

# Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 & 2 and Egyptian Cosmology\*

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Any serious study of Genesis 1–2 must include careful and critical use of other ancient near eastern cosmologies. Since its publication in 1876 by George Smith, *Enuma Elish* has enjoyed widespread application in the study of Hebrew cosmology. In fact, many Old Testament scholars were quick to conclude that Genesis exhibited some sort of literary dependence on *Enuma Elish*. Even more recent commentators, such as Speiser<sup>1</sup> speak of Genesis embodying “Mesopotamian conclusions” and “dependence of Primeval history on Mesopotamian prototypes.” Vawter<sup>2</sup> believes that the author of Genesis was “acquainted with the creation-myths of the polytheistic religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia.” He then suggests that there are even hints in Genesis that the author was “consciously opposing his account to the Babylonian account.”<sup>3</sup> The apologetic or polemical nature of Genesis 1–2 cannot be denied.

From the end of the 19th century and up to the present, Old Testament scholars have maintained that Genesis 1–2:4 was the product of the priestly writers (P) from the exilic or post exilic period.<sup>4</sup> If Genesis 1–2:4 were written during the Jewish exile, this would

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The following abbreviations are used throughout this article:

- BD Book of the Dead.  
BDB Briggs, Driver & Brown, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*.  
CDME R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1962).  
CT Coffin Texts, all references from A. de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Vols. I–VII).  
EE *Enuma Elish*.  
MT Memphite Theology.  
PT Pyramid Texts, all references from K. Sethe, *Die Altägyptischen Pyramidentexte* (Vols. I–II).  
Urk. IV *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, pp. 1–1226 (K. Sethe).  
Wb. Erman & Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptische Sprache* (Vols. I–V).

1 E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (New York, 1964), LV.

2 B. Vawter, *A Path Through Genesis* (New York, 1956), 38.

3 Vawter, *A Path Through Genesis*, 38.

4 Speiser, *Genesis*, XXVf. and J. Tullock, *The Old Testament Story*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1981), 40.

provide an excellent opportunity for the writer(s) to be familiar with and/or react against Babylonian mythology. However, Davidson<sup>5</sup> has argued that

Although Genesis 1–2:4 is usually assigned on literary grounds to the P source, it is difficult to believe that this doctrine of the relationship between God and the world is a late post-exilic discovery.

He goes on to state that from the time of Israel's settlement in Canaan (late 13th century) there was the need for a "Comprehensive Insurance Policy against the seductive powers of Canaanite religion." The best way to deal with this problem was a doctrine of creation.<sup>6</sup>

To Davidson's observation, we might add that there is growing evidence from linguistic and grammatical perspectives<sup>7</sup> as well as on socio-religious grounds<sup>8</sup> that the exilic or post-exilic date for P, as it has been accepted since the end of the 19th century, is open to question. While Zevit offers a *terminus ad quem* of 586 B.C. for P, Rendsburg feels it should be dated at the same time as J and E (i.e., the time of David).

Also problematic for the traditional dating of P is that within prophetic literature of the 7th and 8th centuries, when creation is mentioned (e.g., Jer. 4:23–26; Zeph. 1:2–3; Hos. 4:3) the terminology of Genesis P is present.<sup>9</sup> Holladay<sup>10</sup> observed that terminology of J and P creation material is found in Jer. 4:23, 25. The fact that Hosea is a northern prophet, Zephaniah from the south, and Jeremiah from a northern tribe with southern loyalties, and that they should all be familiar with P (and Jeremiah with J and P) leads Deroche<sup>11</sup> to say: "it must be concluded that it (P) was an important and popular narrative. Hence, the evidence suggests that some major revisions in the understanding of the development of the priestly standard, and of the Pentateuch as a whole, are desperately needed."

In the past several decades a number of Assyriologists who have studied the Babylonian creation story have rejected any possible connections between Genesis and Enuma Elish. Among these are W. G. Lambert,<sup>12</sup> Millard,<sup>13</sup> and earlier Kinnier Wilson<sup>14</sup> and Heidel.<sup>15</sup> Despite the conclusions of these Assyriologists, most Old Testament scholars continue to uphold the Mesopotamian connections.

