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Notes about the mrt Workers of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom Based on the Stela CG 20516

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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.

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

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.¹ 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 1968. Recent studies on the cosmogonies of Khnum and Neith are Broze 1999 and Fernández Pachel 2018, respectively.
pronao 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 with the creation of human beings through the tears of this deity.

While the issue of the creation of human beings as a consequence of the crying of the demiurge is well known—in its first mention being found in the Coffin Texts—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 Late Antique theologians, perhaps influenced by the concepts present in the Greek religion—with which the mentioned theologians had been in contact for centuries. 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 the idea to different philosophers of Late Antiquity—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 predecessors

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

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

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

(272, 4) He (= Ra) cries: gods exist and the entire Ennead joins him.

The second, which is contained within a hymn to Neith, reads as:

(163, 16) 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 Abet, 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: sy: R sn n w m rİ st rİ w rm m rİ ss t rİ “It is from my sweat (60) that I have created the gods, while men (rm) come from the tears (rmw) of my eye”. Additionally, in this passage the well-known pun that explains at a first level the association between tears and men can be appreciated.

Parallels that are not so much narrative but of meaning are present in various texts of the New Kingdom—especially from the Ramese Period—such as pCairo 38039A, or a hymn of Ramesses III inscribed in the temple that he built in Karnak, where human beings emerge from the eyes of the demiurge while the gods do from his mouth or lips. However, in these examples the association god’s mouth/lips is to describe the creation of the divinities as a consequence of the performative power of the word.
Likewise, two inscriptions in the temples of Tod and Edfu say, respectively, that the de
miurge created the gods with his saliva –maki
ng use in this case of a play on words between
agaw and waw, as is also the case in Esna III, 206, 8-9 (§13)– and to human beings with their
eyes (Tod 1, 71, 9-10), and that the gods come
to him from their mouth, while men do so from
his eyes (Edfu III, 47, 6). These various examples clearly
show the dynamism and the capacity to ad
aptation 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
depends partly on whether they refer to the gods
or men does not constitute, as can be seen, a par
cularism 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, while men do so from his eyes
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What draws the attention of the Latopoli
tan fragments is the specific use of the laugh
ter 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
of not of the gods-men creation in the Coffin
Texts,17 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 demi
urge and the gods out of his joy.18 However,
the order of factors in this case is also of para
mount importance: firstly, it concerns the cre
ation of gods, and then the creation of divini
ties, accompanied by a gesture as disruptive19
as laughter,20 both of which can be classified
as methods of intransitive creation, using the
terminology of J. Assmann.

Knowledge the chronological and intellectual
context in which the theologians of Esna put
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 to
wars of the world of Greek literature.

17 Speaking of the presence of laughter in Demotic literary texts (particularly in the story
Arm 116-117). For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Caron 2013:

18 For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Caron 2013:

19 For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Caron 2013:

20 For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Caron 2013:


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 synthesize 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 destructive antagonism, a tension which was handled by the shaping
and constraining functions of both ethical attitudes and specific social practice”.


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, Voloshkine (2012: 799) estimates that, in his view, "Dans le pené égyptienne, l’association entre le
rire et la nudité féminine dévoile essentiellement vers une idée de fécondité et de fertilité. (…) Cependant,
 aucun élément direct ne nous laisse entendre que la vieille conception égyptienne influencé 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 Voloshkine 2012: 759-762.

28 HS III: 345-346.

The nights have the (correct) hours and the moon rises regularly. The gods are contented and pleased, and they live among laughter and wonder (bhibi). The laughter and the wonders can be clearly seen. It can also be appreciated a certain homography/homophony between bhibi and bhi:br; 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 Elusius Mysteries that some researchers did not hesitate in the past to see an influence on the texts written in Greek where it appears. Any time a Greek influence for the creative laughter of the gods, but rather quite the opposite: a possible Egyptian one, was “still unaware of the age of the concept of laughing and thus ventilated a possible Greek influence, a paradigm for our Latopolitan passages.”

Broze was “still unaware of the age of the concept of laughing and thus ventilated a possible Greek influence, a paradigm for our Latopolitan passages.”

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 31 of the Pyramid Texts, where Geb’s laughter and Nut’s rejoicing somewhat 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. The first of them is found in the myth of the divine birth of Hatshepsut, where, after the queen Ahmes is resting, we are told: "rz nw b hr at nsp sb(w)-s bft hmr=f sw sm=f hwr=f b hr=s. sw hbd-f r=f. "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." The parallel between this passage and that from Esna 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 bhbr even if they are not the cause of the mentioned revitalization, they constitute elements arising from this recreation.

