.⁽³⁷⁾

In order to show the theological continuity of the discourse, it is sufficient to quote a famous Ramesside hymn to Amun:

All gods are three:

Amun, Re and Ptah; there is none like them.

He who hides his name as Amun,

he is Re (the sun) in the (sight of) the faces,

his body is Ptah (the earth).⁽³⁸⁾

Time is nearly over and I should hasten to come to a kind of conclusion. What I wanted to show is that there is a certain justification in speaking of theology with reference to ancient Egypt, that this theological discourse was centered around a set of problems which, in metalanguage, may be termed monotheism, cosmotheism, and pantheism, that it started with Akhanyati's revolution and that it continued well into Late Antiquity. What I would like to end with, is to show that this same discourse, now based exclusively on its latest stratum in the form of Greek and Latin texts, continued or rather re-emerged in the Renaissance and culminated in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is in this period that the three terms were coined that appear in the title of this lecture. "Monotheism" appears first in a text by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More in 1660 and becomes current only after the publication of John Bolingbroke's *Collected Works* in 1754⁽³⁹⁾, "pantheism" is used by John Toland, perhaps for the first time, at the end of the 17th century⁽⁴⁰⁾ and "cosmotheism" has been coined by Lamoignon de Malesherbes with regard to Pliny.⁽⁴¹⁾ These and many other authors used these terms in the context of a discourse in which ancient Egypt played an important role. Ralph Cudworth, another Cambridge platonist, reconstructed in his book *The true intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) what he calls the "Arcane Theology" of the ancient Egyptians as a kind of pantheistic monotheism on the basis of a collection of more than 50 quotations from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, from Classical authors and from inscriptions, all of them variations of the formula *Hen kai pan*. The philosopher George Berkeley identified to Hen or natura naturans with Osiris and to pan or natura naturata with Isis.⁽⁴²⁾ The famous inscription on the veiled image at Sais as recorded by Plutarch and Proclus was interpreted as another pantheistic manifesto of ancient Egyptian arcane theology. It read "I am all that was, is, and will be. No mortal has ever lifted my veil". It is moving to see theologians, philosophers and even poets such as Friedrich Schiller partaking in a discourse that continued the central issues of ancient Egyptian theology.⁽⁴³⁾ The discourse went on even after the decipherment of the hieroglyphs. Champollion himself spoke of pantheism and monotheism⁽⁴⁴⁾, Nestor l'Hôte, Emmanuel de Rouge,

Etienne Drioton and others believed in an esoteric monotheism, Hermann Junker subscribed to the theories of Pater Wilhelm Schmidt concerning original monotheism and Junker's image of Egyptian religion was influential for Geo Widengren.⁽⁴⁵⁾

It was Erik Hornung who, in his book on the one and the many (1971), exploded the idea of an Egyptian monotheism or pantheism and closed the theological discourse in what looked like a definitely final way. However, the red thread of continuity had not yet been discovered at that time that runs through the different periods of theological discourse and that connects, however faintly, even our modern interest in Ancient Egypt and our theological terminology with Akhanyati's original initiative. It is wrong to speak of Egyptian monotheism. Hornung is perfectly right in stressing this point. With the exception of Akhanyati, the Egyptians worshiped many gods. But it is equally wrong to call the Egyptians 'polytheists'. Polytheism is a polemical term. It exclusively belongs and makes sense in the context of a religion that distinguishes between true and false and that equates monotheism with truth and polytheism with error.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In a metaphorical sense, it may also apply to some trends of postmodern philosophy affirming pluralism and difference over against homogeneity and logical coherence. But there has never been any religion that developed an orthodoxy based on the idea of a plurality of gods and that defined itself as polytheism. In other words, there is no polytheistic theology, at least not in ancient Egypt, but I am pretty sure that this principle applies universally. Ancient Egyptian theology was certainly not monotheistic in any programmatic sense, but it was concerned with the problem of Oneness. This is what I wanted to express by the term "thinking the One". The Egyptian ways of "thinking the One", so forcefully started by Akhanyati, started a tradition that was totally different from Biblical or prophetic monotheism but that continued to fascinate theologians, philosophers and historians up to the present day.

Notes

(1) *Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?* = Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 10, Neukirchen, 1995.

(2) A typical representative of this criticism is, e.g., C.J.Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, Leiden 1967.