In all the debate over the possible connections between Babylonian mythology and Genesis, there has been very little consideration given to literary influence from Egypt. In the past this has been true in Old Testament studies in general. The tendency has been to

5 R. Davidson, *Genesis 1–11* (Cambridge, 1973), 14.

6 Davidson, *Genesis 1–11*, 14–15.

7 A. Hurvitz, "The Evidence of Language in Dating the Priestly Code—A Linguistic Study in Technical Idioms and Terminology," *RB* 81 (1974), 24–36; idem, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris, 1982).

8 Z. Zevit, "Converging Lines of Evidence Bearing on the Date of 'P'," *ZAW* 94 (1982), 481–511.

9 W. L. Holladay, "The Recovery of Poetic Passages of Jeremiah," *JBL* 85 (1966), 409; M. Deroche, "Zephaniah 1:2–3: The 'Sweeping' of Creation," *VT* 30 (1980), 104–7; idem, "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea," *VT* 31 (1981), 407–8.

10 Holladay, "Recovery," 408.

11 Deroche, "Reversal," 408.

12 W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *JTS* 16 (1965), 287–300.

13 A. R. Millard, "A New Babylonian 'Genesis Story,'" *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967), 3–7, 16–18.

14 J. V. Kinnier Wilson, in D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* (New York, 1958), 14.

15 A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago, 1942), 82–140.

look to Mesopotamia or Ugarit for such affiliations. R. J. Williams,<sup>16</sup> in his very important article “A People Come out of Egypt: An Egyptologist Looks at the Old Testament,” suggests a reason for this proclivity:

By the very nature of their training, Old Testament scholars are more likely to have acquired a first-hand knowledge of the Canaanite and cuneiform sources than they are to have mastered the hieroglyphic and hieratic materials from Egypt.

As early as 1887, in his *Hibbert Lectures I*, A. H. Sayce<sup>17</sup> believed that he had detected influences from Egyptian sources in Genesis 1–2. He bemoaned the fact that scholars were giving excessive attention to Enuma Elish.

In 1905 Hugo Gressman<sup>18</sup> identified Egyptian influences on Israelite religion. In the area of Wisdom literature, there has been little doubt of the Egyptian influence.<sup>19</sup> The extremes of using Egyptian sources in Old Testament study are evident in the writings of Yahuda.<sup>20</sup> While he makes some helpful observations, he displays the danger of tending toward “pan-Egyptianizing” the Hebrew text—an approach this study must avoid. On the other hand, the Egyptian material must not be overlooked. Cyrus Gordon<sup>21</sup> has recently chided Old Testament scholars for doing just that.

One problem that needs to be addressed here, at least briefly, is “What was the nature of Egyptian influence on the Hebrew writers?” There are extremely few cases where direct borrowing of an Egyptian literary work (or for that matter any other near eastern literature) can be demonstrated. The best example where this can be shown with some certainty is Amenemope and Proverbs 22:18ff.<sup>22</sup> Most of the influences from Egypt come by way of diffusion of ideas and motifs, often by artistic objects. This point has been convincingly made by Giveon,<sup>23</sup> and it has been followed more recently by this writer.<sup>24</sup>

In the area of Egyptian cosmology, there have been few serious attempts to investigate possible literary connections with the Old Testament. One can cite several reasons for this. First, the nature of Egyptian sources is partially to blame. The “Memphite Theology” (MT) is the best known Egyptian creation-text. It remains the largest cosmological treatise in Egyptian literature. Apart from MT the material is scattered about in mortuary literature

16 R. J. Williams, “A People Come Out of Egypt: An Egyptologist Looks at the Old Testament,” *VTS* 28 (1975), 231–32.

17 A. H. Sayce, “The Egyptian Background of Genesis I, in *Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith* (London, 1932), 419; idem, *The Hibbert Lectures 1887* (London, 1887), 267ff.

18 H. Gressman, *Der Ursprung der israelitische-jüdischen Eschatologie* (1905), 238ff.

19 For a recent review of the literature on the subject see R. J. Williams, “The Sages in Recent Scholarship,” *JAOS* 101 (1981), 1–19.

20 A. S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation Egyptian* (London, 1933); idem, *The Accuracy of the Bible: The Stories of Joseph, the Exodus and Genesis, Confirmed and Illustrated* (London, 1934).

