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# ***And Everything Began with Laughs and Tears...*** **The Creation of the Gods** **According to *Esna II*, 163, 16-17; III, 206, 8-9 (§13) and III, 272, 2-3:** **Precedents, Interpretation and Influences**

Josué SANTOS SAAVEDRA, Roger FORTEA BASTART

Demiurge's tears play a prominent role in ancient Egyptian cosmogonic traditions as far as the genesis of the human being is concerned. However, the creation of the gods as a consequence of the demiurge's laughter seems to be a *unicum* of the texts of the temple of Esna. This does not mean, however, that it is not possible to trace certain laughter precedents as a vitalizing agent at least from the Old Kingdom, which, subsequently, would be duly re-elaborated by the Latopolitan theologians during the Late Period. It is precisely this theme that will be studied in this work, showing some possible antecedents to the idea of the creation of the divine entities by laughter. At the same time it will delve into the meaning of this theogonic method as opposed to anthropogonic. In addition, the relevance or otherwise of the hypothesis put forward by some researchers about the emergence of human beings will be analysed concerning the transmission of this notion of the theogonic laughter towards different texts written in Greek, as well as the intellectual context in which such an event could have occurred.

Y todo empezó entre risas y lágrimas... *La creación de los dioses según Esna II, 163, 16-17; III 206, 8-9 (§13); y III, 272, 2-3: precedentes, interpretación e influencias*

Las lágrimas del demiurgo juegan un destacado papel dentro de las tradiciones cosmogónicas egipcias antiguas en lo que respecta a la génesis del ser humano. Sin embargo, la creación de los dioses como consecuencia de la risa del demiurgo parece ser un *unicum* de los textos del templo de Esna. Ello no quiere decir, no obstante, que no se puedan rastrear ciertos precedentes de la risa como agente vitalizador al menos desde el Reino Antiguo que, posteriormente, serían debidamente reelaborados por los teólogos latopolitanos durante el periodo tardío. Es precisamente este tema el que será estudiado en este trabajo, mostrando algunos posibles antecedentes en los que se habría asentado la idea de la creación de los entes divinos por la risa, a la par que se ahondará en el significado de este método teogónico frente al antropogónico. Asimismo, se analizará la pertinencia o no de la hipótesis formulada por algunos investigadores relativa a la transmisión de esta noción de la risa teogónica hacia distintos textos escritos en griego, así como el contexto intelectual en que tal hecho pudo haber acontecido.

**Keywords:** Graeco-Roman Egypt, cosmogony, intertextuality, Hellenism, multiculturalism.

**Palabras clave:** Egipto grecorromano, cosmogonía, intertextualidad, Helenismo, multiculturalismo.

**The** ancient Egyptians conceived the origin of the world and of the beings that inhabit it in different ways depending on the time in which these explanations were recorded in writing and on area of the country where they were originated.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we are going to focus precisely on one of those variants that appears in three texts inscribed in the

1 For an overview of the different Egyptian cosmogonies, see Sauneron and Yoyotte 1959 (especially 71–74 for the cosmogony of Esna) and Allen 1988. Recent studies on the cosmogonies of Khnum and Neith are Broze 1999 and Fernández Pichel 2018, respectively.

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pronaos of the temple of Esna. We are referring to the theme of the creation of the gods as a consequence of the laughter of Ra, placed in parallel –in a complementary way– with the creation of human beings through the tears of this deity.<sup>2</sup>

While the issue of the creation of human beings as a consequence of the crying of the demiurge is well known –its first mention being found in the *Coffin Texts*–,<sup>3</sup> the creation of divine entities through laughter does not seem, *a priori*, to have played a similar role in the Egyptian thought of times prior to the theologians of Esna.

Our objective in this work is to essentially answer two questions: Firstly, whether this role of laughter as a creative agent can be found in the oldest Egyptian documentation or if, on the contrary, it is a creation *ex nihilo* of Latopolitan theologians, perhaps influenced by the concepts present in the Greek religion<sup>4</sup> –with which the mentioned theologians had been in contact for centuries.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, we will try to briefly delve into whether the thought reflected in the passages of the temple of Esna constitutes a *unicum* in its time or, on the contrary, can be related to other documentation of the period (mainly written in Greek), which also serves to facilitate the transmission of this idea to different philosophers of Late Antiqui-

ty –particularly the Neoplatonic Proclus in the fifth century CE. Given the space limitation, this work is in no way intended to be comprehensive when attempting to show possible antecedents of the creation laughter in Egyptian sources nor their parallels in the Greek ones of Late Antiquity, presenting only the documentation that we consider most illustrative of what we are aiming to defend.

### 1 | Demiurgic laughter in Esna and its precedents

As has already been commented, the three passages on which this research is based are found in the pronaos of the temple of Esna.<sup>6</sup> The first, which is present in a scene depicting the lotus offering to Khnum-Ra, reads:<sup>7</sup>

(272, 2) (272, 2)

(272, 3) (272, 3)

(272, 2) He (= the solar god) weeps: men exist and gather in multitude around him.

(272, 3) He laughs: gods exist and the entire Ennead joins him.

<sup>2</sup> Broze (1995: 358–359; 1996: 44 and 248; 2003: 7–8) considers the emergence of laughter in these texts and in the story of the Twentieth Dynasty *The Struggle between Horus and Seth* (pChester Beatty I) as a sign of sexual excitement that allows the demiurge to find/recover the virile force necessary to carry out/continue the creational or maintenance task of the cosmic order. While the erotic nuance of the laughter provoked by Hathor in Ra in this story of the Twentieth Dynasty seems not only plausible but difficult to reject, it is rather more complicated for us to accept the use of the same reason as an explanation of the laughter in the texts of the temple of Esna. Hence in this contribution we place the stress on other factors that are also indicators of creational aspects, but of greater amplitude than the former.

<sup>3</sup> Specially *CT VII*, 464g–465a [1130].

<sup>4</sup> Question already posed by Guglielmi (1980: 82) in his seminal article on laughter and tears in the “Ethik, Kult und Mythos” of ancient Egypt, but without proposing an answer.

<sup>5</sup> For the potentialities inherent in an interdisciplinary approach that takes such contacts into account, see Fowden 1986, and more recently Rutherford 2016 and Bortolani 2016 (the latter specifically focused on *Papyri Graecae Magicae*).

<sup>6</sup> Our translation of the texts largely follows that of Sauneron 1962: 142, 288–289 and 264.

<sup>7</sup> *Esna III*, 272, 2–3.

The second, which is contained within a hymn to Neith, reads as:<sup>8</sup>

(163, 16) (163, 16)

(163, 17) (163, 17)

(163, 16) (Neith) who creates the disc: it is called Ra because his rays shine to the earth, he who creates the gods through his laughter when he sees (her). (163, 17) He turns crying as she walks away from him, and from the tears of his eye men are born.

