INNOVATION AND THE TRANSMISSION OF IDEAS ACROSS ANCIENT EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST

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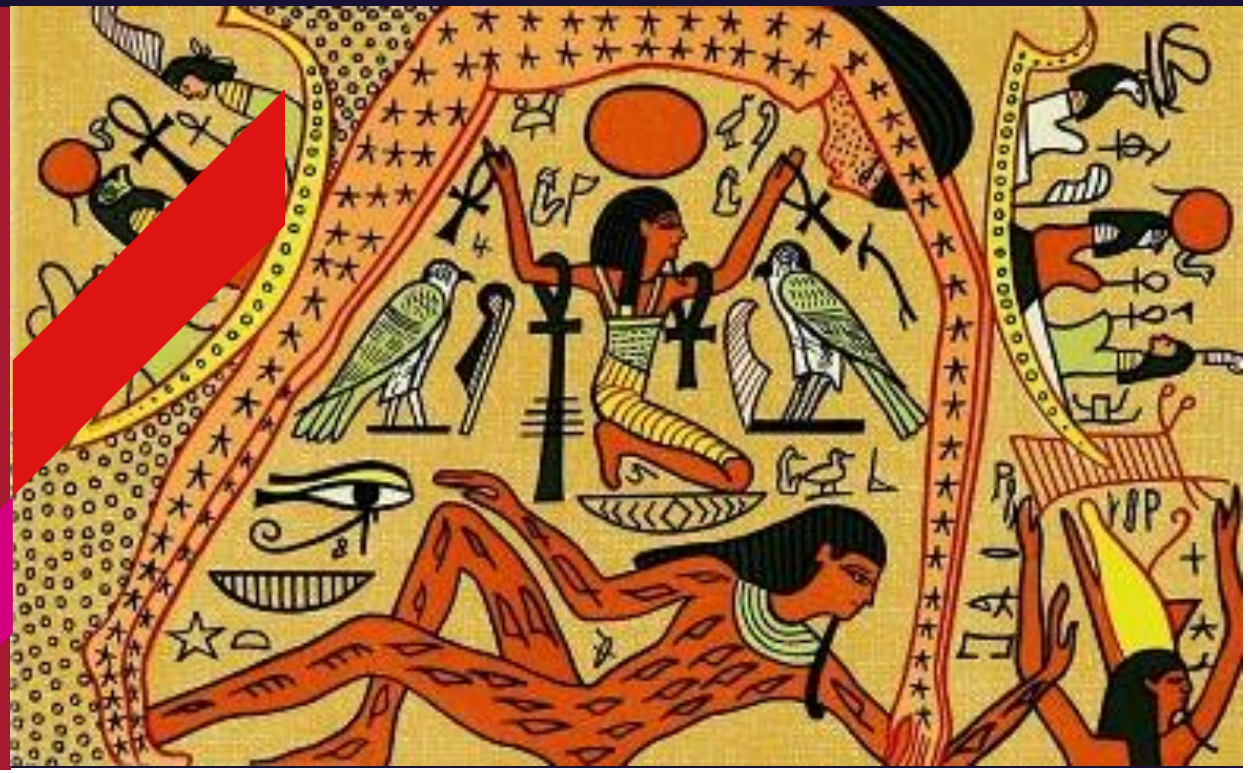
Being and Nothingness in Antiquity

19 April 2022



Outline

1. Invention, Innovation, and Transmission across ‘Borders’
2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not
3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces
4. Negotiating Existence Beyond Borders

1. Invention, Innovation, and Transmission across 'Borders'

1. Invention, Innovation, and Transmission across 'Borders'

the process of initiating and developing novelty

individual or local scale

the process through which novelty is spread and adopted

wider, regional or supra-regional scale

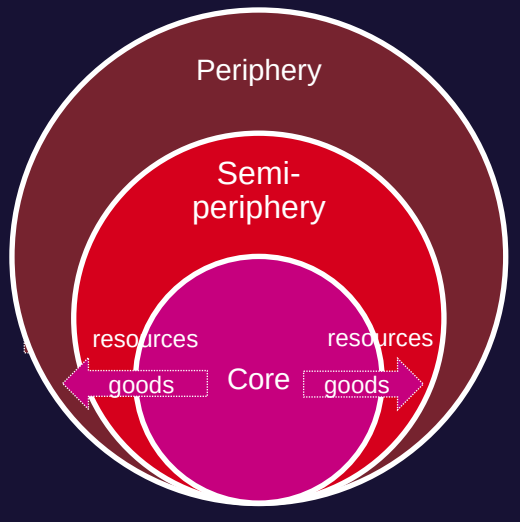
invention through transmission

Diffusionism — transmitting inventions as cultural traits from one defined bounded cultural or social group to another through contact

diffusion mechanisms? adoption mechanisms?

e.g. world systems model

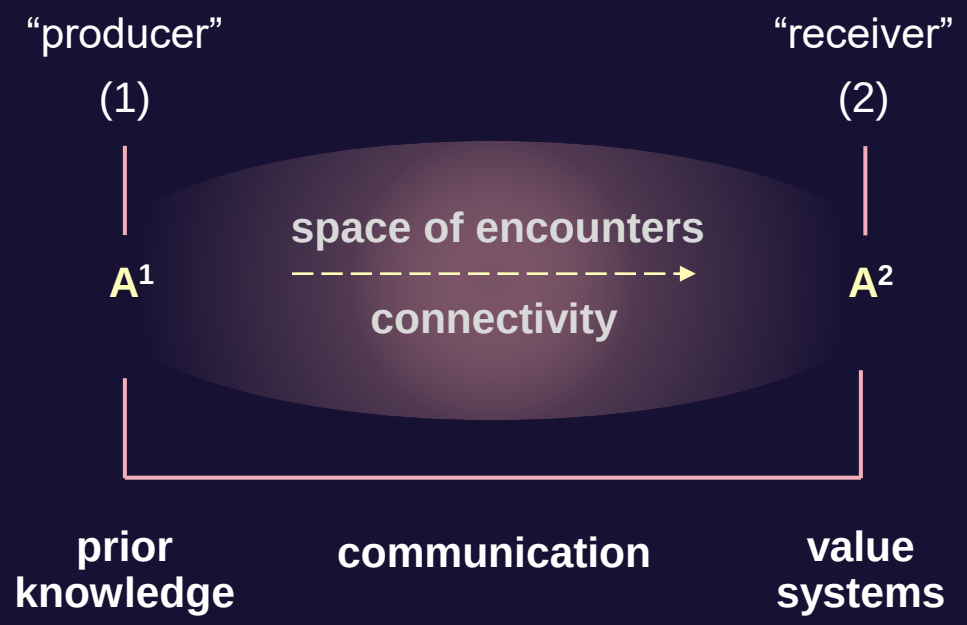
e.g. acculturation



1. Invention, Innovation, and Transmission across 'Borders'

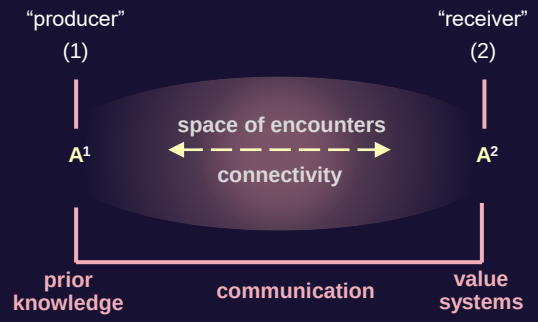
Innovation as the outcome of and catalyst
for several interacting processes,
including the *transfer of knowledge*

1. Invention, Innovation, and Transmission across 'Borders'



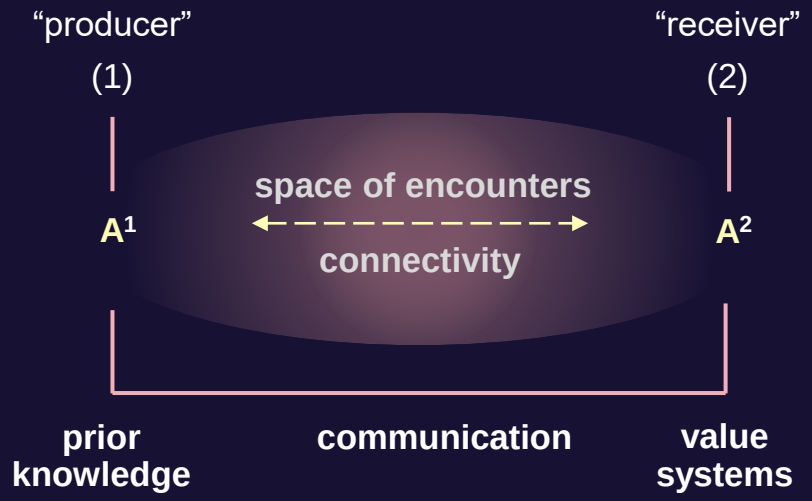
Fittingness

1. Invention, Innovation, and Transmission across 'Borders'



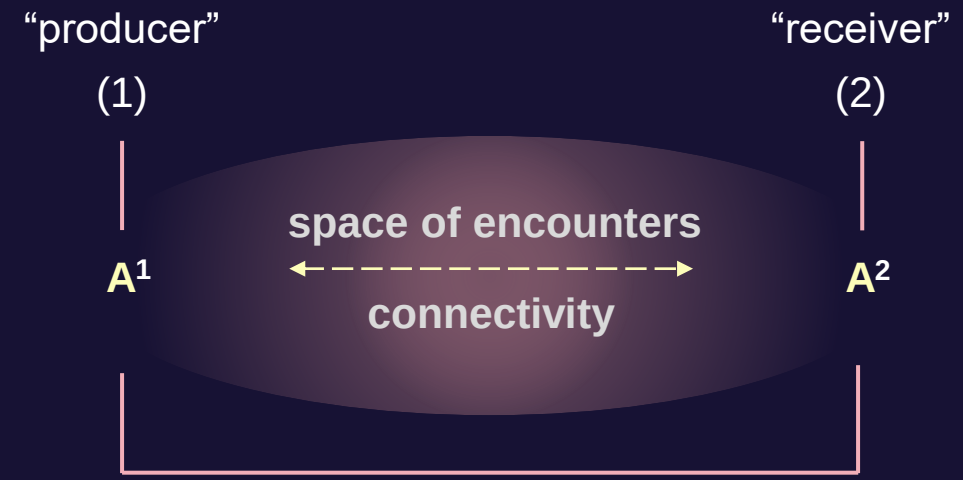
individuals

Theoretical approach:
e.g. acculturation



social networks
and/ or communities of practice

Theoretical approach:
e.g. hybridisation



broader network ties
and/or inter-community dissemination

Theoretical approach:
e.g. transregionalism

Multiscalar transmission

1. Invention, Innovation, and Transmission across 'Borders'

Egyptian Chronology	Dynasty	Levantine Chronology	BCE
Old Kingdom	3-6	**E**arly **B**ronze Age III–IV (**EB**III–IV)	c. 2,686–2,160 BCE
First Intermediate Period	7-11	Early – **M**iddle **B**ronze Age I (**MB**I)	c. 2,160–2,055 BCE
Middle Kingdom	11-13	**M**iddle **B**ronze Age I–IIB (**MB**I–IIB)	c. 2,055–1,650 BCE
Second Intermediate Period	13-17	**M**iddle **B**ronze Age IIB–IIC (**MB**IIB–IIC)	c. 1,773–1,550 BCE
New Kingdom	18-20	**L**ate **B**ronze Age I **(LB**I) **–** Iron Age I	c. 1,550–1,069 BCE