21 Gordon, “Khnum and El,” 203.

22 R. J. Williams, “The Alleged Semitic Original of the Wisdom of Amenemope,” *JEA* 47 (1961), 100–6.

23 R. Giveon, *The Impact of Egypt on Canaan, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 20 (1978).

24 J. K. Hoffmeier, “Some Egyptian Motifs Related to Warfare and their Old Testament Counterparts,” in Hoffmeier and E. S. Meltzer, eds., *Egyptological Miscellanies, Ancient World* 6 (1983), 53–70. Here reference might be made to H. Frankfort’s little article in the Frazer Lecture series “The Problem of Similarity in Ancient Near Eastern Religions,” (Oxford, 1951). He warns that in comparative studies it is easy to misinterpret evidence and confuse the survival of a symbol in consecutive cultures with dependence that is contemporary.

(PT, CT, BD, etc.), hymns, and even Wisdom texts. S. Morenz<sup>25</sup> has commented on this predicament:

... we have an abundance of more or less scanty references in the most varied texts which give us very disjointed information about Egyptian notions concerning God the creator and the evolution of the world.

Therefore it is difficult to study Egyptian cosmology and impossible to say that any view was "the Egyptian" dogma.

Second, since Old Testament scholars for the most part have concluded that the connections are to be traced to Babylonia, and Genesis 1–2:4 is to be dated to the exilic period, there would be no advantage of pursuing such an investigation. However, in light of the above-mentioned studies of the date of P, the exilic-Babylonian context for P must be reassessed.

Third, if an Old Testament scholar were interested enough in Egyptian cosmology, he might begin his research by looking at secondary sources that would deal with Egyptian cosmology. Should he consult Wilson's<sup>26</sup> essay in *Before Philosophy* he might be discouraged from going beyond the opening paragraph of the section dealing with "cosmogony." There Wilson<sup>27</sup> says:

It is further to be noted that it is easier to observe close parallels between the Babylonian and Hebrew accounts of the genesis than it is to relate the Egyptian accounts to the other two. Within the broad area of general developmental similarity in the ancient Near East, Egypt stood slightly apart.

In the pages following this statement Wilson goes on to discuss a number of important Egyptian concepts and texts which appear to suggest quite the contrary.

The present study will consider from an Egyptological standpoint three aspects of Genesis 1:1–13: A. the conditions of the cosmos at the beginning of God's creative work; B. the initial acts of creation; and C. an examination of man's creation.

A. In Gen. 1:1 *berē'sīt* is the word used to describe the "beginning" of God's creative activity. The root of the word is *rō'š*, which literally means 'head'.<sup>28</sup> The Egyptian expression used to refer to primeval time or the beginning of the creation process is *sp tpy*,<sup>29</sup> 'first occasion' or time of creation.<sup>30</sup> The root of *tpy* comes from *tp*, which literally means 'head'.<sup>31</sup> The terminology, while not etymologically related, is related conceptually.<sup>32</sup> In both traditions creation marked the beginning of time.

In Gen. 1:2, four cosmic phenomena are mentioned that are apparently present when creation formally begins. These are *tōhū wāvōhū*—usually understood as a hendiadys meaning "trackless waste, emptiness, chaos";<sup>33</sup> *hōšekh* is 'darkness', 'obscurity';<sup>34</sup> *tehôm*

25 S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. A. Keep (Ithaca, 1973), 160.

26 J. Wilson, "The Nature of the Universe," in H. Frankfort, et al., *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore, 1946), 59.

27 Loc. cit.

28 *BDB*, 910–11.

29 *Wb.* III, 438.

30 *CDME* 222.

31 *Wb.* V, 263.

32 Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch*, 122–23.

33 Speiser, *Genesis*, 3; *BDB*. 1062.

34 *BDB*, 365.

is the 'primeval sea', 'the deep';<sup>35</sup> and *rū<sup>a</sup>ḥ 'elōhîm* is 'the spirit of God', or 'mighty wind'.<sup>36</sup> Much has been made of *tehôm* because it is cognate with Tiamat, the monstrous primeval sea of Enuma Elish out of which the other gods emerged and who was defeated by Marduk, the hero of the story.<sup>37</sup> But Tiamat is merely the goddess who personifies "the primeval sea."<sup>38</sup> This is clear since *thm* is found both at Ugarit<sup>39</sup> and most recently in the Ebla texts where it apparently means "the deep," and is also used in a mythological context.<sup>40</sup> In Enuma Elish (IV, 92ff), Tiamat and Marduk engage in a tremendous struggle at which the latter ends up the victor. There is no evidence of such a struggle in Genesis.<sup>41</sup>

