

The Universe as divine sanctuary

The first time: creation of the world

Like many other peoples, the Egyptians placed their homeland at the center of the creation of the universe. Major temple centers had their own creation stories, which became the main religious sources that explained the structure of that universe.

Atum, the universal master

Atum was the god worshipped at Heliopolis, a city located in what are now the suburbs of Cairo. Its specific creation story is known from religious texts inserted in funerary anthologies such as the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead. Atum described how he became aware of his existence within Nun, how he acquired movement, and his desire to rest. The result was the emergence of a primeval mound on which Atum climbed, and from where he organized the universe.

Ptah, the earth that rises up

The creation story specific to the city of Memphis, south of what is now Cairo, is known from a carved stone slab in the British Museum. The stone was engraved, for preservation purposes, with a mythological text written on papyrus that had been damaged. The city's guardian god, Ptah, was the structuring element of the universe, which he organized thanks to his mind and his voice, by giving names to things and living beings.

The shining lotus

Among other creation stories, a version specific to the city of Hermopolis in Middle Egypt is particularly significant. Thoth, the god worshipped in Hermopolis, coordinated the work of four divine couples, known as the Eight. Their efforts resulted in the creation of the sun, which appeared in the form of a child inside a shining lotus, prefiguring the organization of the world.



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