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

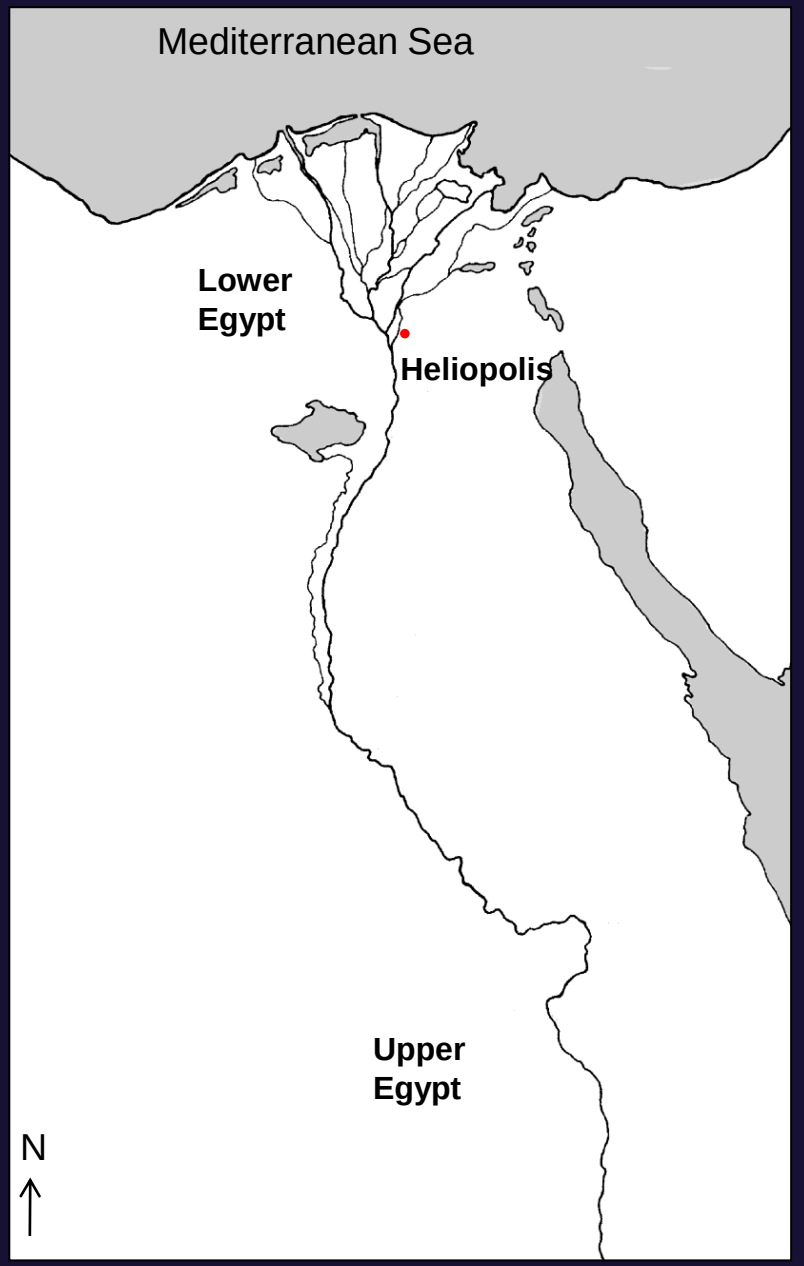
Many cosmogonies

- ‘time before time’
- *sp tp.y* ‘first occasion’
- existence of *Nun/Nuu* (watery expanse)
- creator deity emerges from *Nun/Nuu*

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony*

- Heliopolis and Ra
- first attested in the Pyramid Texts
- attestations in the Coffin Texts, Book of the Dead and the Amduat
- emergence of the Great Ennead



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‘Atum achieved eldership through his power when **he fashioned Shu and Tefnut in Heliopolis**; when **he was alone in his existence**’

(Coffin Text Spell 80)

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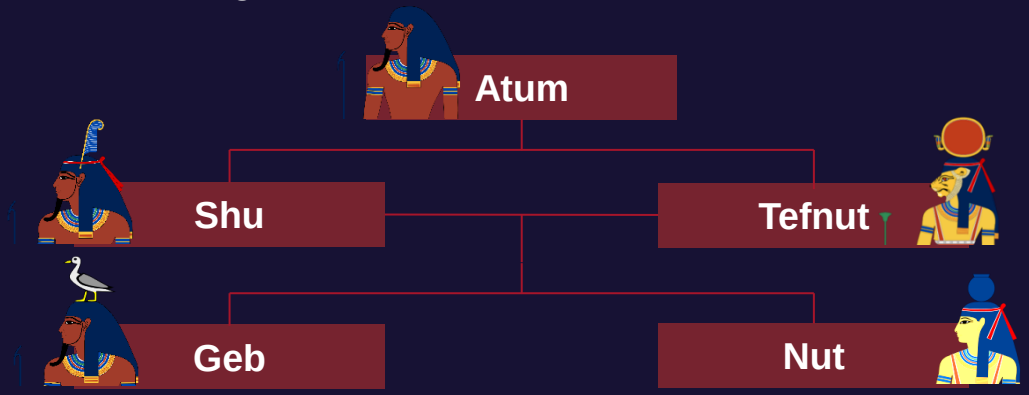

‘when he **separated Geb from Nut**, before the first generation was born, **before the primeval Enneads had come into being**’

(Coffin Text Spell 80)

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony*

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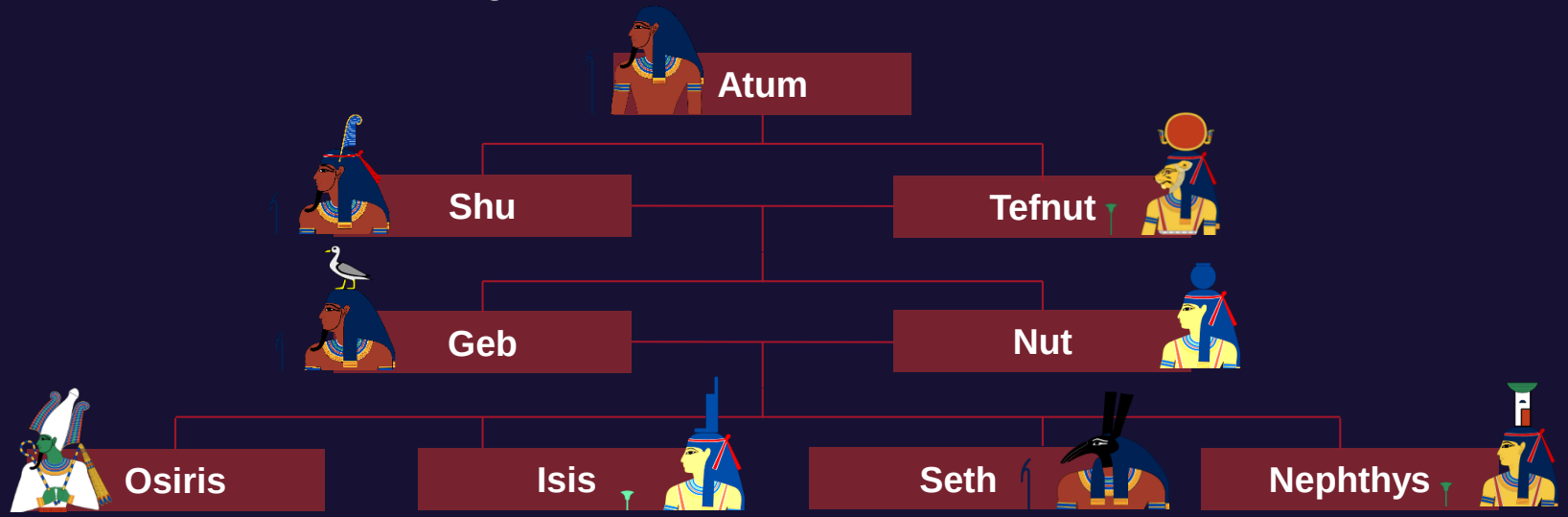
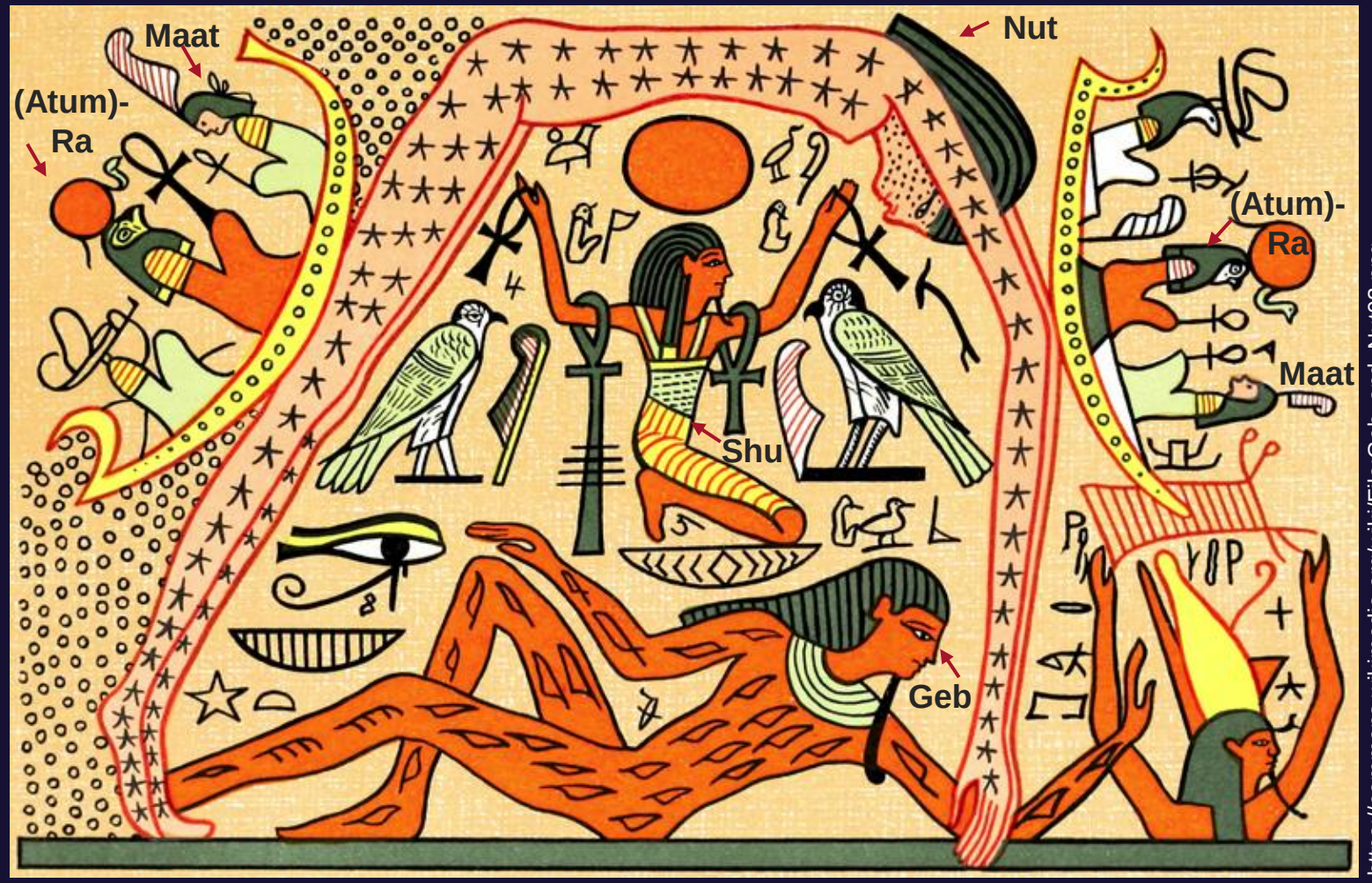