Finally, the third passage of interest in the framework of this work can be found in the text that refers to Neith’s cosmogony, reading as:<sup>9</sup>

(206, 8) (206, 8)

(206, 9) (206, 9)

(206, 8) His mother Ahet proclaimed: Come, come to me, my work; come, come to me, my son;

come, come to me, my child. (206, 9) I am your mother Ahet. This god came: he was speechless, arms outstretched towards this goddess, throwing himself at her neck. This is what the son did when he saw his mother. When this day comes, it is the beautiful day of the beginning of the year. When he cries in the Nun he cannot see his mother Ahet, men are born from the tears of his eye, and when he laughs seeing her, gods are born from the saliva of his lips.

This narrative parallelism between the creation of men and the creation of gods could be related to the soliloquy of Atum in the spell 1130 of the *Coffin Texts*, where it says: *shpr.n=i ntrw m fdt=i iw rmt m rmwt irt=i* “It is from my sweat (*fdt*) that I have created the gods, while men (*rmt*) come from the tears (*rmwt*) of my eye”.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, in this passage the well-known pun that explains at a first level the association between tears and men can be appreciated.<sup>11</sup>

Parallelisms that are not so much narrative but of meaning are present in various texts of the New Kingdom –especially from the Ramesside Period–, such pCairo 58038<sup>12</sup> or a hymn of Ramesses III inscribed in the temple that he built in Karnak,<sup>13</sup> where human beings emerge from the eyes of the demiurge while the gods do so from his mouth or lips.<sup>14</sup> However, in these examples the association gods-mouth/lips is to describe the creation of the divinities as a consequence of the performative power of the word.

<sup>8</sup> *Esna II*, 163, 16–17.

<sup>9</sup> *Esna III*, 206, 8–9 (§13).

<sup>10</sup> *CT VII*, 464g–465a [1130].

<sup>11</sup> For the origin of human beings in the eyes of the demiurge as referred to by Heliopolitan cosmogony, see Mathieu 1986; Bickel 1994: 93–96; Caron 2013–2014; 2014. A synthetic and updated presentation of symbolism attributed to tears in ancient Egypt can be found in Germond 2011–2013.

<sup>12</sup> Assmann 1995: 167, (1).

<sup>13</sup> Nelson 1936: pl. 25b.

<sup>14</sup> For more examples, see Assmann 1995: 167, (2), (5), (9), (10), (11) y 168, (13).

Likewise, two inscriptions in the temples of Tod and Edfu say, respectively, that the demiurge created the gods with his saliva –making use in this case of a play on words between *ntrw* and *ntt*, as is also the case in *Esna* III, 206, 8-9 (§13)– and to human beings with their eyes (*Tod* I, 71, 9-10), and that the gods come from his mouth, while men do so from his eyes (*Edfu* III, 47, 6). These various examples clearly show the dynamism and the capacity to adaptation of the ancient Egyptian religion, which will be seen in a broader context in the second part of this article.

The differentiation of the modes of creation depending on whether they refer to the gods or men does not constitute, as can be seen, a particularism of the temple of Esna, not even the connection of the former with the demiurge’s mouth. Nor must we forget that the method of lacrimal creation is not exclusively linked to anthropogony; to cite only a few examples, pSalt 825 says that bees are born of the tears of Ra,<sup>15</sup> and on the east wall of the pronaos of the temple of Hathor in Dendara it recounts how this divinity was born as a consequence of the exudations that fell on the sand from his eye.<sup>16</sup>

What draws the attention of the Latopolitan fragments is the specific use of the laughter as a theogonic principle. It is, no doubt, a laughter of the joy of Ra after his mother’s return thus putting an end to his previous mournful appearance. There can be no doubt, such as there is for the sentimental assessment or not of the gods-men creation in the *Coffin Texts*,<sup>17</sup> about the fact that in *Esna* II, 163, 16-17 and in *Esna* III, 206, 8-9 (§13) men are born as a consequence of the sadness of the demiurge and the gods out of his joy.<sup>18</sup> However, the order of factors in this case is also of paramount importance: firstly, it concerns the creation of men and then the creation of divinities, accompanied by a gesture as disruptive<sup>19</sup> as laughter,<sup>20</sup> both of which can be classified as methods of intransitive creation, using the terminology of J. Assmann.<sup>21</sup>

Knowing the chronological and intellectual context in which the theologians of Esna put in writing the texts being discussed, we could legitimately ask ourselves whether this idea of demiurgic laughter is genuinely Egyptian or, on the contrary, we must turn our gaze towards the world of Greek religion. The sourc-

15 *r̄ rm=f m-wḥm ḥ̄ (=w) mw m irt=f r t̄ ḥpr=f m ʿfy* “Ra cried again. The water in his eye fell on the ground and it became a bee” (pSalt 825 II, 5. For the hieroglyphic transcription of this passage, see Derchain 1965: II, 2\*).

16 *sf ntry ḥf=f m nḥb m tr n pr=f m nww hy infw nw ʿnḥt=f r nšw m ḥr=f qm3(w)=s m st nfrt* “The divine child shone in the lotus when it came out of the Nun. Some exudations of his eye fell from his face on the sand and a beautiful woman (was) created” (Translated from the transliteration of the hieroglyphic text made by Cauville 1990: 87).

17 For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Caron 2013–2014; 2014 (especially the last work).

18 As Mathieu (1986: 506) comments, “comme le suggérait le graveur du temple d’Esna, les dieux, nés du rire, sont promis à une joie infinie, tandis que les hommes, issus des larmes, sont condamnés d’avance au chagrin”.

19 Speaking of the presence of laughter in Demotic literary texts (particularly in the story *Setne I*), Jasnow (2001: 75, n. 86) says that it “indicates physically the release of tension and the restoration of an equilibrium”. For the same idea expressed over a hundred years ago in relation to the episode of Baubo in the Eleusian Mysteries and the feast of the Daedala of Platea, see Reinach 1911: 594.

20 For laughter and the words used to designate it in ancient Egypt, see Guglielmi 1979: 181; 1980. On the subject of general humour in ancient Egyptian culture, see Van de Walle 1969; 1980; Meltzer 1992; Morenz 1999; Lazaridis 2013.

21 Assmann 2007: 17.

es of the Archaic and Classical Periods show an ambivalent attitude towards laughter in general.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, it could be attributed a playful character and, therefore, harmless. Alternatively, it could be seen as tremendously harmful and undesirable if it concealed a mocking intention, which would not be surprising in a society whose values were based on honour and guilt.<sup>23</sup>

Focusing specifically on the Greek religion of those periods, we find that, although in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, for example, laughter appears on several occasions in the mouths of the gods,<sup>24</sup> this does not really play any role in cosmogonic thinking. The place where we find laughter mentioned in a context closer to creation –in this case referring to fertility– is in the episode of the Eleusian Mysteries where Baubo (or Iambe, as it is called in the *Homeric hymn to Demeter* 200-205 (ca. sixth century BCE), although it does not specify which one is the act that this female character performs to make the goddess laugh) carries out the *anasyrma*<sup>25</sup> –that is to

say, she lifts her skirt to show her genitals– in the face of a depressed Demeter<sup>26</sup> who, as a result, will laugh, recovering the lost joy and with it the natural cycles and the fertility of the soil will be guaranteed its normal progress.<sup>27</sup>

Discarded this Greek way as a possible origin of the notion of the theogonic laughter present in Esna’s texts, we must focus –even though not in depth– on the ancient Egyptian sources of time before our temple in order to see if we can come up with a possible background.