In the Coffin Texts (Spells 75–80) mention is made of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad. The eight are made up of four cosmic forces and their consorts—Nun, Hehu, Kehu, and Amun, frequently called "the chaos gods."<sup>42</sup> Wilson<sup>43</sup> has seen what he calls "similarities" between these four and the primeval forces of Gen. 1:2. Hehu and Amun are thought to be "boundlessness and imperceptibility" and are "rough parallels, to *tohu wawohu*" and Kehu and Nun "are clearly similar to the Hebrew *ḥosekh al-penei tehom*." A slight refinement of Wilson's position might be suggested:

Nun = *tehôm*  
 Keku = *ḥōšekh*  
 Hehu = *tōhû wāvōhû*  
 Amun = *ru<sup>a</sup>ḥ 'elōhîm*

The equation of the first two present no problems.<sup>44</sup> Hehu is perhaps the least known of the four. Hehu is derived from the root *ḥḥ* which means 'millions',<sup>45</sup> hence the idea of infinity or 'Boundlessness'.<sup>46</sup> This last meaning brings us close to the idea of "formless."

Manfred Görg<sup>47</sup> has recently argued that the etymology of *tōhû wāvōhû* may be rooted in the Egyptian words *thy* and *bh*. The former means 'go astray'<sup>48</sup> and the latter 'to flee'.<sup>49</sup>

35 BDB, 1064.

36 G. von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. J. Marks (Philadelphia, 1961), 47.

37 Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 32ff.

38 K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Exeter, 1977), 26. E. L. Greenstein (*Journal of Reform Judaism* 29 [1982], 84) has further argued that ancient Israelites would not have been likely to identify *tehôm* and Tiamat on phonological grounds.

39 C. H. Gordon, *UH* (1955), 276.

40 G. Pettinato, "The Royal Archives of Tell-Mardikh-Ebla," *BA* 29 (1976), 50. It should be pointed out that the exact reading of this word is by no means certain. For the mythological context see Pettinato, *Archives of Ebla* (New York, 1981), 259.

41 U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem, 1944), 36–39.

42 K. Sethe, *Amun und die acht Urgötter von Hermopolis*, *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Academie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin, 1929); H. Frankfort, *The Kingship of the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), 154–55; R. O. Faulkner, "Some Notes on the God Shu," *Jaarbericht ex Oriente Lux* 18 (1959), 267–68.

43 Wilson, "The Nature of the Universe," 61.

44 Loc. cit.; Frankfort, *Kingship of the Gods*, 154–55. For some reason, which is unclear to me, Frankfort equates Kuk with "the Illimitable and the Boundless" and Huh with "Darkness and Obscurity" (cf. p. 155). Kuk is derived from *kkw* which means 'dark' or 'darkness' (*Wb.* V, 142 & *CDME* 287), and it survives into Coptic, having the same meanings, as *kake*<sup>s</sup> and *xaki*<sup>b</sup> (*Wb.* V, 142).

45 *Wb.* III, 152.

46 Wilson, "The Nature of the Universe," 61.

47 M. Görg, "*tohu wawohu*—ein Deutungs-Vorschlag," *ZAW* 92 (1980), 431–34; Görg, "Zur Ikonographie des Chaos," *Biblische Notizen* 14 (1981), 18.

48 *Wb.* V, 319.

49 *Wb.* I, 467

He points to Egyptian iconographic evidence to explain his suggestion.<sup>50</sup> When the Pharaoh charges into battle firing his arrows and they go astray (*thy/ṯ*), then the enemies would flee (*bhṯ*). This of course would mean that chaos would prevail, for the very presence of Egypt's enemies would upset the cosmic order characterized by *mṯ't*, which it was the Pharaoh's duty to uphold.<sup>51</sup> While Görg's suggestion is ingenious, and may be correct, it seems that more linguistic evidence is desirable to substantiate a relationship between Egyptian and Hebrew words and the concepts they embody.