(3) I call these religions based on the distinction between true and false "counter-religions" in view of their critical potential and antagonistic force. See my forthcoming book *Moses the Egyptian. An Essay in Mnemohistory*, Harvard UP, Cambridge. Meanwhile, cf. my study *Monotheismus und Kosmotheismus. Ägyptische Formen eines "Denkens des Einen" und ihre*

europäische Rezeptionsgeschichte. Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften 1993.2. Heidelberg: Winter, 1993.

(4) Cf. J. Assmann, B. Gladigow (eds.), *Text und Kommentar*, München 1995.

(5) Cf. D.B. Redford, *Akhenaten, the Heretic King*, Princeton 1984; H.A. Schlögl, *Echnaton - Tutenchamun. Fakten und Texte*, Wiesbaden 21985; C. Aldred, *Akhenaten, King of Egypt*, London 1988; J. Assmann, Akhanyati's Theology of Light and Time. *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, VII 4, Jerusalem 1992, 143-176; Erik Hornung, *Echnaton. Die Religion des Lichtes*, Zürich 1995.

(6) James P. Allen, "The Natural Philosophy of Akhenaten", in: W.K. Simpson, ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, YES 3. New Haven, 89-101.

(7) Cf. Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom. Re, Amun, and the Crisis of Polytheism*, London 1995, 67-101.

(8) Sandman, *Texts from the time of Akhenaten*. Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca vol. 8. Brussels: Fondation Reine Elisabeth, 1938, 15.4-9; Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*. Zurich: Artemis, 1975 (=ÄHG) Nr. 91.54-56; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II*, Berkeley 1976, 92.

(9) Cf., e.g. David Lorton's criticism of my use of the concept "transcendence": "God: Transcendent, Dead, or Everything?", in: *GM* 140, 1994, 53-67. In this article, Lorton is blurring the very distinctions which I tried to work out in *Re und Amun* (1983) = *Egyptian Solar Religion* (1995) in his effort to establish the distinction between "Amun-Re versus St. Thomas Aquinas".

(10) As far as Africa (and not Martin Bernal) is concerned, there is very little. One might think of Sheikh Anta Diops imaginative attempts to establish etymological connections between Ancient Egyptian and various Bantu languages, cf. the pamphlet by Leonhard Harding and Brigitte Reinwald (eds.), *Afrika - Mutter und Modell der europäischen Zivilisation? Die Rehabilitierung des Schwarzen Kontinents durch Cheikh Anta Diop*, Berlin 1990.

(11) The most important work on the reception history of ancient Egypt is by Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition*, Copenhagen: Ced Gad Publ., 1961 = Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993. Cf. also the works by Siegfried Morenz, *Die Zauberflöte. Eine Studie zum Lebenszusammenhang Ägypten - Antike - Abendland*. Münster-Köln: Böhlau, 1952 and *Die Begegnung Europas mit Ägypten. Mit einem Beitrag von Martin Kaiser über Herodots Begegnung mit Ägypten*, Zürich-Stuttgart: Artemis, 1969.

(12) Cf. Francis Schmidt (ed.), *L'Impensable polytheisme: études d'historiographie religieuse*. Textes rassemblés et présentés par Francis Schmidt. Paris: Editions des archives contemporaines, 1988, and my forthcoming book on *Moses the Egyptian*.

(13) For the following, I refer the reader to my book *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*.

(14) The irreducible pluralism of Egyptian worship has been pointed out in very convincing terms in the seminal book by Erik Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen*, Darmstadt 1971 = *Conceptions of God*, Ithaca 1982.

(15) pMag. Harris, Section G see *Egyptian Solar Religion*, 147-149.

(16) *Der Eine und die Vielen*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971. Trans. John Baines: *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982, 170.

(17) On the concept of the "limitlessness" of god cf. "who concealed himself, whose limits cannot be attained" pLeiden I 344 vso ii, 8-9, Jan Zandee, *Der Amunshymnus des Papyrus Leiden I 344, Verso*, 3 Vols. (Brill: Leiden, 1992), 120-126. Cf. pBerlin 3049, 16, 6 and Urk VIII, 116: "whose circuit has no limits."

(18) pLeiden I 344 vso. III, 2-3 = Zandee, *Amunshymnus*, 168-176.

(19) Emile Chassinat, *Le temple d' Edfou* vol. 3 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1928) 34.9-10.