First of all, it should be noted that the word used for the verb “laugh” in Egyptian is *sbt*, which from the New Kingdom presents *sbi*<sup>28</sup> as a variant, a phenomenon habitual in the historical evolution of some Egyptian words –due to the unstable nature of its last phoneme– in which the radical *t* becomes *i*.<sup>29</sup> At first sight and lacking a deep lexicographic study of this word and its contexts of use, it can be said that its use seems much less common than the rest of the terms and ex-

22 An exhaustive and well-documented analysis of the various aspects of laughter in ancient Greek culture, especially during the Archaic and Classic Periods, can be found in Halliwell 2008.

23 Halliwell (1991: 292) masterfully synthesizes what we intend to explain when he says: “The two poles around which Greek views of laughter tend to be concentrated represent, therefore, a kind of perpetual tension between the spirit of celebratory, playful release and the forces of derisive antagonism, a tension which was handled by the shaping and constraining functions of both ethical attitudes and specific social practice”.

24 Halliwell 2008: 51–99.

25 A detailed and updated presentation and analysis of this issue can be found in Halliwell 2008: 161–166 (with abundant references).

26 For the discovery at Athribis of terracotta statuettes in this gesture, which date from the beginning of the second century BCE, see Mysliwiec 1994.

27 In this regard, Volokhine (2012: 770) estimates that, in his view, “dans le pensé égyptienne, l’association entre le rire et la nudité féminine dévoilée oriente essentiellement vers une idée de fécondité et de fertilité. (...) Cependant, aucun élément direct ne nous laisse entendre que la vieille conception égyptienne influença directement des idées grecques plus ou moins analogues”. Different passages showing the relationship between laughter and fecundity –and which will not be dealt with in this contribution– in chronologically Egyptian texts from the *Pyramid Texts* to the Roman Period, will be found in Volokhine 2012: 759–762.

28 *Wb* III: 434, 5–11.

29 Malaise and Winand 1999: 21.

pressions that the ancient Egyptians used to allude to joy.<sup>30</sup>

As regards the first text in which the mention of laughter can be put somehow in parallel with our passages from Esna, this is spell 511 of the *Pyramid Texts*,<sup>31</sup> where Geb's *laughter* and Nut's *rejoicing*<sup>32</sup> somehow begin the ascent of the deceased monarch to heaven and, therefore, his process of identification with the divinities, which will culminate at the end of the spell after a detailed description of the benefits of such identification. This spell could already be related to the Latopolitan texts, since in it laughter of the earth god and the sky goddess shows a character, if not strictly creational, certainly initiator of a process of ontological change that will lead the king from his condition of human being with innate divine qualities activated through the crowning ritual, to the state of full divinity.

However, it is from the New Kingdom onwards that we begin to find a greater number of texts in which reference is made to laughter in a context that can be related to greater likelihood to our Latopolitan passages.<sup>33</sup> The first of them is found in the myth of the divine birth of Hatshepsut, where, after the god Amon entered the chamber-*nfrw* where

queen Ahmes is resting, we are told: *rs.n=s hr st ntr sbt[=s] hft hm=f sw šm=f hr=s hr- r sw h3d=f r=s* "She awoke to the smell of the god and laughed in the presence of his incarnation. Then, he advanced before her immediately and was sexually aroused by her".<sup>34</sup> The parallel between this passage and that from Esna might at first glance seem unjustified, but it turns out to be understandable if we consider that laughter in both contexts serves as a nexus of union between a lethargic state and a revitalization which results in an act with genetic potency: in this case it leads to the sexual encounter in which Hatshepsut will be begotten. It is precisely in this positive revitalizing character, transformer of the ontological state—creational, after all—of laughter where we believe that it is necessary to emphasize, character present in the spell 511 of the *Pyramid Texts*, in the myth of Hatshepsut's birth, in the texts at Esna and in the rest of examples that we will now briefly present.

The following example we bring up is a fragment of the *Eulogy of Merenptah* contained in pSallier I, the end of which says, as a consequence of the crowning of this sovereign, *hrww q3y(.w) grhwt hry wnwwt i'h iw n mt(t) ntrw htp.w hr-w(.w) nh=tw <m> sbiw bi3yt* "the days are long,

the nights have the (correct) hours and the moon rises regularly. The gods are contented and pleased, and they live <among> laughter (*sbiw*) and wonder (*bi3yt*)".<sup>35</sup> Although here the link with the Esna texts may seem less obvious than in the case of Hatshepsut's, the close link of the revitalizing action that represents the coronation of Merenptah for the cosmos with the laughter and the wonders can be clearly seen. It can also be appreciated a certain homography/homophony between *sbiw* and *bi3yt*: even if they are not the cause of the mentioned revitalization, they constitute elements arising from this recreation.

Another very illustrative example—and one that reminds us so much of the episode of the Baubo of the Elusis Mysteries that some researchers did not hesitate in the past to see an ancient Egyptian origin of this motif—is that of the first mention of Hathor in the account of the Twentieth Dynasty story known as *The Struggle between Horus and Seth*. The passage reads as follows:<sup>36</sup>

(4.1) *hr ir s3 i3d 3 wn.in* (4.2) *hwt-hrw nb(t) nht mhy hr ii iw=s hr h m-b3h it=s nb r dr iw=s kf k3t=s r hr=f h n p3 ntr 3* (4.3) *sbi3t im=st wn.in-*

*=f hr dwn=f iw=f hms(=f) hn t3 psdt 3t iw=f hr dd.n(=f) hrw hn sth i-dd r r=tn*

(4.1) *After a long moment came*<sup>37</sup> (4.2) Hathor, Lady of the Southern Sycamore, stopped in front of her father, the Lord of the World, and unveiled her vulva before her face. *Then*, the great god (4.3) laughed. *Then he* arose, sat down with the Great Ennead and said to Horus and Seth: Speak for yourselves!

As M. Broze has noted, the verb used by the author of the text to speak of the rising of the Lord of the World is *dwn*, which "lorsqu'il question d'un mort, c'est l'idée de résurrection qui est exprimée. Vu le contexte, on comprend que le terme évoque une forme de renaissance du dieu solaire, qui était auparavant couché".<sup>38</sup> Once again we find a laughter that serves as a catalyst from lethargy into a creative dynamism: in this case the reanimation of Ra resumes the litigation.<sup>39</sup> As E.F. Morris comments, "the act of *anasyrmenê* served to resolve a crisis and to move the plot forward".<sup>40</sup>

We also found interesting samples of the revitalizing power, disruptor and generator of laughter action in two very well-known

30 Recently, N. Beaux dedicated two works to the different words and expressions used in Egyptian texts until the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty to allude to sadness and joy, recognizing more than forty terms to refer to the latter. For these words and expressions referring to joy, see Beaux 2012: 1582, n. 88; 2017: 240.

31 We thank Andrea Rodríguez Valls for letting us know this reference.

32 *zbt gbb nthh nwt tp-wy=f pr NN ir pt* "Geb laughs and Nut rejoices before him when NN ascends to heaven" (PT 511, §1149a-b<sup>PMNNt</sup>).