The picture portrayed in both Egyptian and Hebrew cosmology is that of a cosmos without "form," hence, chaos. This seems to be the meaning of *tōhū wāwōhū* in Gen 1:2. In the Coffin Texts (II, 4–6) *tnmw/tnmw* is also used to describe this condition.<sup>52</sup> It is sometimes rendered "gloom" and "abyss."<sup>53</sup>

The traditional translation "the Spirit of God" for *ru<sup>ah</sup> 'elōhīm* has been seriously questioned in recent years, and studies by Orlinsky<sup>54</sup> and Luyster<sup>55</sup> have convincingly shown that "wind of God" or "mighty wind" (cf. the N.E.B. which understands *'elōhīm* in the superlative sense) is to be understood. Luyster<sup>56</sup> concludes that the wind is "the instrument by which his will, whatever it may be, is executed." Well known examples of this can be found in the Genesis flood story where God sends a wind to push back the flood waters (Gen. 8:1) and in the story of the escape of Israel through the "sea of reeds" when the water is parted by a God-sent wind, and then a blast from God causes the sea to return to its natural form (Ex. 14:21–22/15:8–10). Amun might be paralleled by *ru<sup>ah</sup> 'elōhīm* since Amun originally was the god of wind.<sup>57</sup> Fifty years ago, Sayce<sup>58</sup> argued for a connection between the two. More recently R. Kilian<sup>59</sup> has also argued for a connection between the four Hermopolitan cosmic forces and those of Genesis 1:2. He believes that the Hebrew tradition is dependent on the Egyptian material and that this influence must have taken place during the New Kingdom (1570–1100 B.C.).

In Mesopotamian and Hebrew traditions, there is no attempt to explain the origin of the primeval sea. In both traditions, life springs from there. In MT (I. 50a) it is Ptah-Nun who gives birth to Atum the Creator god. In the Pyramid texts we read of Re being born in Nun prior to the existence (*nn.hprt*) of sky, earth and the conflict of Horus and Seth (PT § 1040). Many years ago, Grapow<sup>60</sup> was struck by the parallel structure of the Egyptian statements and those in Gen. 2:5ff. and Enuma Elish. More recently this pattern has been detected in the controversial Ebla creation story.<sup>61</sup> The idea of life, and even the gods,

50 Görg, "Zur Ikonographie," 18.

51 Hoffmeier, *Egyptological Miscellanies*, 53ff.

52 *CDME* 299.

53 R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Warminster, 1973), CT II, 4–6.

54 H. Orlinsky, "Ruah in Genesis 1:2," *JQR* 58 (1957), 174–82.

55 R. Luyster, "Wind and Water: Cosmogonic Symbolism in the Old Testament," *ZAW* 93 (1981), 1–10.

56 *Ibid.*, 6.

57 Frankfort, *Kingship of the Gods*, 155. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 358.

58 Sayce, "The Egyptian Background of Genesis I," 419–20.

59 R. Kilian, "Gen. 1:2 und die Urgötter von Hermopolis," *VT* 16 (1965), 420–38.

60 H. Grapow, "Die Welt vor der Schöpfung," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 67 (1932), 37–38.

61 G. Pettinato, "Ebla and the Bible," *BA* 43 (1980), 208–9. A. Archi, "The Epigraphic Evidence from Ebla and the Old Testament," *Bib.* 60 (1979), 561–62.


originating in the primeval sea is very ancient indeed. It is so widely found in near eastern traditions that a single point of origin may never be determined.

As far as the four cosmic powers of Genesis and Egyptian cosmology are concerned, only three of these are clearly present in *Enuma Elish*. Darkness is apparently absent.<sup>62</sup>

B. Into the darkness of primeval earth God calls forth light ('*ōr*; 1:3), and it appears in response to his verbal command. Light is present in EE I, but it is not present due to divine fiat. In CT II 4c–5c when the creation of Re is described, it takes place in *ḥḥw*, *nw*, *ṯmmw*, *kkw*. It then states *ink šsp n.s kkw* "it is I who lighten darkness for it."

Old Testament scholars are familiar with the Memphite Theology as a creation by fiat that predates Genesis. However, this concept is found elsewhere in Egyptian literature, too. In CT II, 23 life is created "according to the word (*ḥft mdw*) of Nun in Nu, in Hehu, in *ṯmmw* in Keku." The command (*wḏ*) of Atum is responsible for the creation of animal life in CT II, 42–43. Similar to the logos creation of Ptah in the Memphite theology is that attributed to Ptah on the little known stela of Ptah and Sekhmet.<sup>63</sup> This late 18th or early 19th Dynasty text says of Ptah: *ḏd.tw m ib.f m ḥpr.sn* "One says in his mind (lit., heart), 'Look, may they come into being.'" While the doctrine of creation in response to divine command is widespread in Egyptian literature, it is not to be found in Babylonian cosmologies.