2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony*

Pharaoh as ‘the god’s document scribe who says ***n.tt*** and brings into being ***iw.tt***’

(Pyramid Text 510)



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Geb_and_Nut03.png

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony*

Existence and non-existence
- *n.tt* = ‘that which is’
- *iw.tt* = ‘that which is not’

Pharaoh as ‘the god’s document scribe who says ***what is*** and brings into being ***what is not***’
(Pyramid Text 510)

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

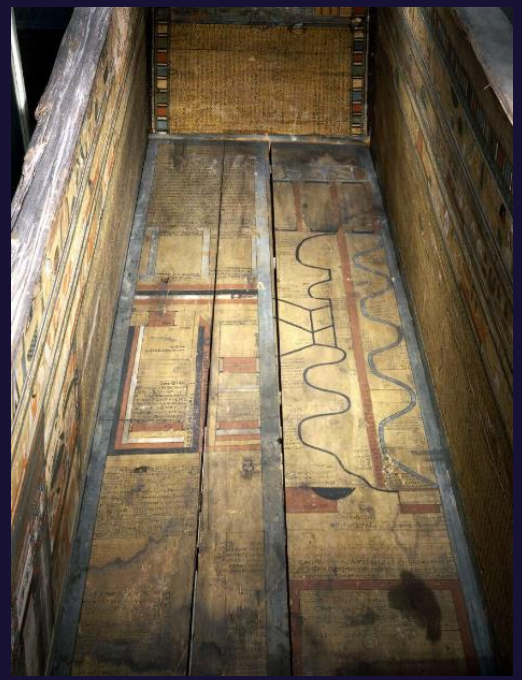
Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence*

— *n.tt* = 'that which is'

— *iw.tt* = 'that which is not'

— deceased brought *n.tt iw.tt* into being (Coffin Texts)

— existent and nonexistent beings (*n.tt* and *iw.tt*; *wn* and *nn wn*)



www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA30839

Deceased as 'the lord of ***those who are*** and ***those who are not***'
(Coffin Text Spell 45)

'The spirit whom I will create will indeed ***exist***, the spirit whom I hate ***will not exist***'
(Coffin Text Spell 1042)

'As for him who knows this spell for going down into them (i.e. the paths of Rostau), he himself is a god in Thoth's following; he will go down to any sky to which he wishes. But as for him who does not know this spell for passing over these paths, he shall be taken into the infliction(?) of the dead which is ordained, **as one who is not, who shall never have righteousness (i.e. maat)**'
(Coffin Text Spell 1035)

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence*

— *n.tt* = ‘that which is’

— *iw.tt* = ‘that which is not’

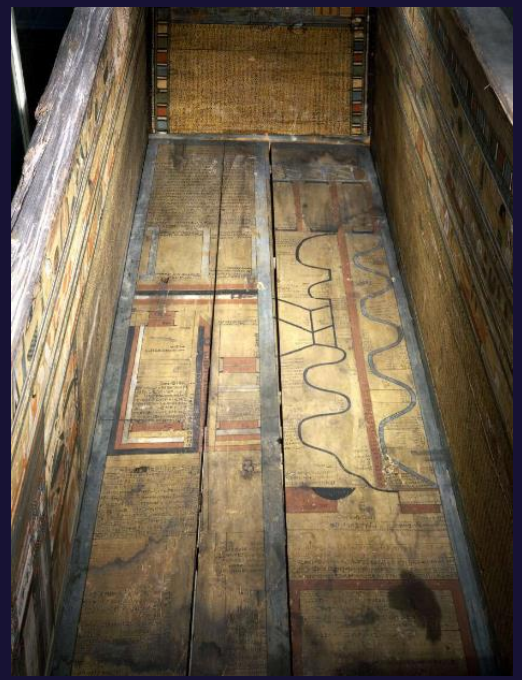
— deceased brought *n.tt iw.tt* into being (Coffin Texts)

— existent and nonexistent beings (*n.tt* and *iw.tt*; *wn* and *nn wn*)

— Osiris as supervisor of the existent

‘The supervisor of ***what is existent***. Who is he? He is Osiris. As for ***what is existent***, it is eternity and everlasting.’

(Coffin Text Spell 335)



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Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence*

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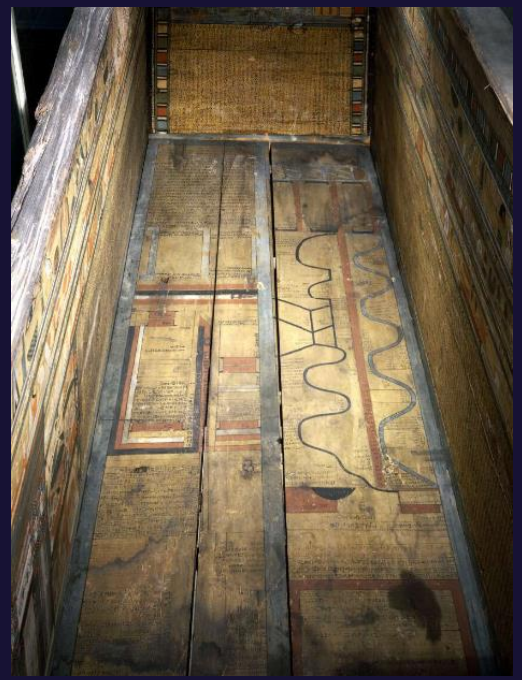
— Osiris as supervisor of the existent

— nonexistent is not *yet* existent in divine mysteries



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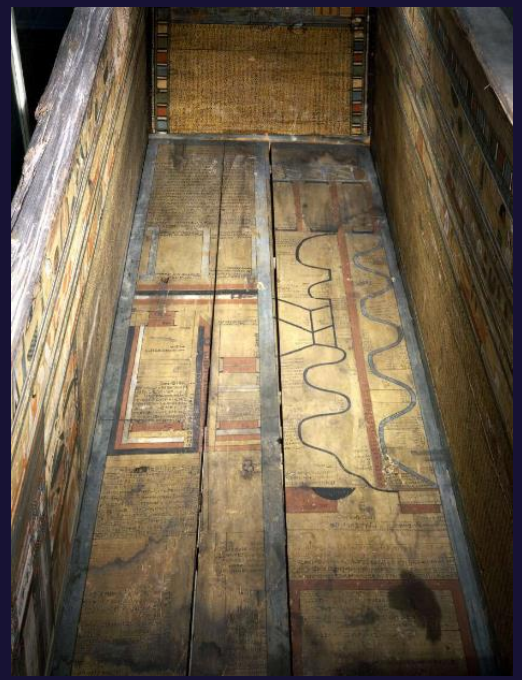
— nonexistent is not *yet* existent in divine mysteries

— *n.tt iw.tt* = ‘everything’**?**



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2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies

Heliopolitan cosmogony

Existence and non-existence

- *n.tt* = ‘that which is’
- *iw.tt* = ‘that which is not’
- deceased brought *n.tt iw.tt* into being (Coffin Texts)
- existent and nonexistent beings (*n.tt* and *iw.tt*; *wn* and *nn wn*)
- Osiris as supervisor of the existent
- nonexistent is not *yet* existent in divine mysteries
- *n.tt iw.tt* = ‘everything’?
- the nonexistent at the **point of creation**

Nonexistent as ‘the final limit, or the realm beyond all boundaries, which is encountered when one reaches outside the limited world of being; and they are also present in our midst within the ordered world of creation.’
(Hornung 1971: 177)

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies

Heliopolitan cosmogony

Existence and non-existence

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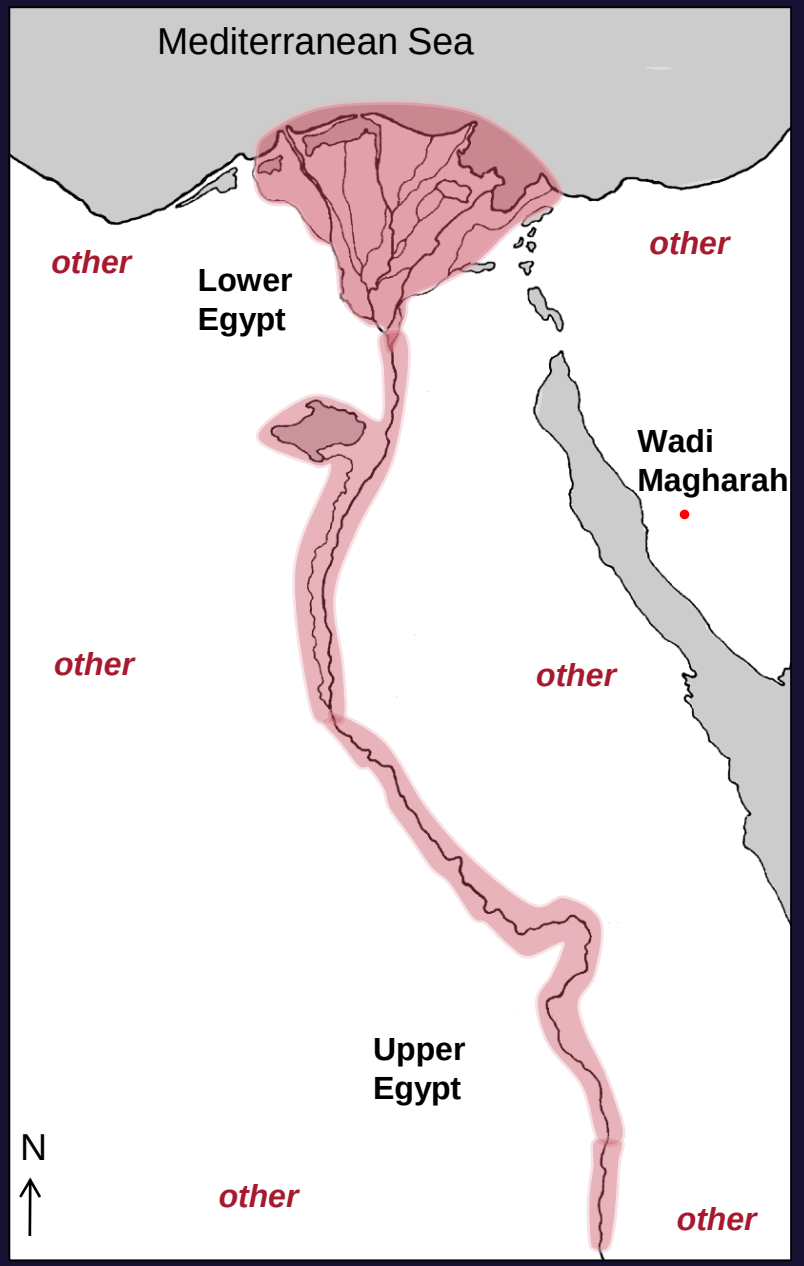
- Osiris as supervisor of the existent
- nonexistent is not *yet* existent in divine mysteries
- *n.tt iw.tt* = ‘everything’?
- the nonexistent at the **point of creation**
- the potential of the nonexistent

‘The challenge presented to the Egyptians by the constantly present reality of the nonexistent has **two main aspects**, one hostile, the other fruitful and regenerative.’