33 Von Lieven (2014: 20) asserts that the origin of the gods in Ra's laughter has been witnessed since the Ramesside Period. However, the document cited to support this idea—a hymn to Nefertum inscribed on an ostracon found in KV9 (Cairo 25210)—only mentions the creation of human beings through tears, while the part referring to the gods has not been completely preserved. On the other hand, it is somewhat striking that this researcher states that Broze was "still unaware of the age of the concept of laughing and thus ventilated a possible Greek influence, a theory which of course now has become obsolete" (Von Lieven 2014: 20, n. 5). However, Broze does not propose at any time a Greek influence for the creative laughter of the gods, but rather quite the opposite: a possible Egyptian influence on the texts written in Greek where it appears.

34 *Urk. IV* 219, 12–15.

35 pSallier I, r<sup>o</sup> 8,11–9,1. For the hieroglyphic transcription of this passage, see Gardiner 1937: 87, 1–3.

36 pChester Beatty I, r<sup>o</sup> 4,1–4,3. For the hieroglyphic transcription of this passage, see Gardiner 1932: 41, 7–11.

37 We indicate the rubrics present in the original document by underlining the transliteration by italics in translation.

38 Broze 1996: 44.

39 The various authors who have recently become interested in this passage seem to agree on the erotic character and at the same time (or as a consequence of it) the reanimation of Hathor's gesture: "Quelle que soit la motivation du rire de la déesse, rien n'indique une intention railleuse. (...) le caractère érotique du contexte est évident" (Broze 1996: 44); "What's so funny about *anasyrmenê*? (...) because Hathor was the goddess of physical love and beauty, her flash could have delighted her father by reminding him of his potency in realms both sexual and political" (Morris 2007: 201); "L'Hathor du papyrus Chester Beatty pourrait bien être, au demeurant, en lien avec « l'éros du demiurge », cette déesse « vulve » (Nébet- Hetepet), principe féminin mobilisateur de l'énergie créatrice masculine. (...) L'épisode du papyrus Chester Beatty indique que le dévoilement du sexe d'Hathor, explicite, met un terme net à une crise : il provoque un sursaut chez Rê (contrecoup du dévoilement « brutal » du sexe), qui se manifeste par le rire, et qui va faire en sorte que le dieu va retourner à ses occupations. (...) On peut donc volontiers le reconnaître comme une rire de « regeneration »" (Volokhine 2012: 758).

40 Morris 2007: 206.

demotic compositions. We are referring to the stories *Setne I* and *Setne II*. At the beginning of *Setne I* we are told:<sup>41</sup>

(3,2) *hqr p3 nw || smn=w t3 hrwt t m-b3h Pr-ε3 || st iw.w m-s3=y || t=w t=y r t3 hrwt t (3,3) [m-b3h Pr-ε3 | iw h3=] r y t hr m-šs | iw bn tw=y ir n p3y=y gy n sf in || d n=y Pr-ε3 || Th(.t)-wre.t in mtwt | ir t| iw.w=w n=y n n3y mtwt l he(w.t) d || my | hms=y irm (3,4) [N3-nfr-k3-Pth p3y=y sn] ε3 || d=y n=f || my | hms=y irm p3 šr n w<sup>c</sup> mr mš<sup>c</sup> || my | hms=f irm t3 šr:t n ky mr mš<sup>c</sup> h<sup>c</sup>=f || hpr=f | r t3y=n mhw3.t r ε3y || sby=y || sby Pr-ε3 || (3,5) [p3 Mr- Pr-Nisw.t iw.w] || d Pr-ε3 || p3 Mr-Pr-Nisw.t my | t=w Th(.t)-wre.t r p3 ε .wy n N3-nfr-k3-Pth n p3 grh || my | t=w nty-nb | nty n3-nfr=w irm=s tr=w || t=w =y n hm.t r p3 ε.wy n N3-nfr-k3-Pth*

(3,2) The time came, (and) the feast was laid in the presence of Pharaoh. They came for me, (and) I was taken to the feast (3,3) [in the presence of Pharaoh,] ‘my’ [heart] exceedingly sad, without my being in my mood of the day before.

Said Pharaoh to me, ‘Ihweret, are you the one who had them come to me with these foolish words, saying, “Let me settle down with (3,4) [Nanferkaptah my] older [brother]”?’

Said I to him, ‘Let me settle down with the son of an army commander; let him, for his part, settle down with the daughter of another army commander. Let it be that our family will be numerous!’ I laughed, (and) Pharaoh laughed.

(3,5) [The Royal Majordomo came.] ‘Said’ Pharaoh, ‘Royal Majordomo, have Ihweret taken to the house of Nanferkaptah tonight. Have every beautiful thing taken with her, omitting nothing.’

I was taken as wife to the house of Nanferkaptah (...).

As for *Setne II*, after the question posed by the Nubian magician as to whether there was

someone able to read the document that he had brought without breaking its seal and without opening it, and the consequent sadness provoked by these words in the king and Setne before the impossibility of finding a man with such abilities, we are told (pBM EA 10822.1, v<sup>o</sup> 3,11-3,19) that the prodigious son of Setne, upon seeing his father lying down and despondent for this reason, asked what his situation was due. Once Setne replied, his son laughed because he thought it was of little importance and said that he could read the Nubian document without opening it and without breaking its seal. Hearing that, Setne regained his lost strength and rose to his feet.<sup>42</sup>

Once again, we see how in these two passages laughter is a catalyst that carries from a state of depression or lethargy (or both) to a new situation characterized by the recovery of joy and dynamism.

As a conclusion to the first question we had asked ourselves at the beginning of this article, it can be said, then, that all these parallels to which we have briefly reviewed seem to demonstrate, or at least make plausible, the idea that the theogonic laughter we found in Esna’s texts had antecedents in Egyptian texts from earlier times –although it does not seem too abundant–. In them *sbt/sbi* has a clear revitalizing character which serves to exit from a state of lethargy and carry out an act of creation in the broadest sense of the term.

The Latopolitan theologians must have known this inveterate association of laughter with the revitalization/creation and inserted it into the cosmogonic narrative inscribed on the walls of the main temple of their locality. That is to say, they took ancient ideas “attachée à sa foi millénaire, mais tente, en l’en-

richissant par l’intérieur, de lui rendre un peu de cette vie qui la fuit”,<sup>43</sup> something that should not surprise us if we take into account the work of adaptation of Greek religious thought and Hellenistic philosophy which some researchers, like Broze, have appreciated in the texts present in that temple.<sup>44</sup> This very possible intercultural dialogue carried out by the *hierogrammatists* of Latopolis perhaps makes the presence of laughter more understandable in different texts contemporary and later (in Demotic as well as in Greek) with a similar meaning. It is to analyze precisely these parallels that we are going to dedicate the second part of this contribution.