In the next phase of creation, God makes the *rāqî<sup>a</sup>* to act as a separator between the terrestrial and celestial waters. *Rāqî<sup>a</sup>* comes from the root *rq'* which means to 'beat, stamp, spread out'<sup>64</sup> and frequently applies to metal. *Rāqî<sup>a</sup>* is then named *šāmayim* by God in Gen. 1:8. In PT § 305 the resurrected king takes possession of the sky and splits or separates (*pšn*) the metal (*bi*).<sup>65</sup> The celestial vault in Egyptian conception, like its Hebrew counterpart, appears to have metal as a common point. Genesis makes no mention of how the sky is sustained, perhaps like the Heliopolitan view, the air, which is personified by Shu, holds up the sky (cf. PT § 1471, CT II, 8b).<sup>66</sup>

But there are other views in Egyptian cosmology. The view that predominates Egyptian literature is that some sort of poles or staves sustain the heaven over earth, which had been separated at the beginning of creation. The Pyramid Texts mention the *d'm* and *w's* staves supporting the sky (*pt*—) (PT § 348, 360, 1456, 1510) and another tradition mentions the *šḥnt* poles (PT § 1559; CT I, 2641; BD 450, 14).<sup>67</sup> These supports are oriented towards the four cardinal points (PT § 339, 348, 1510a).<sup>68</sup> The idea of pillars sustaining the sky is also found in the Old Testament. Job 26:11 speaks of "the pillars of heaven" ('*ammûḏē šāmayim*) while in 2 Sam. 22:8 "the foundations of heaven" (*mōs<sup>e</sup> dōt šāmayim*) are mentioned.

The act of separating heaven and earth from each other is common to most ancient

62 Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 101.

63 M. Mogenson, "A Stele of the XVIIIth or XIXth Dynasty, With a Hymn to Ptah and Sekhmet," *Proceedings of the Society for Biblical Archaeology* 35 (1913), Plate II.

64 *BDB*, 955.

65 For the most recent discussion of the etymology of *bi*, see G. Rendsburg, "Semitic *PRZL*, *BRZL*, *BRDL*, Iron," *Scripta Mediterranea* 3 (1982), 54–71.

66 Faulkner, *JEOL* 18 (1959), 266–70.

67 Cf. *Urk.* IV, 1662.11.

68 Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (London, 1969), 74, n. 3.

near eastern cosmologies. Gen. 1:7 uses *wayyavdēl* while in Egyptian literature *wpt* (PT § 1208c; CT II, 39f.) and *dsr* (PT § 1778; CT III, 49e) are used interchangeably. The point of PT § 1778 is that heaven (*pt*) and earth (*ts*) were originally in Nun. In some instances (e.g., CT II, 39f.) Geb and Nut, the personifications of earth and sky are mentioned. In EE IV, 130–38 Marduk, with the aid of the mighty north wind, slays Tiamat and splits her in half, placing one part in the sky, leaving the other on earth. In Sumerian Mythology it is Enlil, god of air, who separates An and Ki (heaven and earth).<sup>69</sup>

In the third day of God's creative work in Gen 1:9–13, the terrestrial waters are commanded to gather together in one spot so that dry land could appear. One of the prevailing cosmological views in Egyptian mythology is that the primeval hillock emerged from the flood waters of Nun (PT § 1652). The emergence of these hillocks was later interpreted as sacred spots which would be the sites upon which the temples would be built. This undoubtedly is the meaning behind the common New Kingdom expression *st dsrt nt sp tpy* "the holy place of creation."<sup>70</sup>

A. H. Sayce<sup>71</sup> believed that the sequence of events described in Gen. 1:1–13 was just like that of the Hermopolitan doctrine of creation:

<u>Hermopolis</u>	<u>Genesis</u>
1) The chaotic deep:	1) The chaotic "deep";
2) The "breath" (Amun) moving on the waters;	2) The breath of Elohim moving on the waters;
3) The creation of light	3) The creation of light
4) The emergence of the hill "in the middle of the waters."	4) The emergence of firmament "in the midst of the waters."