(Hornung 1971: 180)

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence* — *Beyond Borders*



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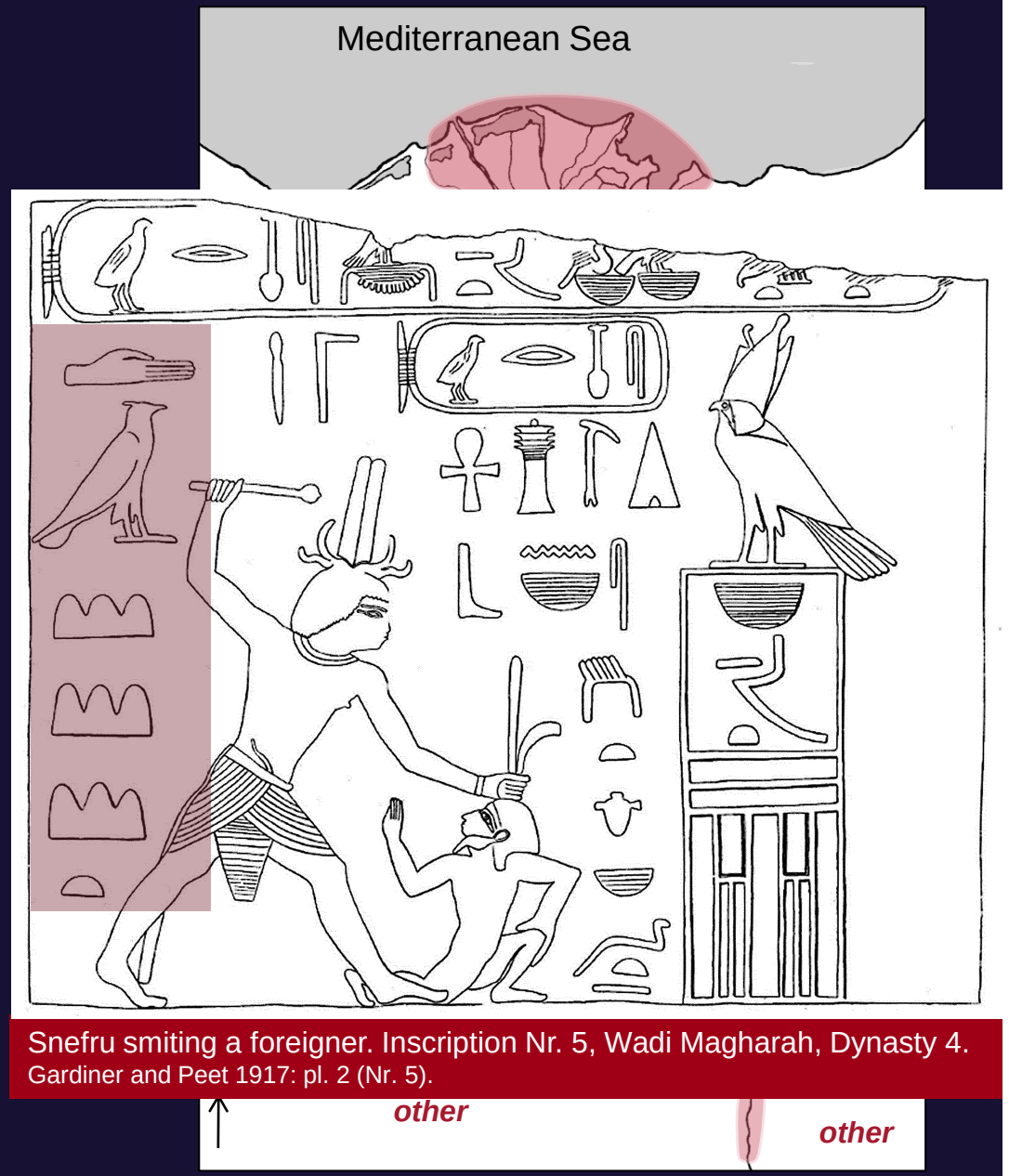
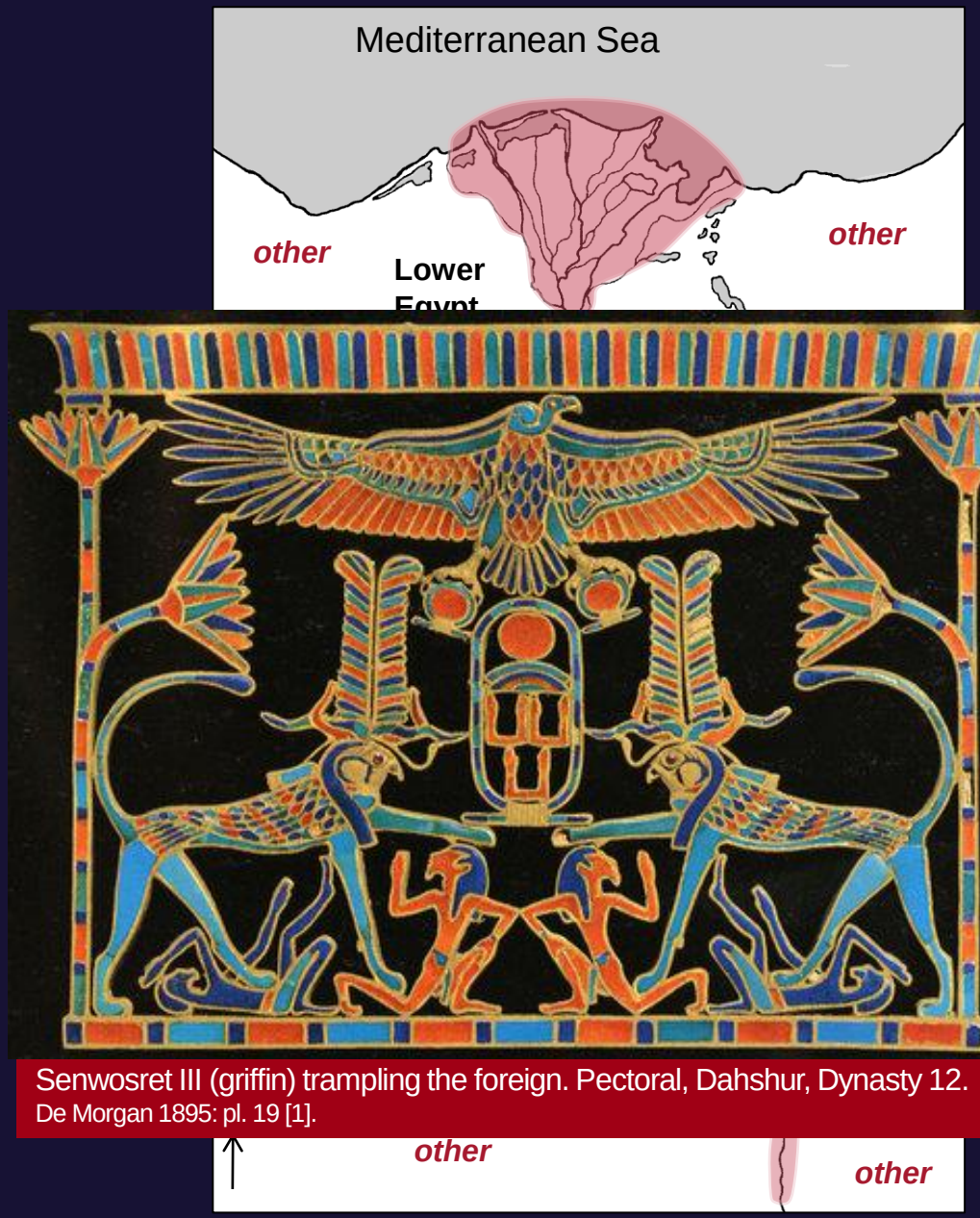
Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence* — *Beyond Borders*



Snefru smiting a foreigner. Inscription Nr. 5, Wadi Magharah, Dynasty 4.
Gardiner and Peet 1917: pl. 2 (Nr. 5).

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

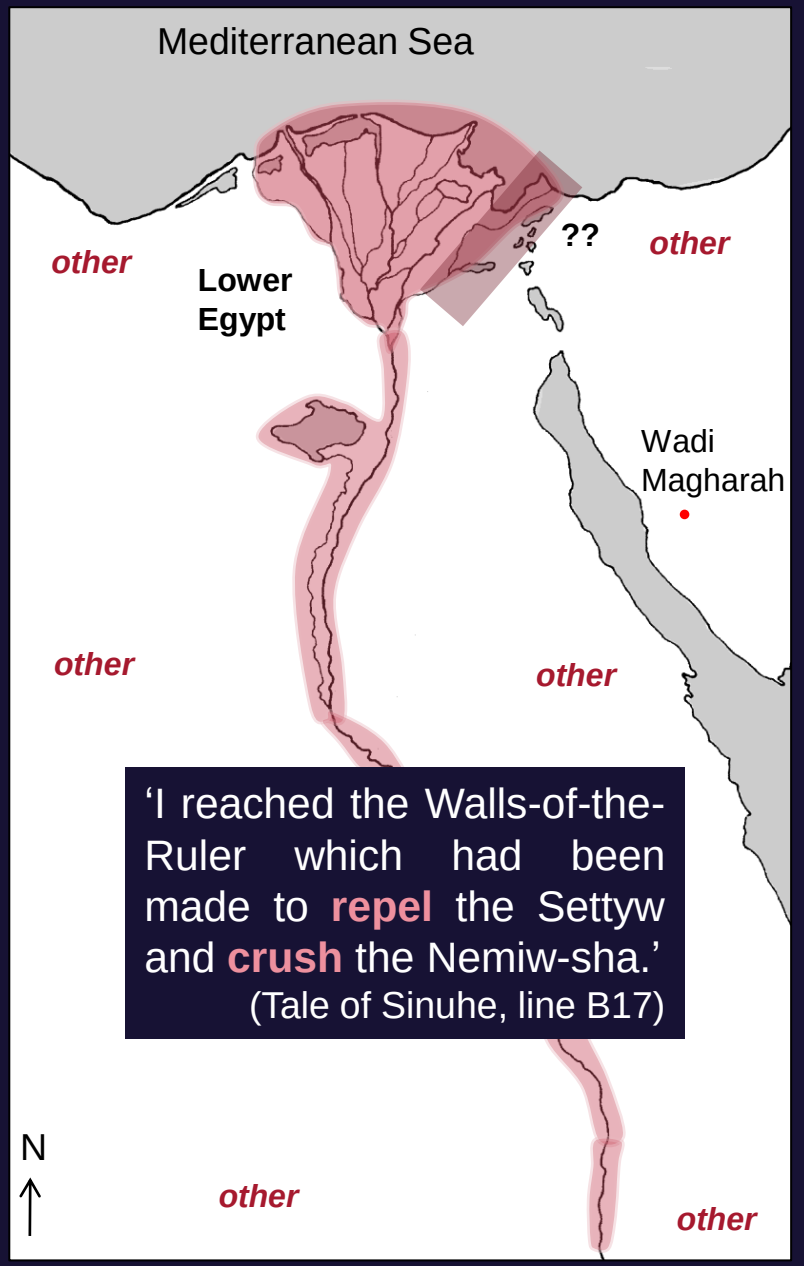
Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence* — *Beyond Borders*



Senwosret III (griffin) trampling the foreign. Pectoral, Dahshur, Dynasty 12.
De Morgan 1895: pl. 19 [1].