## 2 | Laughter and tears in the late sources

We must now pay attention to contemporary sources of our cosmogonic texts of Esna. However, and in contrast to the documents referred to up to now, we are going to come across a heterogeneous set of traditions. Thinking reality that produced the religious complex of Esna means to think Egypt in the frame of Hellenism<sup>45</sup> –understood in a chronologically broad

sense that would range from the arrival of Alexander the Great, in 332 BCE, to the gradual implantation of Christianity between the fourth and fifth centuries CE. This particular period fostered a cultural syncretism that affected the entire eastern Mediterranean. Especially in the time to which our texts belong: from first to fourth centuries CE. In this second half of Hellenism, from Roman domination to the gates of the Byzantine Period, traditional religiosity goes from the last bright rales in the reclusion and festivities of the great temples of Luxor, Esna, Dendara or the area of el-Fayum –not mention of the enclave of Philae on the Nubian border–, until the practical disappearance of its community function and priesthood. This does not exclude the continuity of the worship at a private sphere of which we have numerous testimonies in the form of papyri, the service to the deceased, *ex-voto* figurines and domestic altars.<sup>46</sup> The intricacies that wove the complex network between state, community, family and territory were breaking down.<sup>47</sup>

However, the mixture of traditional religiosity with forms –and, to what an extent, the funds– Greeks and Romans, Jews, Levantines and Christians, has left us one of the most ex-

<sup>41</sup> pCairo 30646, 3,2–3,5. Transliteration and translation by Vinson 2018: 113.

<sup>42</sup> A translation of this passage can be found in Agut-Labordère and Chauveau 2011: 50–51.

<sup>43</sup> Sauneron 1961: 44

<sup>44</sup> Broze 1993; 1999; 2003. As Broze notes well when she highlights the similarity between the role played by the goddess Ahet in the text of Neith’s cosmogony in Esna and that of Barbelo in the second hypostasis in Seth’s three Gnostic stelae, “sans qu’ils impliquent une filiation directe entre les deux, ils laissent supposer un courant intellectuel commun, attesté par des sources grecques ou égyptiennes” (Broze 1993: 7, n. 6). Likewise, in another work (Broze 2003: 9), this same researcher defends that “le temple d’Esna illustre peut-être à sa manière, comme les textes en grec et en latin qui lui sont plus ou moins contemporains, le désir d’associer, d’unifier, les prestigieuses sagesses qui se confrontent, se combattent parfois durement, mais au moins se connaissent”. Note, however, that there are other researchers (Sauneron 1961: 44) who completely deny the existence of external influences to traditional Egyptian culture in the texts written on the walls of the temple of Esna.

<sup>45</sup> A synthesis of the identity and cultural changes brought about by the Greek conquest over Egypt is to be found in Pereira 2013 (specially 3–30).

<sup>46</sup> On the permanence of the traditional Egyptian religiosity and the new Greek-Egyptian forms that will crop up with conquest, see Fowden 1986 (specially 13–44); focusing more concretely on the Roman Period and its sociological aspect: Frankfurter 2012.

<sup>47</sup> For a recent update on the discussions about the end of the ancient Egyptian religion, see Medini 2015.

citing legacies of Late Antiquity, inasmuch as it forces us to rethink the dimension of two concepts difficult to grasp and to conjugate: *identity* and *syncretism*.

To what extent can identity be defined as the permanence of the identical? And what role does the assumption of the other, that is, syncretism, play in this identity? The heteroclit and complex of this religious syncretism has to force us to think ancient Egyptian religion –not only that of this age, but as a whole– as something dynamic and alive (and as such, exposed to internal and/or external events) that escapes easy definitions and static *clichés*. The question of the identity and the assumption of the otherness is, in short, the core matter of the second part of this paper.

For example, the first document we present: the famous story of the *Myth of the Eye of the Sun* or *The Distant Goddess*<sup>48</sup> (pLeiden I, r<sup>o</sup> 384). The text forms part of the *Theban Magical Library*, a set of manuscripts in Greek, Demotic, Coptic and Hieratic glosses, with a marked magical character, coming from the Theban region and dated to the second half of the third century CE.<sup>49</sup> In turn, this library was included at the time by K. Preisendanz in the edition of the so-called *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM).<sup>50</sup> Our papyrus has the number XII (*PGM XII*), also known as *Leiden's*

*Great Papyrus*. While the verse is a compendium of *voces magicae* in Greek and Demotic which overflows with spells with numerous Greek, Semitic and Egyptian divinities, the *Myth of the Distant Goddess* is a mythical narrative with literary and cultural hints of folk-tale<sup>51</sup> of pure Egyptian tradition. It is, in fact, the most complete version of a myth that sinks its roots deep into Egyptian religious conscience. Indeed, the *Myth of the Distant Goddess* is profusely attested to in numerous Ptolemaic temples –especially those of Dakka, Philae, Edfu, Esna and Dendara–, a time when special vitality was enjoyed.<sup>52</sup> However, the cult unattached from the mythical story, is already attested during the New Kingdom,<sup>53</sup> in Hathoric hymns of the Middle Kingdom,<sup>54</sup> in the name of certain divinities of the Old Kingdom,<sup>55</sup> and can be suspected as the survival of arcane ritual hunting cults.<sup>56</sup> In our version, the Eye of Ra, the goddess Hathor, moved by the anger towards her father –and for reasons that are not entirely clear–, leaves Egypt and takes refuge in the south, in the wild lands of Bugem in the form of a *imyt ikšt*, “a nubian cat”. Without the presence of the goddess, Egypt languishes, and has lost the happiness and the fertility of their fields. Ra then sends a *wnš-kwf*, “a jackal-monkey”, who rebels in the end as Thoth himself, who must appease

48 Spiegelberg 1917; De Cenival 1988; Bresciani 1990: 738–772; Quack 2005: 206–240.

49 For questions relating to their discovery, dating and palaeographic characteristics, see Dieleman 2005: 40–45.

50 Preisendanz 1931.

51 On the sometimes diffuse categorization of mythical into narrative forms, see a summary of the question in Cervelló Autuori (forthcoming).

52 Junker 1911; Inconnu-Bocquillon 2001 (specially conclusions: 335–336).

53 Ritcher 2010.

54 Darnell 1995.

55 It is the case of Anhur (in Greek, Onuris), divinity of This, already attested in names and priestly titles of the Third Dynasty, whose name, *in-hrt*, means “the one who brings back the Distant One”.

56 Otto 1950.

the goddess through *n3 šmw n phr h3t* “les petites charmes du coeur”,<sup>57</sup> which turn out to be various fables and “philosophical” reasoning.<sup>58</sup> In her return, the goddess changes forms: from the wild cat to the furious lioness Sekhmet, the vulture Nekhbet in Nekhen, the gazelle Mut in Thebes and finally into a beautiful young woman on her way to Heliopolis. It is in fact the manifestation of the duality of the feminine divinities on its way towards hierogamy, the union of the Eye with her father Ra, the reunion of the creator with his feminine counterpart which is to make cosmic rebirth possible.<sup>59</sup> We find ourselves, therefore, with the same dichotomy posed by the Latopolitan cosmogony, that is: remoteness-sorrow-sterility, on the one hand, and proximity-rejoicing-fecundity, on the other. A regenerative power seems to be closely linked to laughter. If in the Latopolitan cosmogony it is the meeting between Ahet and his son Ra that triggers laughter as the creative agent of the gods, in the Demotic tale it is the liberating guffaw of the Distant Goddess provoked by the appeasing word (*shp*) of Thoth that makes possible the advent of the regenerative forces as a repetition of the cosmogonic act. Laughter opens and defines the trip of reunion between Ra-father as a creative principle,

and his daughter Hathor as an active power of creation. Celebration and laughter of the procession that accompanies Hathor becomes the manifestation of that approach, as is the greening of the country.<sup>60</sup> The definitive turn that causes Hathor to return to Egypt is expressed precisely with laughter, and with it, a succession of images related to life: the northerly wind, the perfume of Punt, the Nile flood and the vivifying rays of Ra.<sup>61</sup>