*Prima facie* examination of these four points might lead one to question a connection between the fourth points in the two traditions. But, as Sayce<sup>72</sup> points out, the hill that emerged from the primeval sea in the Hermopolitan tradition "becomes the 'firmament' which divides the waters which are below it from the waters which are above it." PT § 1778, as mentioned above, indicates that the sky had emerged from Nun and was raised over the earth.<sup>73</sup>

C. The creation of man is described in Gen. 1:26–27, which used the words *bārā'* and *'āsā* to describe this activity, with no mention of the material used. But 1:26 mentions that man was made "in the image of God" and in his "likeness." *De'mūt* and *Şelem*<sup>74</sup> both convey the idea of something carved or shaped, like a statue. In Babylonian accounts of man's

69 H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (London, 1973), 6, 69–70; T. Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), 98–99, 168–69; S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago, 1963), 145.

70 *Urk.* IV. 364; 882.10–11. For a discussion of these texts and others like it, see J. K. Hoffmeier, "Sacred" in *the Vocabulary of Ancient Egypt, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* (1985), 171–77.

71 Sayce, "The Egyptian Background of Genesis I," 421.

72 *Loc. cit.*

73 For a discussion of the parallel PT and CT passages see Hoffmeier, "Sacred" in *the Vocabulary of Ancient Egypt*, 30–36, 65–70; cf. also Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 173–74.

74 *BDB*, 198, 853.



creation<sup>75</sup> man is formed from clay mingled with the blood of Kingu or two Lamga gods (craftsmen gods). In Atra-Ḥasis I, 210ff. man is created from the flesh and blood of a slain god which is mixed with clay.<sup>76</sup> There is no mention of man being formed in the likeness of his creator, although the idea of statuary may emerge from the two Lamga gods, or be implied by virtue of divine blood as giving life to inanimate clay.

Merikare, a 10th Dynasty wisdom treatise, says *ir.n.f.tiw 'nh fndw.sn snnw.f pw pr m ḥ'w.f, wbn.f m pt n ib.sn*<sup>77</sup> “He made the breath of life for their nostrils. They are his images which came forth from his body. He shines in the sky at their desire.” Here we see Re placing the breath into the nostrils of men, but of even greater significance is that in Merikare man is described as the *snnw* of the creator-god. *Snnw* is derived from the word meaning ‘second’,<sup>78</sup> hence ‘likeness’, ‘image’.<sup>79</sup> and it is frequently written with a statue for the determinative (𓂏), as in Papyrus Carlsberg VI of Merikare.

H. W. Wolff<sup>80</sup> connects ‘image’ in Gen. 1:26 with the ancient practice of kings who left their statues and stelae (which invariably bore their image) in territories they had conquered to symbolize their rule over that area. Man in Hebrew thought is God’s regent on earth.<sup>81</sup>

More detail on the creation of man is given in Gen. 2:7. Here God “forms” man. *Yāšār* frequently applies to the work of the potter “forming” a vessel (Isa. 29:16; Jer. 18:2–6). The material from which man is made is ‘*āfār*, meaning ‘dust’<sup>82</sup> or ‘particles of earth’.”<sup>83</sup>

The picture here is reminiscent of Khnum forming man on the potter’s wheel.<sup>84</sup> A concept found as early as the Pyramid Texts (§§ 445, 522) but not found in art until the 18th Dynasty.<sup>85</sup> As Khnum forms man on the wheel, the goddess Hekat offers the clay figure the breath of life to the nostrils. This motif is also found in Egyptian literature. CT II, 43 says “My life (*nh.i*) is in their nostrils, I guide their breath into their throats.”

Amenemope also discusses man’s creation: *ir rmt 'm' dhꜣ, pꜣ ntr pꜣy.f kd* “as for man, (he) is clay and straw, God is his builder.”<sup>86</sup> “Giver of breath” is an epithet of Aton in the “Great Hymn of Aton” (ll. 48–49).<sup>87</sup> R. J. Williams<sup>88</sup> has called the concept of god placing breath into the nostrils of man as an “Egyptianism.” While this view of the creation of man in

75 Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 66–72.

76 W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford, 1969), 21–22.

77 Merikare 136–38 in Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 83.

78 *Wb.* IV, 149.

79 *CDME* 232.

80 H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia, 1974), 160.

81 *Ibid.*, 159–60.

82 *BDB*, 779.

83 W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1971), 279.

84 While Cyrus Gordon has recently reminded us of the connection between the Egyptian motif of Khnum as the potter-creator, Davidson (*Genesis*, 30) also saw a possible connection, and J. S. Forester-Brow in his book *The Two Creation Stories in Genesis* (London, 1920), 119–20, over sixty years ago noticed the similarity. So on this point, scholars have seen a possible Egyptian background to this motif in Gen. 2:7.