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 sbn, 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.” Once again we find a laughter that serves as a catalyst from lethargy into a creative dynamism: in this case the resurrection of Ra resumes the litigation. As E. F. Morris comments, “the act of anasyrmen served to resolve a crisis and to move the plot forward.” We also found interesting samples of the revitalizing power, disruptor and generator of laughter action in two very well-known

30 Recently, N. Braux 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 Braux 2012: 182, n. 88; 2017: 240.

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

32 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 ostracorn found in KV9 (Cairo 25210)—only mentions the creation of human beings through tears, while the past 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. 9). 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.

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38 PMNNt 16.4.1-3.

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 renovation of Haror’s gesture: “Quelle que soit la motivation du rire de la déesse, rien n’indique une intention maligne: (...) le caractère érotique du contexte est évident” (Broze 1996: 44). “What’s so funny about anasyrmen? (...) 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: 200). “L’Hathor du papyrus Chester Beatty pourrait bien être, au demeurant, en lien avec l’‘éros du demiuère’, cette déesse ‘vulère’ (Nebht–Hetepet), principes féminins 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 sourire chez Ré (contrepoint 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 « régénération »” (Volkohhne 2002: 78).

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

(3,4) Gpr 3w w (m) nb3y t'j n ybjt b-'P (w') | t w= t n yr t jnbj t (i) [m-bjb] b-'P

\[3w w (m) nb3y t'j n ybjt b-'P (w') | t w= t n yr t jnbj t (i) [m-bjb] b-'P\]

\[\text{transliteration:} \text{Gpr 3w w (m) nb3y t'j n ybjt b-'P (w')} | t w= t n yr t jnbj t (i) [m-bjb] b-'P\]

At the beginning of Setne II we are told:42

(3,5) Gap fh, nh3 (3w w) nb3y t'j n ybjt b-'P (w') | t w= t n yr t jnbj t (i) [m-bjb] b-'P

\[Gap fh, nh3 (3w w) nb3y t'j n ybjt b-'P (w') | t w= t n yr t jnbj t (i) [m-bjb] b-'P\]

\[\text{transliteration:} \text{Gap fh, nh3 (3w w) nb3y t'j n ybjt b-'P (w')} | t w= t n yr t jnbj t (i) [m-bjb] b-'P\]

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 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 108322, 15, 3.31-3.19) that the prodigous 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.42

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 - understood in a chronologically broad sense that would range from the arrival of Alexander the Great, in 332 BCE, to the gradual imposition 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 religiousity goes from the last bright rales in the recluse and festivities of the great temples of Luxor, Esna, Dendara or the area of el-Fayoum - 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 figures and domestic altars. The intricacies that wove the complex network between state, community, family and territory were breaking down.

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-
And Everything Began with Laughs and Tears
Josué Santos Saavedra, Roger Fortea Bastart

the goddess through n1 bm n3 ph n3 b3t ("les petites charmes du coeur")57, which turn out to be various fables and "philosophical" reasoning.58 In her return, the goddess changes forms: from the wild cat to the curious lion
Sekhmet, the vulture Nekhbet in Nechh
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 also cosmic rebirth possible.59 We find ourselves, therefore, with the same dichotomy posed by the Latopolitan cosmogony, that is: remoteness-sorrow-sterility, on the one hand, and cosmicity-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 Aset 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 appealing word (shub) of Thoth that makes possible the advent of the regenerative forces as a repetition of the cosmogonic act. Laughing 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 process that accompanies Hathor becomes the manifestation of that approach, as is the greening of the country.56 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 nor
erly wind, the perfume of Punt, the Nile flood and the vivifying rays of Ra.55

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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-b3r, means "the one who brings back the Distant One".
56 Otto 1990.
58 As Bresciani (1990: 732) 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 interventions of the jackal-monkey as etreintes philosophiques or, as he herself points out, dialoghi filosofici. Beyond the adequacy of the term philosophical, we note that under the name pFri (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 panhumanism 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 wAd, 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 goddess, and the recurrent use of wADyt as the Eye of Ra.

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49 For questions relating to their discovery, dating and palaeographic characteristics, see Dieleman 2005: 40-45.
50 Preisendanz 1933.
51 On the sometimes diffuse categorization of mythical into narrative forms, see a summary of the question in Cervelló Autuori (forthcoming).
52 Junker 1931; Incnou=Bogquillon 2000 (specialy conclusions: 335-338).
53 Rischer 2010.
54 Darnell 1995.
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56 Otto 1990.
Keeping on with the magical Greek pa-
papyrus, we now refer to PGM XIII (pLeiden I, 395),62 titled the Sacred Book called Monad or Eighth Book of Moses, dated between the third and fourth centuries CE. This is a paradigm-
amic example of what we referred to above as Hellenistic syncretism: Greek divinities,
Egyptian images, Chaldeans and Jewish for-
mulas coexisting on the same plane with the express mention of a superior divinity,
the invisible, transcendent and unknowa-
ble One, authentic point of the encounter of this polycepha-
lic religiosity, from which the other divinities are possible as emanations from him.63 The papyrus is at the same time an indivisible mixture between fragments of an authentic manual for magicians and
cosmographic speculations, such as the one in the fragment below. The artificial border between
magic and religion is blurred. Our passage corresponds to the famous Eunom-
polia, of which there are two versions in the same papyrus (pLeiden I, 395, 339-366 and
444-531). We reproduce below several parts of the second version:64