(XV, 28-29) *s3by=s dd t3 imy.t ikš.t m3w-ndm h3š=s n3 md.w.t e hwnn3=w i.ir p3 šm n wnš kwf dd (...)*

(XV, 33) *tw=k lk=s h3t=y hr 3hm tw=k [pr]=f hr ršy (...)*

(XVI, 4-6) *fy t3 p.t n w<sup>c</sup>.t mh (y.)t in=s t3 hy.t n P3-w<sup>c</sup>ny r hry irm=s w<sup>c</sup>ly h<sup>c</sup>py h<sup>c</sup>ht=s h3<sup>c</sup> P3-R<sup>c</sup> n twe e iw=f m itn 3 nb<sup>c</sup>.t e n3y=f nw.w hr ršy e n3y=f s3tw.w hr 3nh (...)*

(XV, 28-29) La chatte éthiopienne éclata de rire: son coeur était ravi des paroles que le petit chacal-singe avait dites ! (...)

(XV, 33) Tu as fait en sorte que mon coeur cesse de soupirer ! Tu l’as fait [bondir] de joie ! (...)

(XVI, 4-6) Le ciel apporte un vent du nord ! Il apporte avec lui le parfum de Pount ! Le Nil déborde; (il=) le ciel s’éclaire, (quand) Re se lève au matin sous la forme d’un disque flamboyant, ses regards nageant dans la joie, ses rayons remplis de vie (...).

57 pLeiden I, r<sup>o</sup> 384 X, 1. Transliteration and translation by De Cenival 1988: 28–29.

58 As Bresciani (1990: 739) points out in the presentation of his translation of the Myth, egyptological tradition has wanted since the beginning of the edition of this text to refer to the interventions of the jackal-monkey as *entretiens philosophiques* or, as she herself points out, *dialoghi filosofici*. Beyond the adequacy of the term *philosophical*, we note that under the name *phr* (enchantment, remedy, drug...), true speculative exercises are practiced on the relationship of man with the world and the gods, both through the allegorical language of the moralizing fables, and through the paranomasias and fantastic etymologies.

59 Derchain 1972: 24–35.

60 The text shows the essential union between the joy of the return and the fertile greening of the fields, through the recurrent use of *w3d*, the root of which is present in words to rejoice, to make green, to green, to succeed (in a company), the papyrus plant as an emblem of Egypt, the malachite stone as an element of the ritual make-up of the eyes, and, finally, in the name *w3dyt* as the Eye of Ra.

61 pLeiden I, r<sup>o</sup> 384 XV, 28–XVI, 6. Transliteration and translation by De Cenival 1988: 46–48.

Keeping on with the magical Greek papyri, we now refer to *PGM XIII* (pLeiden I, 395),<sup>62</sup> titled the *Sacred Book called Monad or Eighth Book of Moses*, dated between the third and fourth centuries CE. This is a paradigmatic example of what we referred to above as Hellenistic syncretism: Greek divinities, Egyptian images, Chaldeans and Jewish formulas coexisting on the same plane with the express mention of a superior divinity, the invisible, transcendent and unknowable One, authentic point of the encounter of this polycephalic religiosity, from which the other divinities are possible as emanations from him.<sup>63</sup> The papyrus is at the same time an indivisible mixture between fragments of an authentic manual for magicians and cosmogonic speculations, such as the one in the fragment below. The artificial border between magic and religion is blurred. Our passage corresponds to the famous *Kosmopoia*, of which there are two versions in the same papyrus (pLeiden I, 395, 139-206 and 444-531). We reproduce below several parts of the second version:<sup>64</sup>

(472-475) Habiendo dicho esto, dio tres palmadas y el dios se rió siete veces: ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja. (καὶ ἐγέλασεν ὁ θεὸς ἐπτάκις χαῖ χαῖ χαῖ χαῖ χαῖ χαῖ χαῖ) Y al reírse, fueron engendrados (ἐγγεννήθησαα) siete dioses, los que abarcan el Todo (τὰ πάντα) (...);

(478-479) Cuando él se rió (ἐκάκχασε) por primera vez, apareció Fos (Luz) Auge (Brillo) y separó el Todo (...);  
(481) Y se rió (γελῶν) por segunda vez y todo fue agua (...);  
(487-490) Y cuando quiso reírse (κακχάσαι) por tercera vez, apareció a través de la furia del dios Nus (Mente) y Frenes (Pensamientos) sosteniendo un corazón; y recibió el nombre de Hermes (...);  
(492-494) Y se rió (ἐπεκάκχασε) el dios por cuarta vez, y apareció Genna (Generación) que es dominio sobre la semilla del todo, por quien fue sembrado todo cuanto existe (...);  
(495-497) Y se rió (γελῶν) por quinta vez y se entristeció al reírse, y apareció Moira (Destino) con una balanza significando que la justicia está en ella (...);  
(509-511) Rióse (ἐκάκχασε) por sexta vez y se alegró mucho. Y apareció Cairós (Oportunidad) sosteniendo un cetro que simboliza la realeza (...);  
(522-523) Se rió (ἐκάκχασεν) por séptima vez entre jaeos y nació Psique, y todo se puso en movimiento.

The spell is addressed to the main divinity: “a ti que eres superior a todos, el que todo lo ha creado; a ti que te has creado a ti mismo, el que todo lo ve sin ser visto; (...) Tú, el que se transforma en toda clase de formas, eres el invisible Eón de Eones”.<sup>65</sup> Transcendent and generator principle of “Helios Aquebicrom (which means the flame and the ray of the so-

62 For a contextualization of the collection of *PGM* and *PDM*, we refer to the introductions of Betz and Johnson in Betz 1986: xli–liii and lv–lviii. We follow their translation, as well as the Spanish version from Calvo Martínez and Sánchez Romero 2004. For the Greek text, we refer again to Preisendanz 1931.

63 Nilson 1970: 132–141.

64 *PGM XIII*, 472–523 = pLeiden I, 395, 472–523. Translation by Calvo Martínez and Sánchez Romero 2004: 294–296. Greek version in Preisendanz 1931: 110–111.