85 E. Naville, *Deir el-Bahri II* (London, 1896), pl. 48.

86 Amenemope 25.13–14 in H. O. Lange, *Das Weisheitsbuch des Amenemope, Danske Videnskabernes selskab, historik-filologiske meddelelser* 11/2 (1925), 126.

87 N. de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El-Amarna* 6 (London, 1908), plates xxvii, xli.

88 R. J. Williams, “Some Egyptianisms in the Old Testament,” *Studies in Honor of John A. Wilson's 70th Birthday, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 35 (1969), 93–94.

Egyptian literature is only one among several,<sup>89</sup> it comes very close to the description found in Gen. 2:7. We are led to the conclusion that this Egyptian view, which spans the time from the Old Kingdom to the end of the New Kingdom, is closer to the Hebrew tradition than the Hebrew is to the Babylonian.

One final note on the Merikare text: in the lines which immediately precede the statement on placing the breath of life in man's nostrils, we are told: "He made heaven and earth for their sake after he had subdued the monster of the waters (*skn n mw*)" (ll. 134–35).<sup>90</sup> In the Old Testament, a number of monsters are encountered which might find a parallel with either Apophis (the serpent) or *skn n mw* of Merikare (cf. Isa. 51:9–10; 27:1; Ps. 89:9–12; Job 9:13–14; 26:12–13). In these passages the monsters Leviathan (a serpent known from Canaanite sources), Tanin (also attested in Ugaritic, translated 'crocodile') and Rahab of the sea (dragon = chaos?) are mentioned.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly enough, *skn n mw* of Merikare uses a crocodile for a determinative (I-3 of Gardiner's sign list). When such monsters are mentioned in the Old Testament, it is actually a protest against the pagan view that such beasts pose a challenge to the gods.<sup>92</sup> In each Biblical passage where these creatures are mentioned, God is shown to be their master or creator; there is no struggle for supremacy.

One could go on and explore other facets of Egyptian and Hebrew genesis and cite many parallels, But from what has been observed here, the Egyptian and Hebrew cosmologies are closer than some have maintained,<sup>93</sup> and in some instances the motifs are even closer than those from Babylonian creation accounts (such as original darkness, light being called into existence, man formed in the image of God, and breath being divinely placed in man).

The Israelites had their origins somewhere in Syria-Mesopotamia. Even after the sojourn in Egypt, Joshua recalled their origins as being "beyond the Euphrates" (Josh. 24:2). The sojourn in Egypt did not diminish their Semitic, Mesopotamian roots, and yet they departed Egypt, in some cases bearing Egyptian names, using Egyptian weights and measures and having borrowed Egyptian words.<sup>94</sup> In the years following their occupation of Canaan there was ongoing contact with Egypt. There is no reason to doubt that there could have been literary influence on Hebrew cosmology as there was in other areas of Hebrew literature.<sup>95</sup> And yet, there are many points shared in common among ancient near eastern creation stories. A more comprehensive study of all near eastern sources on the subject would probably lead to a realization that the Mediterranean world was very ecumenical and that ideas, be they religious, philosophical, or technical were freely exchanged.

Egyptian literature has often been consulted by Old Testament scholars engaged in

89 Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 158–82.

90 All three witnesses of this passage read *snk n mw* (see W. Helck, *Die Lehre für König Merikare*, 83). However, Posener (*Revue d'Égyptologie* 7 [1950], 78–81) observes that *snk* appears to be a metathesis of *skn* 'greed' (*CDME* 251; *Wb.* IV, 318) which uses the crocodile determinative. I owe a word of thanks to Kenneth Hoglund for reminding me of Posener's article.

91 Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 102ff.

92 Cassuto, *Genesis*, 37–39.

93 Wilson, "The Nature of the Universe," 61.

94 Williams, "Some Egyptianisms in the Old Testament," 93–98; "Egypt and Israel," in J. R. Harris, ed., *The Legacy of Egypt* (Oxford, 1971), 257–90; "A People Come Out of Egypt," 231–52.

95 Cf. my recent discussion in *Egyptological Miscellanies*, 53–90.

comparative studies. But this has not usually been the case in the area of cosmogony and cosmology. It is hoped that the foregoing pages will convince some of the relevance of Egyptian literature to the study of Genesis 1-2 and that Egyptian literature might begin to receive the consideration it rightly deserved along with other near eastern documents.

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