(473-475) Habiendo dicho esto, dio tres palmadas y el dios se rió siete veces: ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja (καὶ ἱλαστὰ ὦ θεῦς, ὦ λαμπρὰ τῷ πόρῳ των πόρων). Y al reírse, fueron engendrados (ἐγεννήθησαᾳ) siete dioses, los que abarcan el Todo (τὸ οὐράνιον) (…);

(478-479) Cuando él se rió (ἀυχάγασεν) por primera vez, apareció Fos (Luca) Auge (Brillo) y separó el Todo (...);

(481) Y se rió (ἀυχάγασεν) por segunda vez y todo fue agua (...);

(483-484) Y cuando quiso reírse (αὐχάγασον) por ter-
cera vez, apareció a través de la furia del dios Nus (Menes) y Frenes (Pasos) sosteniendo un corazón; y recibió el nombre de Hermes (...);

(493-494) Y se rió (ἀυχάγασεν) el dios por cuarta
tav vez, y apareció Genna (Generación) que es domi-
nio sobre la semilla del todo, por quien fue sem-
brado todo cuanto existe (...);

(495-497) Y se rió (ἀυχάγασεν) por quinta vez y se en-
tristeció al reírse, y apareció Moira (Destino) con una balanza significando que la justicia está en ella (...);

(500-501) Rióse (ἀυχάγασεν) por sexta vez y se alegró mucho. Y apareció Cairós (Oportunidad) sos-
teniendo un reloj que simboliza la realce (…);

(505-513) Se rió (ἀυχάγασεν) por séptima vez entre
re jades y nació Psique, y todo se puso en mo-
vimiento.

The spell is addressed to the main divinity: “a ti que eres superior a todos, el que todo lo ha creado; a ti que 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”.65 Transcendent and generator principle of “Helios Aquebichrom (which means the flame and the ray of the so-
lar disk)”, 66 authentic demiguir of the phys-
cical cosmos. The formula does not sound un-
familiar in the ancient Egyptian cosmographic context. The separation between a transcend-
ent and sole god, different from a doer agent,
is being advertised in traditional religion from
at least the New Kingdom,67 and it is, in fact,
one of the characteristics of the cosmogony
of Enn: mother Neith/Ahet gives birth to Ra (our Helios), who is revealed as the true crea-
tive agent of the cosmos.68 This Helios Aque-
bi chrom, explicitly related to the flame and the
ray of the solar disk evokes powerful the ac-
tive dimension of the Eye of the Sun, precise-
ly expressed with the homophony and hom-
ography between ὁρεξις / ὤροσ, a word 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 mor-
tal and the unlimited, the two poles that de-
fine the existing. Additionally, in another pas-
sage from Stobeus, fragment XXIII (knew as
Κόρη Κοσμοῦ), 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 Aesclepi-
us-Imnuthes, receivers and guards of their
saving gnosia. At the same time in which na-
ture begins to assume its generating role, we are
told:69

Dios sonrió al oír esto y dijo: “Sea la Naturaleza” (hdmp πρί ναμ διδόον αἰ̄νιαν Ὀνήρ καὶ έχει Φύσιν νώ) y de su voz salió un objeto femenino de una
dezla total, cuya visión dejó atónitos a los di-
exes; el Dios protopate la honra con el nombre de ‘Naturaleza’ (Φύσις) y le encomendó la fe-
cundidad (γεννητικὴ).

The quotation belongs to the chapter called About Hermes [About Destiny], where, in a
recurring mode in Hermetica, a specular rel-
ationship is established between the supre-
me and the subordinate. 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 ὂροσ and γελῶν, a
link which, beyond chance, points, on the con-
trary, to an essential belonging between the
Sun and the activity that defines it—and,
moreover, is a quality that unites the mor-
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hinge between the worlds above and below, through their descendants Tat and Aesclepi-