65 *PGM XIII*, 63–71 = pLeiden I, 395, 63–71. Translation by Calvo Martínez and Sánchez Romero 2004: 279–280. Greek version in Preisendanz 1931: 90. Note the similarities between some of the expressions referring to this sole and transcendent god with some epithets linked to the Sun creator of the traditional Egyptian religion: *hry-ntr* (Leitz 2002–2003: V, 368) for “superior a todos”; *hpr ds=f* (Leitz 2002–2003: V, 703) for “que te has creado a ti mismo”; *ir-ih-t-nbt* (Leitz 2002–2003: I, 478), or *irn-tit-nbt* (Leitz 2002–2003: I, 466) for “el que todo lo ha creado”.

lar disk)”,<sup>66</sup> authentic demiurge of the physical cosmos. The formula does not sound unfamiliar in the ancient Egyptian cosmogonic context. The separation between a transcendent and sole god, different from a doer agent, is being advertised in traditional religion from at least the New Kingdom,<sup>67</sup> and it is, in fact, one of the characteristics of the cosmogony of Esna: mother Neith/Ahet gives birth to Ra (our Helios), who is revealed as the true creative agent of the cosmos.<sup>68</sup> This Helios Aquebicrom, explicitly related to the flame and the ray of the solar disk evokes powerfully the active dimension of the Eye of the Sun, precisely expressed with the homophony and homography between  $\text{ⲁ}$  *ir* “to do” /  $\text{ⲁ}$  *irt* “eye”. In any case, it is the Sun-Helios who gives the seven laughs from which a process of emanation and differentiation begins by which appear the divine principles which configure the physical cosmos. Again, the laughter essentially related to the Sun as a doing power.

Intimately linked to this text and confirming what has been said, we find the fragment XXIX of the *Stobaeus Extracts*:<sup>69</sup>

El llanto (δάκρυ) es Crono, la generación (γένεσις) Zeus, la palabra (λόγος) Hermes, la ira (θυμὸς) Ares, el sueño (ὕπνος) Luna, el deseo (ὄρεξις) la de Citerea y la risa (γέλως) Helios, porque, en justicia, por él rien toda inteligencia mortal y el ilimitado cosmos (τούτῳ γὰρ ἅπαντα δικαίως καὶ θνητὴ διάνοιά γελᾷ καὶ κόσμος ἀπειρών).

The quotation belongs to the chapter called *About Hermes [About Destiny]*, where, in a recurrent mode in *Hermetica*, a specular relationship is established between the *supra* and the *sublunary*. And so, the star-divinities of space correspond in the sphere of the earth to human qualities. The Sun is laughter –note the homophony between ἥλιος and γέλως, a link which, beyond chance, points, on the contrary, to an essential belonging between the Sun and the activity that defines it– and, moreover, is a quality that unites the mortal and the unlimited, the two poles that define the existing. Additionally, in another passage from *Stobaeus*, fragment XXIII (known as *Kóre Kosmou*), in which the maternal figure of Isis reveals to the infant Horus the sense and nature of the worlds, a revelation in which Hermes, “the knower of everything”, acts as a hinge between the worlds above and below, through their descendants Tat and Asclepius-Imuthes, receivers and guardians of their saving gnosis. At the same time in which nature begins to assume its generating role, we are told:<sup>70</sup>

Dios sonrió al oír esto y dijo: “Sea la Naturaleza” (ταῦτα εἰπόντων ἐμειδίασεν ὁ θεὸς καὶ εἶπε Φύσιν εἶναι) y de su voz salió un objeto femenino de una belleza total, cuya visión dejó atónitos a los dioses; el Dios protopadre la honró con el nombre de ‘Naturaleza’ (Φύσεως) y le encomendó la fecundidad (γεννητικὴν).

66 *PGM XIII*, 446–447 = pLeiden I, 395, 446–447. Translation by Calvo Martínez and Sánchez Romero 2004: 294. Greek version in Preisendanz 1931: 109.

67 Assmann 2001: 189–244.

68 The structural symmetry between the *Kosmopoia* and the episode of the seven creative words of Mehet-Weret as referred to in the temple of Esna was already noted by Sauneron 1961: 47.

69 *SH XXIX*, 1 (= *About Hermes [About Destiny]*). Translation by Renau Nebot 1999: 417. Greek version in Nock and Festugière 1954: 456.

70 *SH XXIII*, 10 (= *Kóre Kosmou*). Translation by Renau Nebot 1999: 357. Greek version in Nock and Festugière 1954: 12.



Additionally, the laughter-smile is that propitiates the birth of engenderer Nature, the maternal Isis that coincides with the Genna of the *Kosmopoia* and the Zeus of the passage XXIX.

The fragments of *Stobaeus* (fifth-sixth centuries CE) collect extracts from various works by the hermetic current (*Stobaei Hermetica*), that is, a heterogeneous series of religious philosophy –or, rather, philosophical religion– that between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE brought together elements of traditional Egyptian religiosity, but also Jewish, Greek and Mesopotamian, within the speculative framework of the Hellenistic philosophy of Neoplatonism, Stoicism or Neopythagoreanism. Within this broad and undefined universe of beliefs, there would be room for both *PGM* and Gnosticism, as well as *Corpus Hermeticum*, which Egyptianity has been much discussed.<sup>71</sup> We will have to return to it in our conclusions, but it is this, in short, and as we said above, one of the fundamental issues of this second part of the article. In this regard we situate ourselves on the path pointed by Iamblichus (fourth century CE) in his *De Mysteriis*: “los (writings) que circulan bajo el nombre de Hermes contienen opiniones herméticas, aunque con frecuencia emplean la lengua de los filósofos (that is, the conceptualization), pues han sido traducidos de la lengua egipcia por hombres no inexpertos en filosofía”.<sup>72</sup>

Until now, we have not emphasized the profound ontological duality that involves creation through laughter –joy– and tears –sadness. Additionally, although the nature of two

opposing worlds –the divine *versus* the human– is thus defined, almost that implicitly, in the following fragment this radical difference becomes explicit. Irenaeus of Lyon (second century CE) writes his *Adversus Haereses* against the Valentinian Gnostics, a group that originated in Egypt in the second century of our era. Until the discovery of the Coptic codices of Nag Hammadi, the information about the various Gnostic movements –another fundamental piece in this syncretic Egypt– had come to us through the controversies of Heresiologists.<sup>73</sup> Irenaeus’ attack on the Valentinians focuses on the cosmogonic, as it is here where the influence of late Platonism and Neoplatonism, with their divine hypostasis and the radical differentiation between the upper world (*Pléroma*) and the lower world (*Kénoma*), could collide against orthodoxy. Therefore:<sup>74</sup>

De las lágrimas de aquella (= Achamot’s sadness) provino toda sustancia húmeda, de su risa la sustancia luminosa (ἀπό γὰρ τῶν δακρῶν αὐτῆς γεγονέναι πᾶσαν ἐνύγροισ οὐσίαν ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ γέλωτος τὴν φωτεινὴν), de la tristeza y el estupor los elementos corporales del mundo. Pues a veces lloraba y se acongojaba, según dicen, por haber sido abandonada sola en la oscuridad y el vacío, a veces daba en pensar en la luz que la había abandonado y entonces cobraba ánimos y reía.

Indeed, the ontological and moral division of the world is evident here. Achamot, “la Intención (...) de la Sabiduría superior (...) y Espíritu Santo, del espíritu que está con Cristo”,<sup>75</sup> suffers a fall from the *Pléroma*, and in the

face of this essential loss sheds the tears that give rise to the world. However, the memory of its origin, the divine spark also present in man, can make it go upward to the Light, it is then when he laughs. Laughter is once again an element of union with power cosmogony, and in this case it is explicitly presented as an agent of reconciliation.