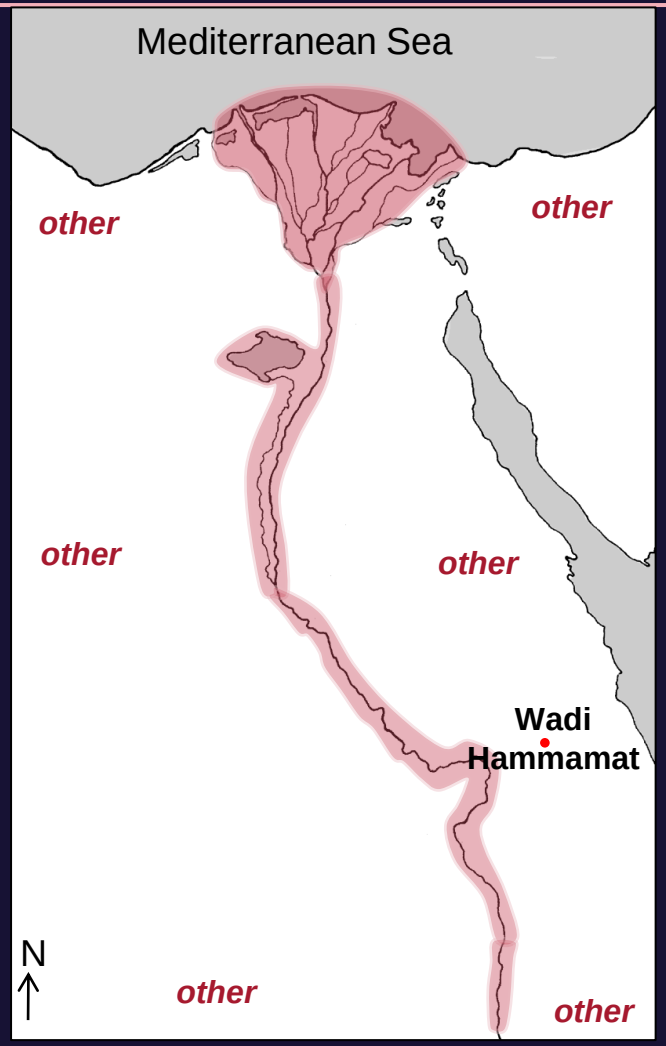
2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence* — *Beyond Borders*



2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies



Beyond Borders —

From the early Middle Kingdom: individuals involved in activities at or beyond the borders of Egypt are attested with titles concerning *n.tt iw.tt*

e.g. Ahanakht is ‘one who measured **what is and what is not**, making firm the boundaries which are in the Hare Nome’ (tomb inscription, Deir el-Bersheh, reign of Montuhotep II (?), Dynasty 11)

e.g. Intef is ‘one who acts as door for **what is and what is not**’ (stela, reign of Montuhotep II, Dynasty 11)

e.g. Henu is ‘overseer of **what is and what is not**’; ‘one who knows the condition of **what is and what is not**, nothing escaping from him’ (inscription, Wadi Hammamat [Eastern Desert], reign of Montuhotep III, Dynasty 11)

2. Beyond Borders: What Is and What Is Not

Many cosmogonies — *Heliopolitan cosmogony* — *Existence and non-existence* — *Beyond Borders*

Detail of a desert hunt scene. Tomb of Khety. Beni Hassan, Dynasty 11-12.
© The Australian Centre for Egyptology, Macquarie University.

— From the early Middle Kingdom: individuals involved in activities at or beyond the borders of Egypt are attested with titles concerning *n.tt iw.tt*

— Middle Kingdom representations of encounters (?) with the nonexistent, the unknown, or the other

e.g. Ankhu encounters ‘the land, the water, the sand on two banks, **what is and what is not**’ (inscription, Wadi Gawasis [Red Sea coast], reign of Senwosret I, Dynasty 12)

e.g. Ptahwer mentions ‘reaching the boundaries of the foreign lands… reaching the **total end of the unknown**’ (inscription, Serabit el-Khadim [Sinai], reign of Amenemhat III, Dynasty 12)

3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

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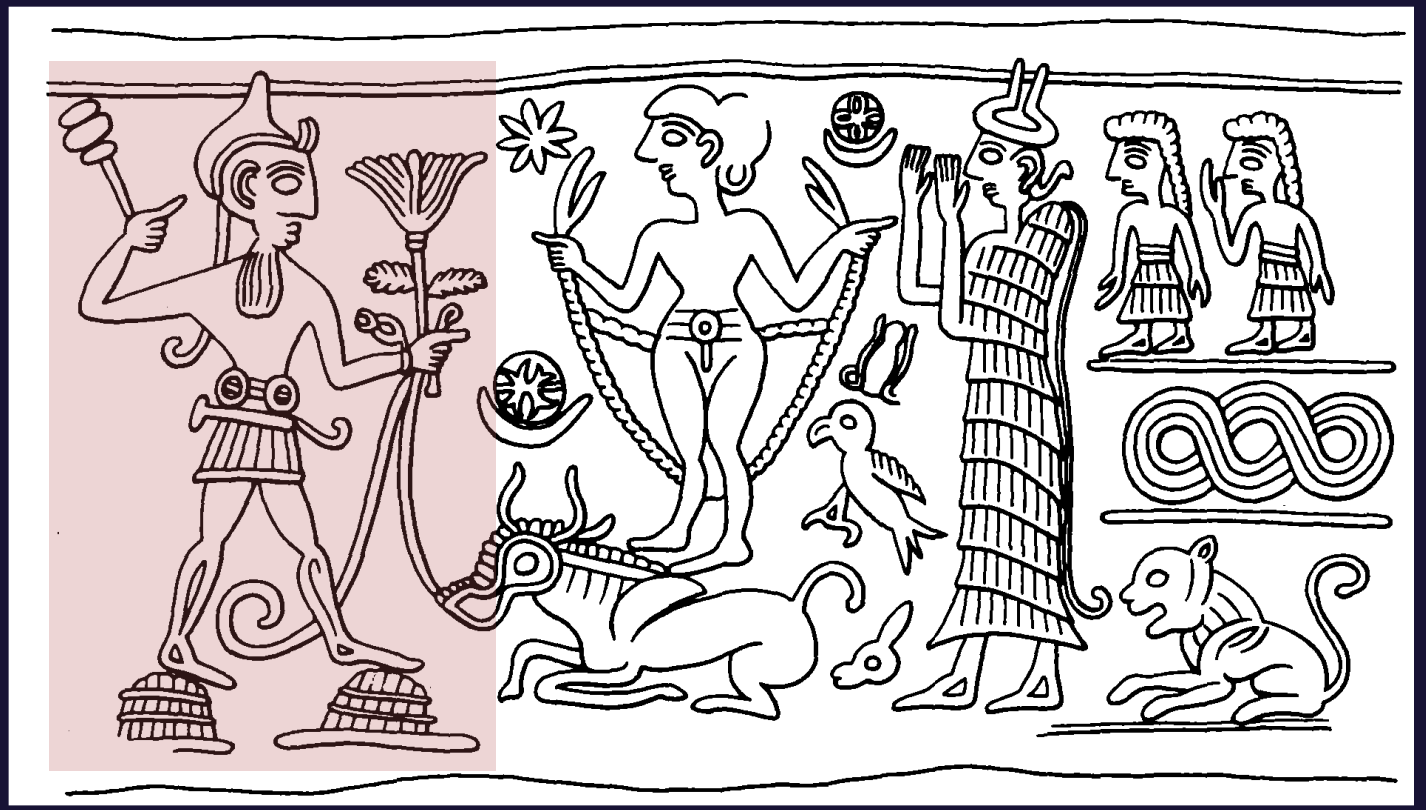
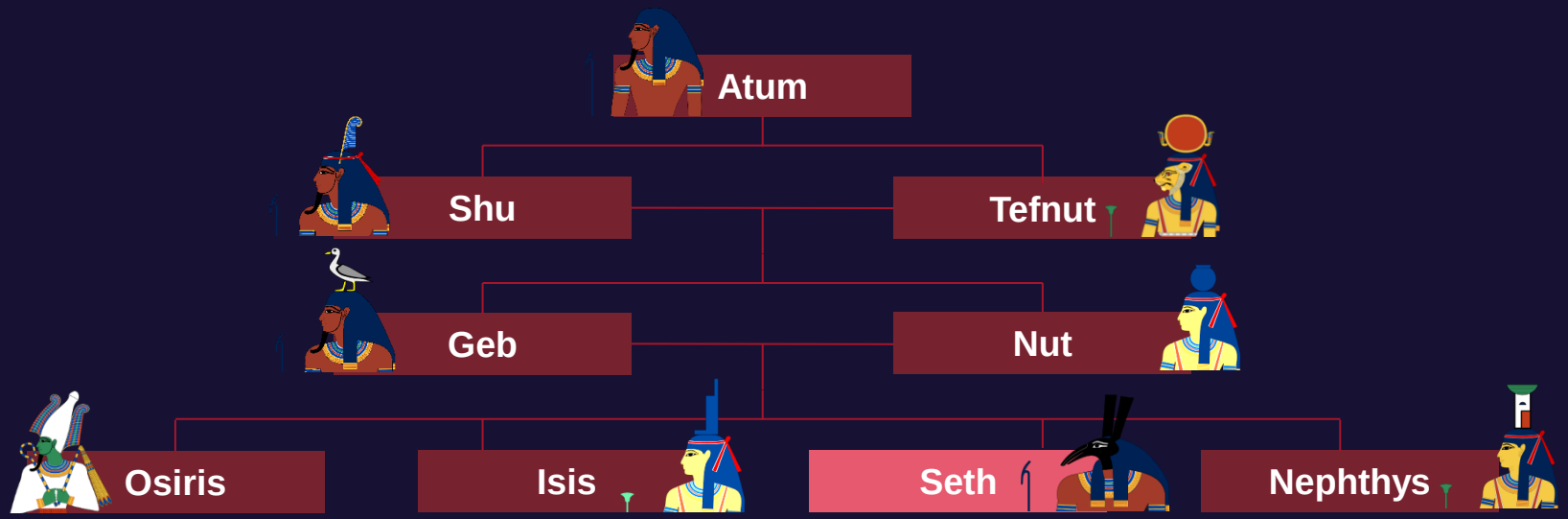
Storm god



Impression of a cylinder seal. Pierpont Morgan Library Nr 967, MBIIA-B.
Winter 2012: fig. 269.

3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

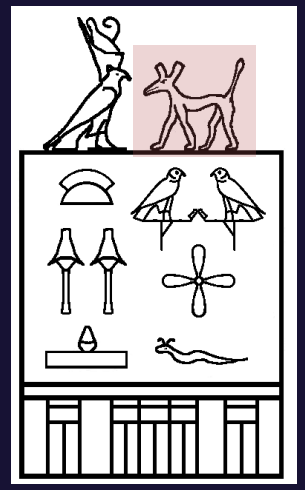
Storm god



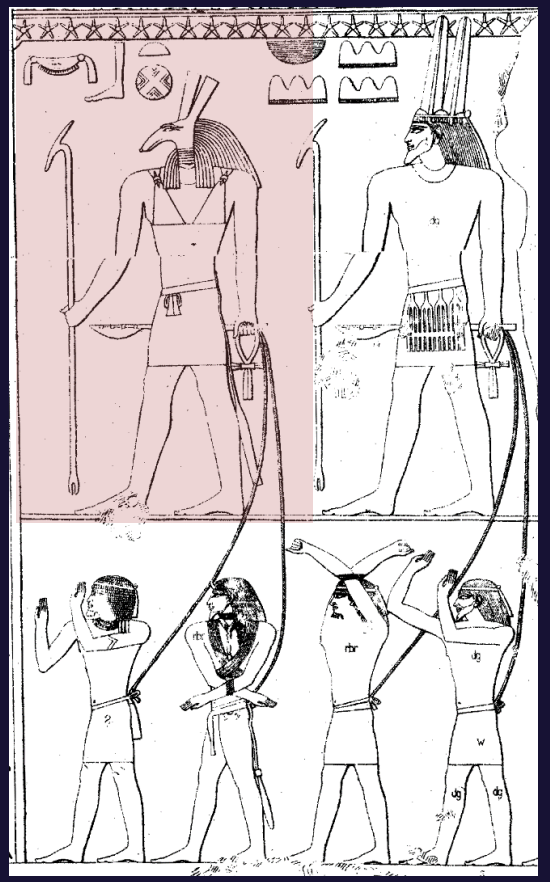
3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

Storm god

nšni ‘storm, rage’



Sealing of Khasekhemwy, Abydos, Dynasty 2.
Petrie 1901: pl. 23.