- (20) *hprw.f m hhw*: stela of Ramesses III = Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions* vol. 6 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969) 452.8.
- (21) Urk VIII §138b = Kurt Sethe, *Thebanische Tempelinschriften aus griechisch-römischer Zeit*, ed. Otto Firschow (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957) 110. Of Yahweh, on the contrary, it is said: "One' is his name" (Zekh. 14:9).
- (22) On this meaning of *hhw* cf. my *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern* (Theben I) (Mainz, 1983), text 149(c).
- (23) Hymn to the primeval god in the "Livres que mon fleuret" in pBerlin 3030 VIII-IX; pLouvre 3336 I. 1-16; pBrussels published by Louis Speelers, *Rec. Travaux* 39 (1917), 28ff.
- (24) J. C. Goyon, in R.A. Parker, J. Leclant, and J. C. Goyon, *The Edifice of Taharqa* (Hanover and London: U of New England P, 1979) 69-79; 40-41; pl.27. Cf. *ÄHG* no. 128. A parallel demotic text has been published by M. Smith, *Enchoria* 7 (1977), 115-149.
- (25) Cf. *Egyptian Solar Religion*, 178-189.
- (26) An illustration of the otherwise largely unpublished representation of the 10 ba's of Amun in the crypt of the Ptolemaic Opet Temple at Karnak may be found in Claude Traunecker, *Les dieux de l'Égypte, Que sais-je?* 1191 (Paris: Seuil, 1992) 97 fig. 8.
- (27) Serge Sauneron, *Le Papyrus Magique Illustré de Brooklyn*. Wilbour Monographs III (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1970) 23 Tf. IV, fig. 3. (facing p.13).
- (28) *ÄHG* Nr. 141.
- (29) OIP XXV, pl.23; *ÄHG* no.196.
- (30) Cf. Urk VIII 1g, Sethe, *Amun* § 202.
- (31) *ÄHG* Nr. 143, 111-124.
- (32) STG Nr.88, p.124f.
- (33) A.J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste II: Le dieu cosmique* (Paris, 1949).
- (34) R. Merkelbach, M. Totti, *Abrasax. Ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts* I (Opladen, 1990), 136f., cf. ibd., 127-134 for similar greek texts and for their striking parallels with Ramesside theology.
- (35) Macrobius, *Saturnalia* I 20, 16-17; R. van den Broek, in *Hommages à Marten J. Vermaseren*, EPRO 68.1 (Leiden, 1978), 123-141; Merkelbach, loc.cit., 129f.
- (36) Martin Nilsson, *Grundriß der Griechischen Religionsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1974) vol. II, 573f.
- (37) Ps. Just. *Cohort. ad Gent.* 15 = Orph.fr. 239. Macrobius, *Sat.* I 18.17 quotes the first verse.
- (38) *ÄHG* Nr. 139.
- (39) R. Hülsewiesche, "Monotheismus", in: K.Gründer, J.Ritter (Hrsg.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* 6 (1984), 142-146; F. Schmidt, "Naissance des polythéismes (1624-1757)", in: *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* 59, 1985, 77-90.
- (40) See Robert Rees Evas, *Pantheisticon. The Career of John Toland*. New York/Bern/Frankfurt/Paris: Peter Lang, 1991.
- (41) In his edition of *Pliny the Elder's Natural History* [original: Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*] (1782), he commented on one of the most typical passages of this religion — *mundum, et hoc quodcumque nomine alio coelum appellare libuit, cujus circumflexu teguntur cuncta, numen esse credi par est* — with the proposal to call Pliny "non un Athée, mais un Cosmo-théiste, c'est à dire quelqu'un qui croit que l'univers est Dieu." See Emmanuel J. Bauer, *Das Denken Spinozas und seine Interpretation durch Jacobi* (Frankfurt/Bern/New York/Paris: P. Lang, 1989) 234ff.
- (42) George Berkeley, *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tar Water*, (2nd. ed. London: 1744) 144. I would like to thank Dana M. Reemes who drew my attention to this book.

- (43) See my *Moses the Egyptian* (forthcoming).
- (44) Cf. J. Yoyotte, "Champollion et le panthéon égyptien", in: *BSFE* 95, 1982, 76-108.
- (45) Cf. the excellent survey of Jorgen Podemann Sorensen, "Major Issues in the Study of Ancient Egyptian Religion", in: *Temenos* 30, 1994, 125-152.
- (46) Gregor Ahn, "'Monotheismus' - 'Polytheismus'. Grenzen und Möglichkeiten einer Klassifikation von Gottesvorstellungen." *Mesopotamica - Ugaritica - Biblica. Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof*. Eds. M. Dietrich, and O. Loretz. Kevelaer-Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1993. 1-24.