62 For a contextualization of the collection of PGM and PDM, we refer to the introductions of Betz and Johnson in Beta 1868. 1 xi-ii and Ix-ii. 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 Pseudepigrapha 1931.
67 Assmann 2001: 189-244.
68 The structural symmetry between the Κοσμοποίησις and the episode of the seven creative words of Mehet-Weret as referred to in the temple of Isis was already noted by Sauvage 1926: 47.
Additionally, the laughter-smile is that pro-
pitates the birth of engenderer Nature, the
maternal Isis that coincides with the Genna
of Neoplatonism, Stoicism or Neopythagore-
anism. Within this broad and undefined uni-
verse of beliefs, there would be room for both
PGM and Gnosticism, as well as Corpus Hermo-
ticum, which Egyptanity has been much dis-
cussed.71 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 (four century CE) in his De Mys-
teria: “los (writings) que circulan bajo el nom-
bre de Hermes contienen opiniones herméti-
cas, 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”.72

Until now, we have not emphasized the pro-
found ontological duality that involves cre-
ation through laughter -joy- and tears -sad-
ness. Additionally, although the nature of two
opposing worlds - the divine δεινός the human-
is thus defined, almost that implicitly, in the
following fragment this radical difference be-
comes explicit. Irenaeus of Lyon (second cen-
tury CE) writes his Adversus Haereses against
the Valentinian Gnostics, a group that origi-
nated 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 funda-
mental piece in this syncretic Egyptian - had come
to us through the controversies of Heresiolog-
ists.73 Irenaeus’ attack on the Valentinians
focuses on the cosmovic, as it is here where
the influence of late Platonism and Neoplato-

ism, with their divine hypostasis and the rad-
ical differentiation between the upper world
(Pléroma) and the lower world (Ketōma),
could collide against orthodoxy. Therefore:74

De las lágrimas de aquella (= Achamot’s sad-
ness) provino toda sustancia húmeda, de su risa
la sustancia luminosa (πόσι γάρ τοῦ δισχείρον σίμης
γεγονούσι αὐτὸν εὐνόμων, οὕτως ὡς ὁ τοῦ φωτός
τὴν φωτεινήν), de la tristeza y el estropel los ele-
mentos corporales del mundo. Pues a veces llor-
aba y se acongajaba, según dicen, por haber sido abandonada sola en la oscuridad y el vacío, a veces
daba en pensar en la luz que la había aban-
donado y entonces cobraba ánimos y reía.

Indeed, the ontological and moral division
of the world is evident here. Achamot, “la In-
tención (…) de la Sabiduría superior (…) y
Espíritu Santo, del espíritu que está con Cri-
ado.7577 The mythical projects a meaning that
ever goes beyond the apparent: if the physi-
cal world –the apparent, the visible text– does
not cease to be subjected to the falsehood of
appearance, likewise the true meaning is hid-
den in the transcendent message beyond the
letter, in a divine voice hidden that differs be-
yond, in the hidden of the sublunary. There-
fore, Proclus starts from an allegorical read-
ing on the Iliad episode in which the Olympic
gods laugh at the expense of the Hephaestus’
limp of, and from an orphic fragment ("Tes
larmes sont la race miserable des mortels, mais
ç’est par un sourire que tu as fait jaillir la race
sainte des dieux")78 to say the following:79

71 A recent and well-documented monograph on this question is Bull 2018.
73 A good synthesis on Gnostic thought can be found in McBride 1934: 88-218.
77 On this hermeticism based on secrecy and its parallels with modern contemporaneity, see Eco 1990: 85-118. On the other hand, the dialogue of Lucian Philippides (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.

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

And Everything Began with Laughs and Tears Josué Santos Saavedra, Roger Fortea Bastarr
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 so 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 representative, 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. 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 religiousity, does not cease to use its own and ancestral material adapted to a Hellenistic vision operating all over the Eastern Mediterranean. The creation of the gods through laughter and human beings by means of demiurge’s tears as it appears in the Latopolitant texts, therefore, responds to our expectation, 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.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Montse Basté and Dr Ken Griffin for their revision of the English language of this article. We also want to show our appreciation to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

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The High Priesthood of Memphis during the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period: An Updated Study and Prosopography
Josep CERVELLÓ AUTUOI
7

Quelques observations sur l’écriture rétrograde dans les tombes thébaines de l’époque tardive
Silvia EINAUDI
65

Interpreting Three Gold Coins from Ancient Egypt and the Ancient Near East at the Museo Casa de la Moneda, Madrid
Miguel JARAMAGO
81

Egyptian Predynastic Lice Combs: Analysis of an Ancestral Tool
Candelaria MARTÍN DEL RÍO ÁLVAREZ
123

Who Painted The Tomb of Sennedjem?
Gema MENÉNDEZ
145

The Tendrils of the Bat Emblem
Andrea RODRÍGUEZ VALLS
161

Workers in Perpetuity? Notes about the mrt Workers of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom Based on the Stela CG 20516
Pablo M. ROSELL
171

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
187

Tabasety, the Temple Singer in Aarhus
Rogério SOUSA, Vinnie NØRSKOV
207

Submission Guidelines
225