Finally, we will refer to Proclus (fifth century CE), one of the last great philosophers of Late Antiquity. Already removed from the Egyptian sphere, Proclus echoes, however, in his *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* of the image of laughter and the tears to characterize a dual cosmos: the one above, which corresponds to the gods, immutable and eternal, and the one below submitted to men’s change and perishing. Late Neoplatonism emphatically embraced religious texts as an expression of superior knowledge hidden among metaphors and images of traditional myths. When Plutarch states in his *De Iside et Osiride* that the true Egyptian philosophy is “oculta en su mayor parte en mitos y palabras que contienen oscuros reflejos y transparencias de la verdad”,<sup>76</sup> the ban on allegorical reading of the texts of traditional religions is being removed. In a world where the ritual has lost its strength as a community bond, thought seeks in tradition higher knowledge the key of which seems odd for a society looking towards new horizons. The past is depicted as a Golden Age that speaks through an incomprehensible language, and only esoteric readings can allow an approach to a definitely lost wis-

dom.<sup>77</sup> The mythical projects a meaning that always goes beyond the apparent: if the physical world –the apparent, the visible text– does not cease to be subjected to the falsehood of appearance, likewise the true meaning is hidden in the transcendent message beyond the letter, in a divine voice hidden that differs beyond, in the hidden of the *sublunary*. Therefore, Proclus starts from an allegorical reading on the *Iliad* episode in which the Olympic gods laugh at the expense to the Hephaestus’ limp of, and from an orphic fragment (“Tes larmes sont la race miserable des mortels, mais c’est par un sourire que tu as fait jaillir la race sainte des dieux”)<sup>78</sup> to say the following:<sup>79</sup>

(127, 29-30) Si les mythes ne disent pas que les dieux pleurent tout le temps (δακρύειν μὲν γὰρ οὐκ αἰεὶ φασιν οἱ μῦθοι τοὺς θεοὺς), mais qu’ils rient d’un rire irrépressible, c’est (128, 1-7) parce que les larmes symbolisent la providence des dieux sur les choses mortelles et périssables, qui tantôt sont, tantôt ne sont pas, et que le rire symbolise l’influence qu’ils exercent sur les masses entières et mues toujours d’un mouvement identique qui composent dans sa totalité l’Univers (ὁ δὲ γέλως τῆς εἰς ὅλα καὶ αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως κινούμενα πληρώματα τοῦ παντός ἐνεργείας). C’est pourquoi, je pensé, quand nous divisons les créatures en dieux et hommes, nous assignons le rire à la génération des etres divins, les larmes à la venue au monde des hommes ou des animaux (τὸν μὲν γέλωτα τῇ γενέσει τῶν θείων τὰ δὲ δάκρυα τῇ συστάσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἢ ζῴων ἀπονέμομεν).

Once again, we find the image of laughter and crying as a symbol of a radical ontologi-

71 A recent and well-documented monograph on this question is Bull 2018.

72 Iamb., *Myst.* VIII, 4. Translation by Ramos Jurado 1997: 206–207.

73 A good synthesis on Gnostic thought can be found in McBride 1994: 182–218.

74 Iren., *Adv. Haer.* I, 4, 2. Translation by Montserrat Torrents 1983: 113. Greek and Latin version in Harvey 1857: 35–36.

75 Iren., *Adv. Haer.* I, 4, 1. Translation by Montserrat Torrents 1983: 110. Greek and Latin version in Harvey 1857: 31–32.

76 Plut., *Is. Os.* 9 (354C). Translation by Pordomingo Pardo and Fernández Delgado 1995: 73.

77 On this hermetic semiosis based on secrecy and its parallels with postmodern contemporaneity, see Eco 1990: 83–118. On the other hand, the dialogue of Lucian *Philopseudeis* (for which see the translation by Navarro González 1988: 195–225) makes an amusing portrait of this Hellenistic obsession about the occult and supernatural from an unbelieving and overwhelming gaze.

78 Procl., *In. R.* I 128, 9–10. Translation by Festugière 1970: 148. Greek version in Kroll 1899: 128.

79 Procl., *In. R.* I 127, 29–128, 7. Translation by Festugière 1970: 148. Greek version in Kroll 1899: 127–128.

cal dualism. It is surprising to see that in all these sources presented, which respond to traditions so diverse, laughter and crying, as opposing forces, function as a recurrent image of cosmogonic-theological speculation. For over four centuries, liturgical, magical and philosophical texts –whose differentiation is blurred– resort to a metaphor that cannot be more explicit and fruitful for the foundations of a world divided between the sphere of the divine, immutable and eternal, and that of the human, subject to change, becoming and death.

Yet, can we go as far as to say that the origins of this recurring image is ancient Egyptian? Would it correspond to the autochthonous tradition that differentiates between gods and men at the cosmogonic moment, which can therefore also be defined from the emanation and differentiation of Creator One? On the one hand, we have been able to verify that the reference to the creation of laughter-joy and tears sinks its roots in early times –at least the first one from the Old Kingdom and the last one from the Middle Kingdom–. On the other hand, the cosmic, ontological and moral dualism that defines the complex set of syncretic beliefs of Hellenism cannot find *raison d'être* in such ancient times. The traditional separation between the sacred and the profane in ancient Egyptian religion does not involve a metaphysical split as is the case purported by Hellenism. The traditional figure of the king by the way, and that of the priesthood as its legitimate represent-

ative, prevents the split from being complete and insurmountable. Its hinge function –real hinge, not metaphorical, because the king is effectively a divine entity on earth, not mere representation, and likewise the divine is an immanent reality to the world through ritual practice, writing, images and the names of gods in temples...– prevents the void between one world and another.<sup>80</sup> However, Egyptian religion –whose dynamism, too often forgotten, turns it into a living and changing reality– is undergoing since at least the New Kingdom a progressive differentiation between the transcendent and the immanent. The Esna cosmogony, epitome of traditional religiosity, does not cease to use its own and ancestral material adapted to a Hellenistic vision operative all over the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>81</sup> The creation of the gods through laughter and human beings by means demiurge's tears as it appears in the Latopolitan texts, therefore, responds, in our opinion, to an Egyptian religious notion that it would go back at least to the *Pyramid Texts*, and that found on its Hellenistic bosom a fertile soil in which to express an ontological dualism that was making ways and getting reinforced through the ages. It is precisely this clearly Egyptian background where it is found, in our view, the substratum –and we would have to ask ourselves, even if this is another matter, to what extent– of the Magical, Hermetic, Gnostic texts and Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean philosophies of a marked oriental character that came to light during the Roman Period and Late Antiquity.

80 The *Book of the Heavenly Cow* explicitly narrates the original split between the divine and the human, but also true reconciliation through the figure of the king and cult reality. There is a differentiation from the divine world indeed, but not an irreconcilable duality. A good introduction to this composition will be found in Guilhou 2010.

81 Opposing view in Sauneron 1961: 44, among others. Other authors, such as Doyen and Preys (1992: 79), recognize the influence of the Greek cultural context on Egyptian priests after the Macedonian conquest, but they estimate that this “révèlent moins l'influence grecque sur la théologie égyptienne que sur son mode d'expression”.

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Papers on Ancient Egypt

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