Seth of *Nb.t* leading foreigners. Causeway of Sahura’s Pyramid Complex, Abusir, Dynasty 5.
Borchardt 1913: pl. 5.

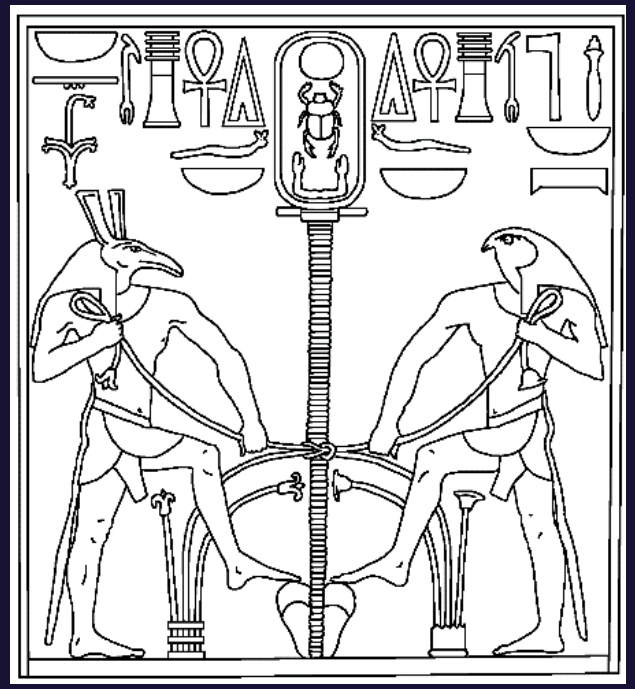
Wand(?) with the Seth-animal. Brussels E.2673, Dynasty 12(?).
http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/detail.aspx?id=425

3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

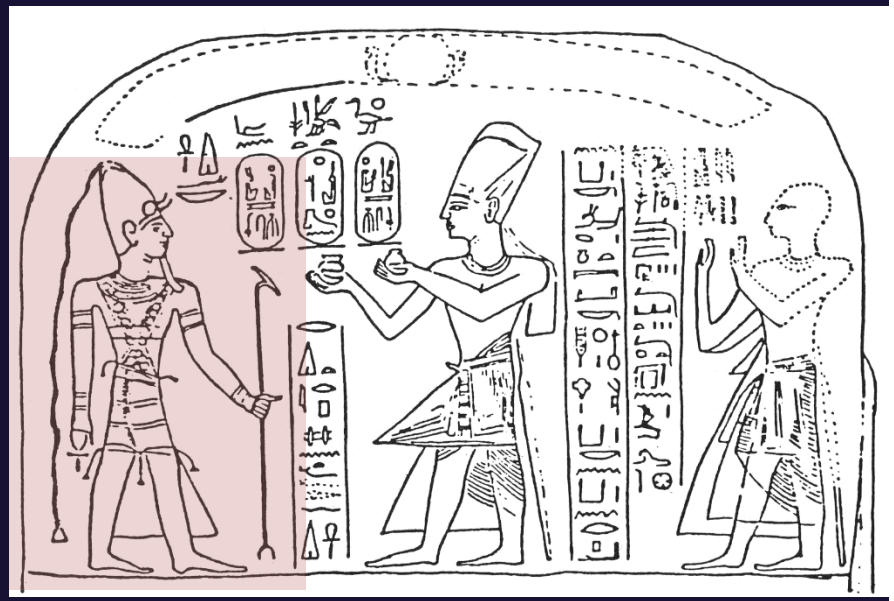
Storm god

nšni ‘storm, rage’

Bʿr ‘Baal’



Seth and Horus. Temple of Amun, Karnak, reign of Senwosret I, Dynasty 12.
Te Velde 1967: pl. 5 [1].



Upper portion of the 400 Year Stela showing Seth’s transformed representation (left), Dynasty 19.
Bietak 1990: fig. 1.

3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

Storm god

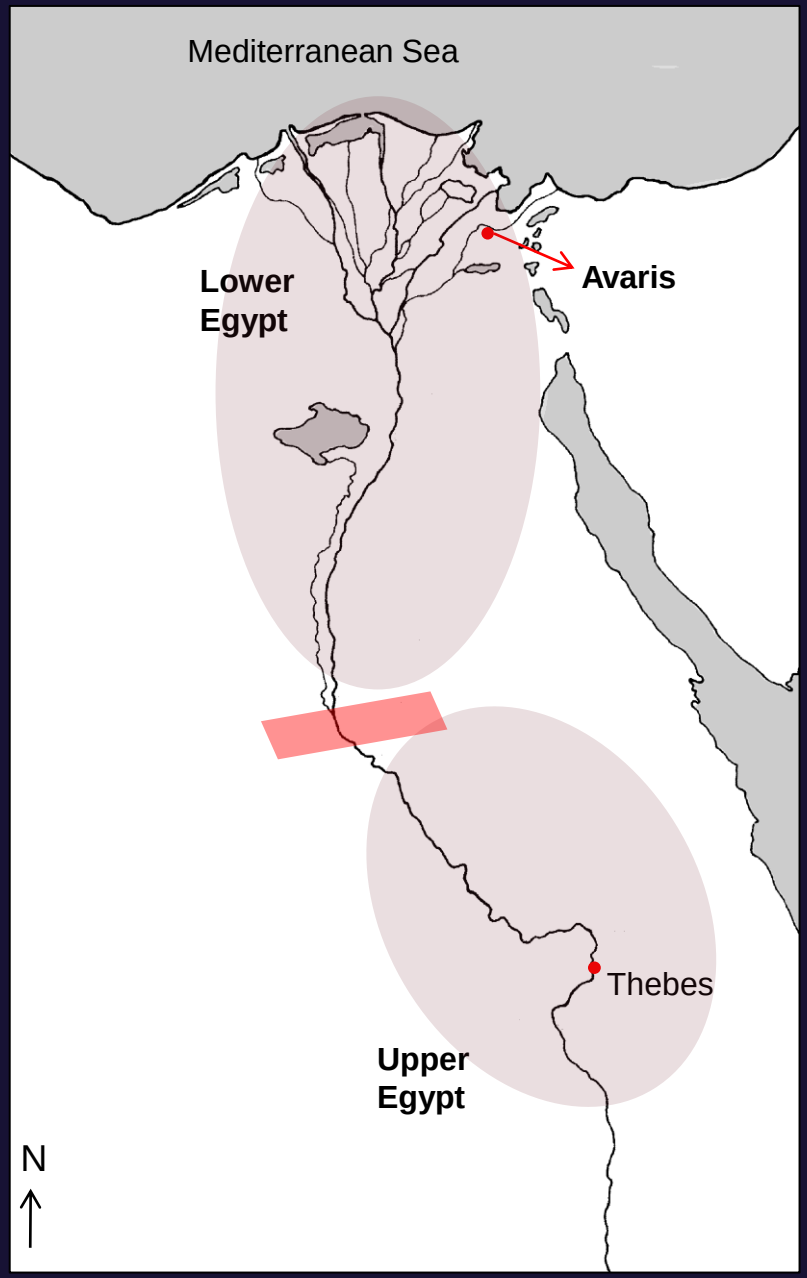
Regionalised kings and new roles — Patron city-deity

Obelisk of Nehsy (Dynasty 14):

Nehsy, **beloved of** **, lord of Avaris**

Offering table of Hyksos Apophis (Dynasty 15):

his monument for **his father [** **], lord of Avaris**



3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

Storm god

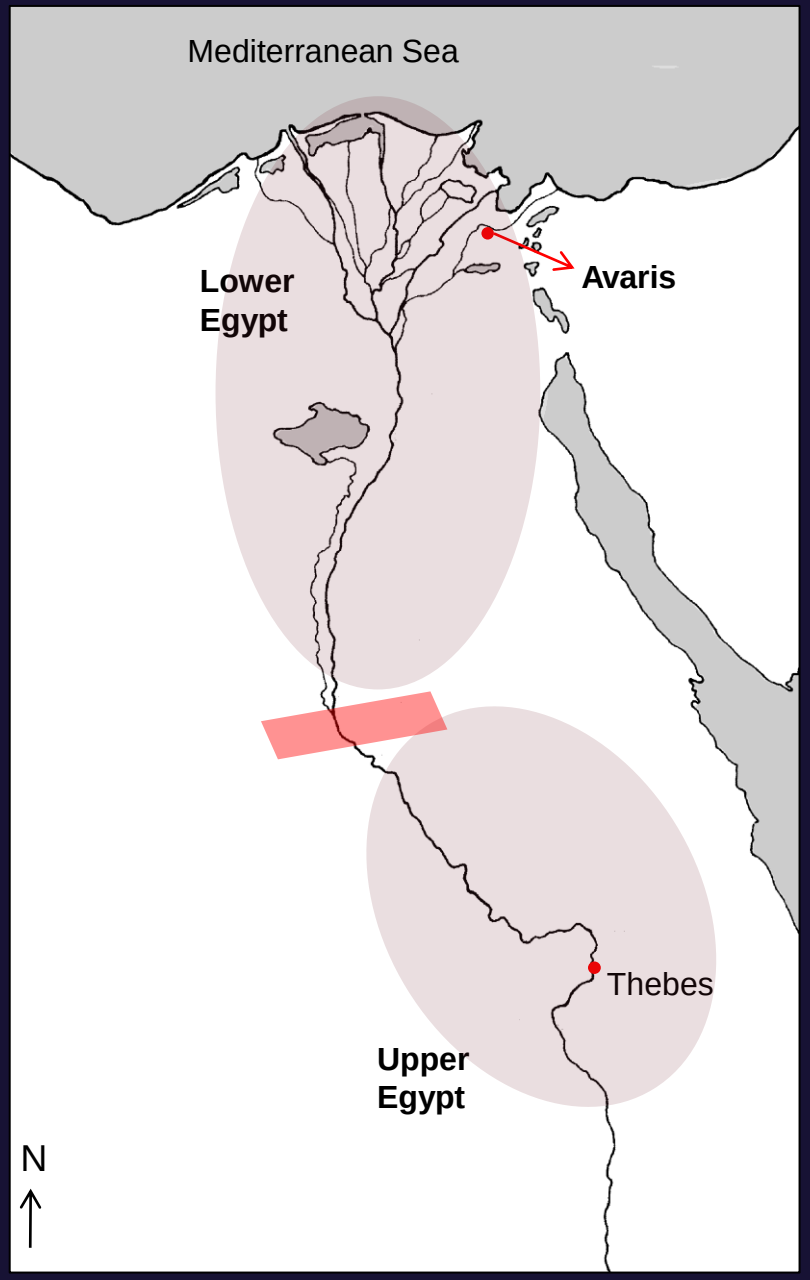
Regionalised kings and new roles

— Patron city-deity

— Weather phenomena as omens and theophany?

Tempest Stela, Karnak, reign of Ahmose, Dynasty 17

the sky was a **storm-cloud**



3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

Storm god

Regionalised kings and new roles

Cross-cultural knowledge — Seth-animal in the Levant

‘Count of Byblos, Nehsian[kh, justified, beloved] of , lord of Rb[n]w[n]’.
Seal impression, Alalakh, MBIIB(?).
Teissier, *Levant* 22, fig. 1.

‘Djedkara, beloved of , lord of Iay’.
Scarab, Sidon, MBIIB.
After Gubel and Loffet, *AHL* 34-35, 79.

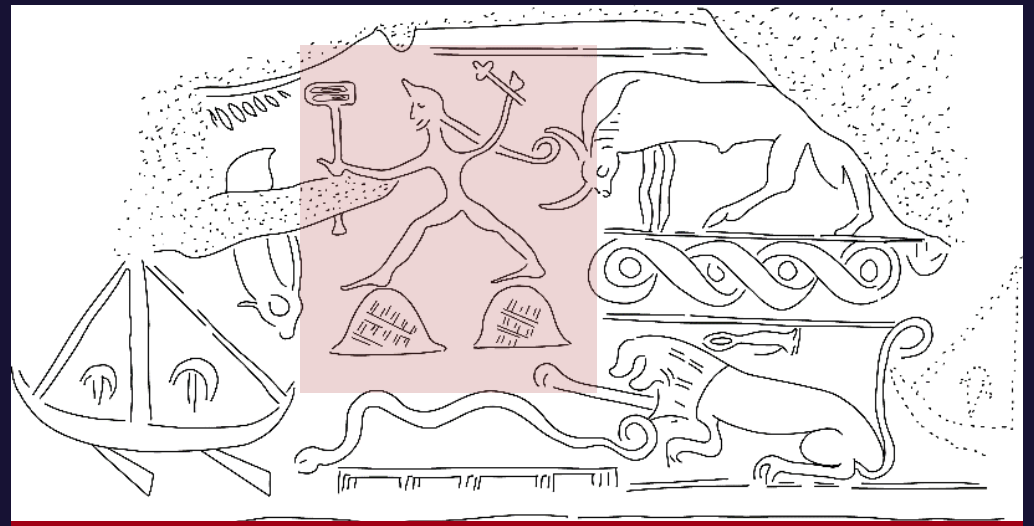
3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

Storm god

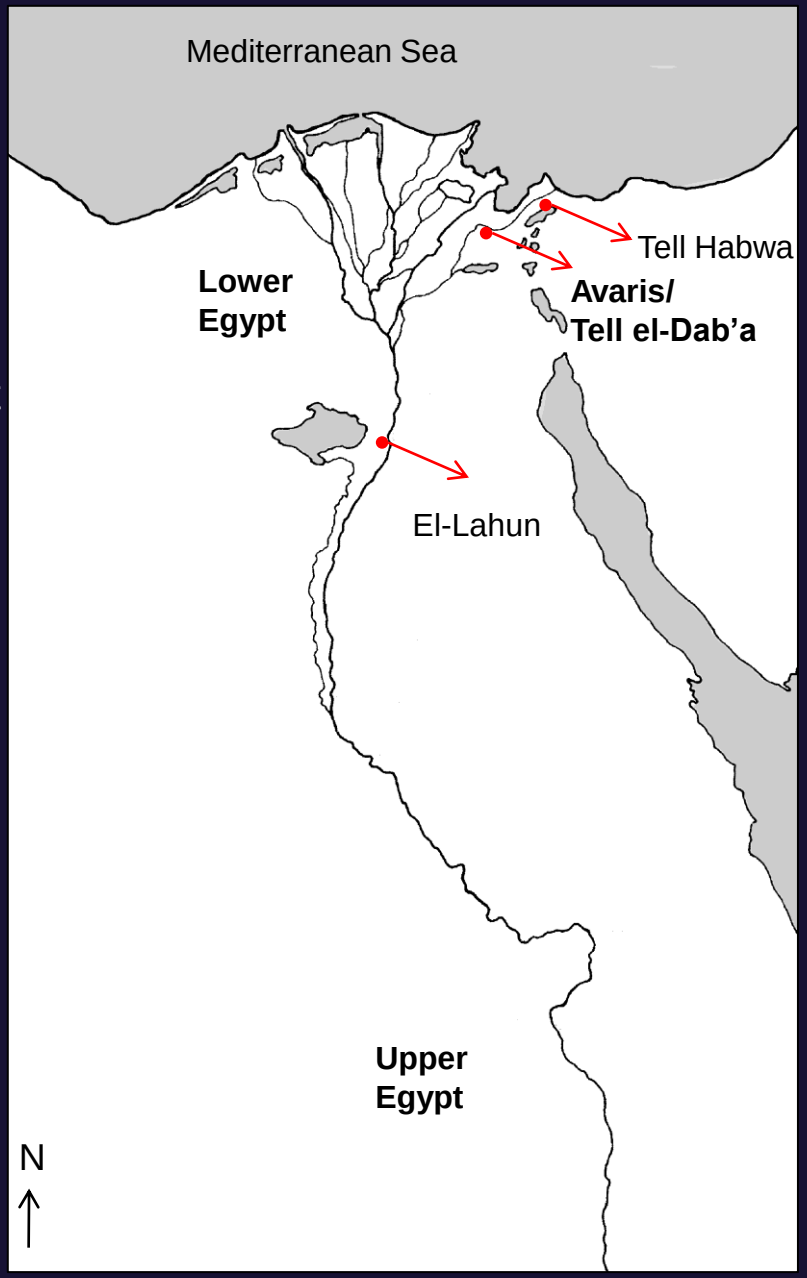
Regionalised kings and new roles

Cross-cultural knowledge

- Seth-animal in the Levant
- Levantine storm god in Egypt
  e.g. names
  e.g. iconography



Cylinder seal and its impression. Area F/I, Stratum d/1-c (Phase G/4-G).
After Porada 1984: fig. 1.



3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

Storm god

Regionalised kings and new roles

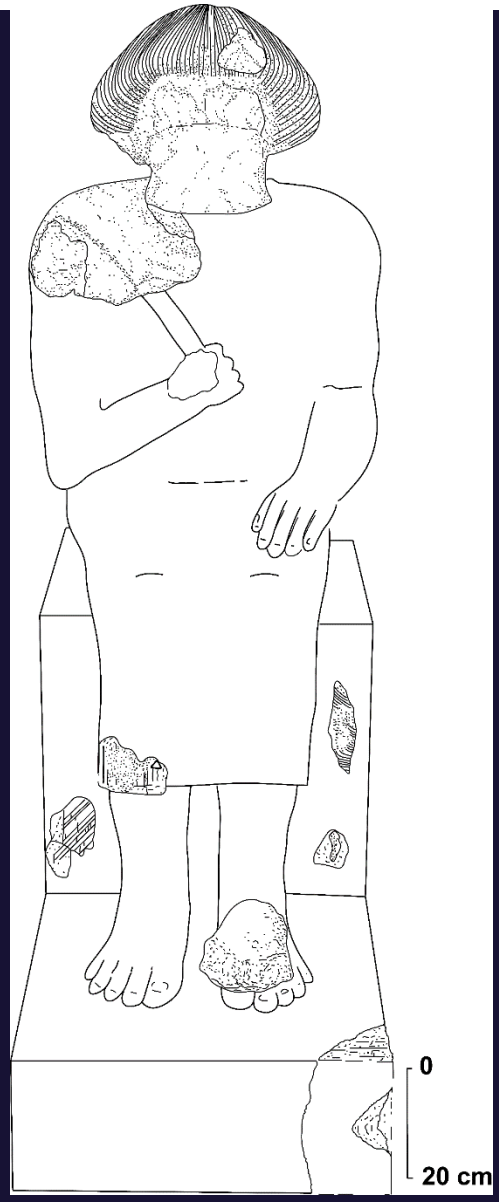
Cross-cultural knowledge

- Seth-animal in the Levant
- Levantine storm god in Egypt
  - e.g. names
  - e.g. iconography

Means of transmission

Avaris/Tell el-Dab'a offered suitable spaces for encounters and negotiations

- e.g. transregional activities of various groups
- e.g. rulership, the elite, and identity negotiations



Reconstructed statue of an official with Egyptian and Levantine features. Late Middle Kingdom, Tell el-Dab'a.
After Schiestl 2006: figs. 2, 5.

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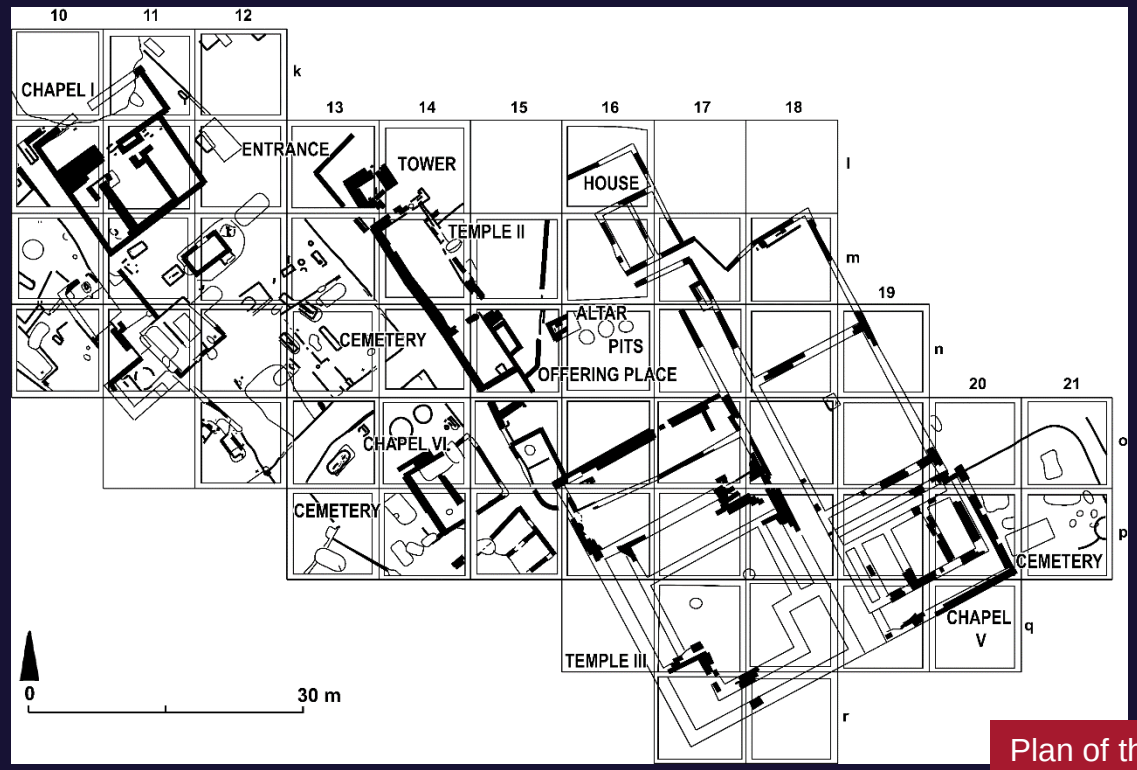
e.g. sacred precinct



Plan of the Second Intermediate Period sacred precinct at Tell el-Dabᶜa.
After Bietak 2010: fig. 34.

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e.g. sacred precinct

e.g. palatial complexes

'Ezbet Helmi complex and wall painting reconstruction.
Bietak 2013.

3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

Storm god

Regionalised kings and new roles

Cross-cultural knowledge

Continued transmission and transformations

Dynasty 18: Characteristics not previously attested for the Seth-animal manifest in **texts** e.g. links with the sea, diplomacy, trade and warfare

‘As **has encircled the sea**, likewise will encircle you, that which pertains to Aamw (i.e. a foreign disease from the northeast)’

(Hearst Medical Papyrus Remedy 170)

3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

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e.g. links with the sea, diplomacy, trade and warfare

e.g. Baal classified with the Seth-animal

Ywtʿw-Bʿr(i)

3. Beyond Borders: God of Unruly Forces

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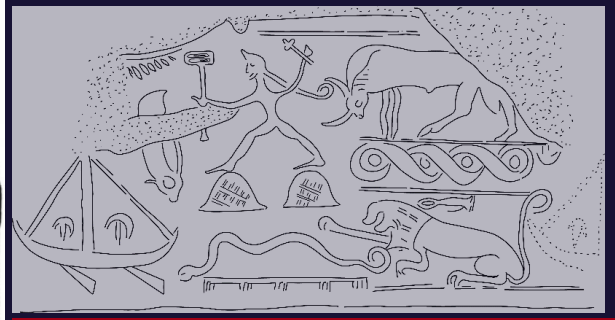
- Dynasty 18: Characteristics not previously attested for the Seth-animal manifest in **texts**
  e.g. links with the sea, diplomacy, trade and warfare
  e.g. Baal classified with the Seth-animal
- Dynasty 19: New dynasty centred in the Delta promoted Seth as patron deity again
  e.g. Seth-Baal in **texts and art**



Upper portion of the 400 Year Stela showing Seth's transformed representation (left), Dynasty 19.
Bietak 1990: fig. 1.

4. Negotiating Existence Beyond Borders

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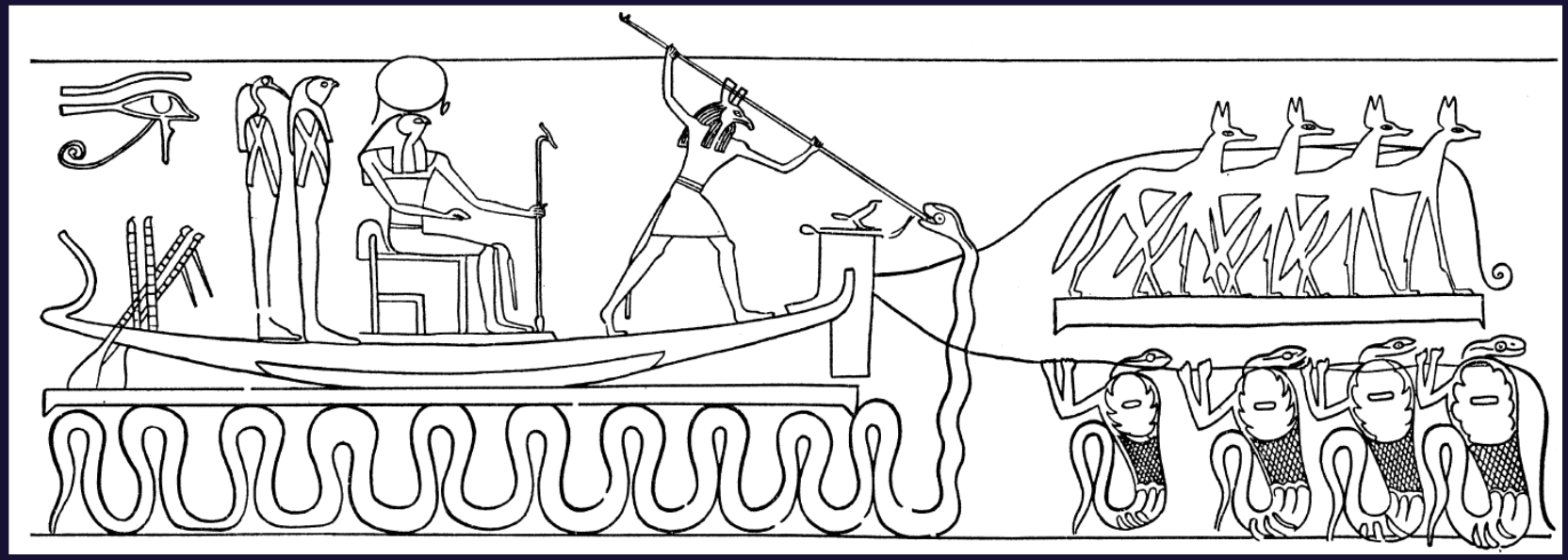
Storm god maintaining existence in Egypt and beyond

e.g. Ramesses II in the Battle of Qadesh is described by the Hittite king as 'Seth, great of strength, Baal himself, **[in] (his) hour**'

(The Bulletin, Luxor, KRI 2, 139 [9-12])

'Surely I (Baal) smote El's beloved **Yam**? Surely I exterminated **Nahar** (river), the mighty god? Surely I lifted up **Tunnan** (serpent dragon)… I smote the **writhing serpent**, Encircler-with-seven-heads!'

(Baal Cycle KTU 1.3: III.36-47)



Seth in the Seventh Hour of the Amduat. Papyrus of Her-Wbn, Dynasty 21.
Piankoff and Rambova 1957: fig. 54.

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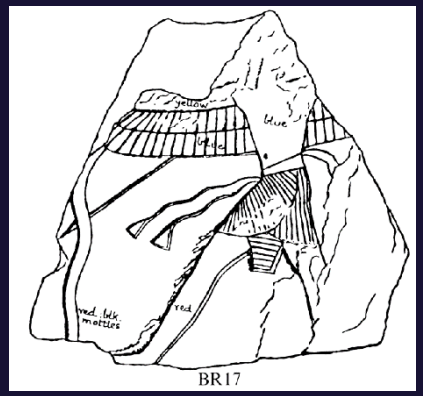
Cylinder seal impression MMA 1985.357.6.
MBA or LBA.
Cornelius 1994: pl. 50 [BM74].

Scarab Inst. Arch. E.VI.24/29.
Tomb 902, Tell el-Far'ah South, LBA.
Cornelius 1994: pl. 50 [BM76].

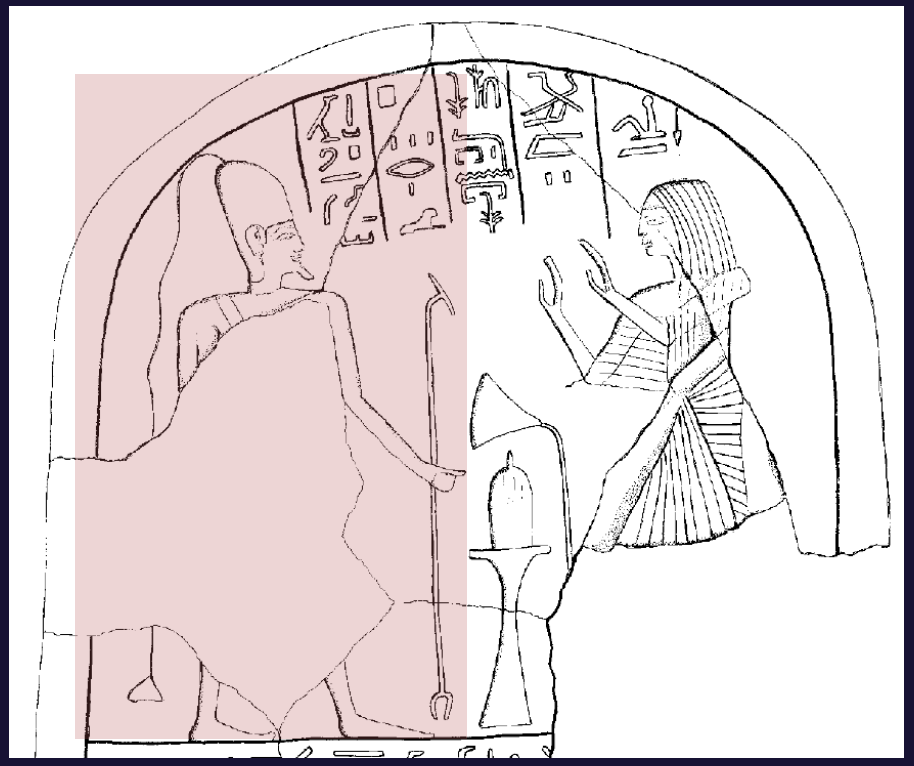


Fragmentary relief. Temple of Matmar,
Ramesses II's reign, Dynasty 19.
Cornelius 1994: pl. 43 [BR17].

4. Negotiating Existence Beyond Borders

Storm god maintaining existence in Egypt and beyond

Transcultural process



Upper part of the stela of Mami showing him praising ‘Baal Sapan (Baal of Ugarit)’. Temple of Baal, Ugarit, LBIIB. Eggler 2007: fig. 7.

Baal Sapan

4. Negotiating Existence Beyond Borders

Storm god maintaining existence in Egypt and beyond

Transcultural process

Long-term negotiations

- Socio-political and cultural factors
- Multidirectional, dynamic and cyclical process
- Several agents of transfer and negotiation

Local cult deity → **Dyn. 12-17** → Dynastic or state deity → **Dyn. 19** → Deity of an ‘empire’. A transcultural god?

4. Negotiating Existence Beyond Borders

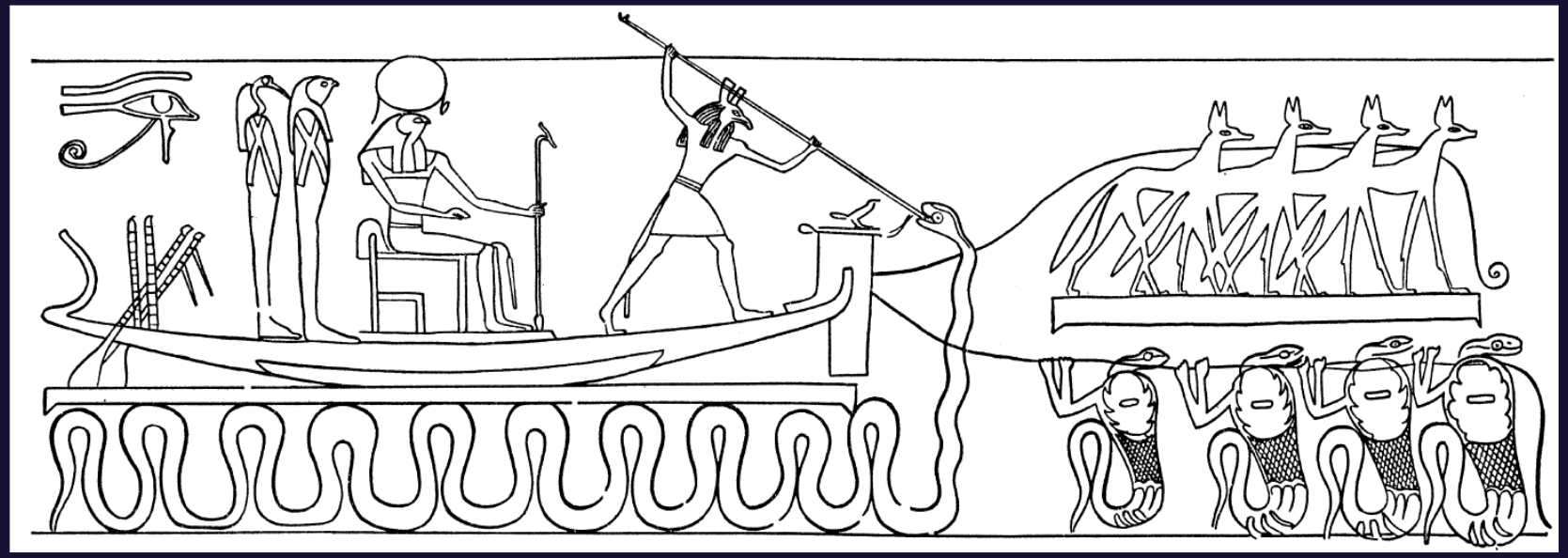
Storm god maintaining existence in Egypt and beyond

Transcultural process

Long-term negotiations

Enhancing and expanding views of the cosmos

- The existent is constantly moving, changing and transforming
- The existent can only be maintained with the inclusion and acknowledgement of the ever-present nonexistent



Thank you for your time.

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