



# A Life-Bestowing Body Part of the Demiurge Atum in the Ancient Egyptian Religious Context: Textual and Archaeological Evidence

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## ABSTRACT


In ancient Egypt, the hand played a life-giving role in both creating deities and perpetuating human beings. The Pyramid Texts describe the creative power of the hand of the god Atum, in creating the earliest divine couple. The emphasis of the life-bestowing hand when the world came into being demonstrates the pivotal role the hand of the demiurge god played in the creation of life. By the end of the Second Intermediate Period and beginning of the New Kingdom, the Hand of Atum became a special title borne by mothers of the children of Atum. In the iconography of the New Kingdom, the creative hand of the self-resurrected dead, who in this case incarnated Atum, was also essential for surviving in the afterlife. This paper seeks to characterize the culture of the fertile hand, which were of prime importance in activating the procreative ability of both the creator god, Atum, and the risen dead.

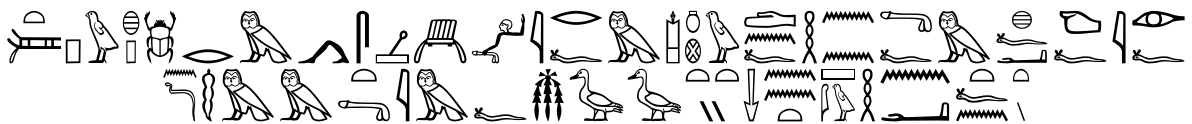
## INTRODUCTION

Birth and rebirth—by whom and how—were subjects of constant concern to all people in ancient Egypt. Several myths survive detailing how the ancient Egyptians believed the world was created, unfolded, and recreated. Owing to their concentration on the essence of the universe, the accounts of the creation of the world were varied.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, all the creation myths agree that before the development of a structured cosmos, there existed in darkness a primeval water of chaos. There was a great belief that this inert water symbolized non-existence and all the cosmogonies assured that the world and universe had risen from this limitless ocean. The Egyptians conceived the personification of the water of chaos in the form of the god Nun (Grieshammer 1982, 534-535; LGG III, 543-547).<sup>1</sup> The daily role of Nun was to bring, on his upraised hands, light upon the created world that had plunged into darkness through the night (Hornung 1994, 148).<sup>1</sup> This point of view supports the notion of deriving life from life and the creation of the universe by way of cosmic matter, not with organic life, as was supposed by Morenz (1973, 177). Furthermore, it definitely affected the ancient Egyptian perception of the importance of divine hands in the earliest creation, and the everyday revivification of the whole world.

**TOUCH OF LIFE BY THE FERTILE HAND OF THE CREATOR GOD: EARLIEST DECISIONS OF BIRTH AND REBIRTH**

Among the various cosmogonies in ancient Egypt, the oldest survives from Heliopolis, and followed an unusual way of creation by self-impregnation (Hornung 1973, 137, 218). In what is known as the Heliopolitan creation myth, masturbation by the creator god, Atum, resulted in the existence of the universe (Hornung 1973, 137, 218). According to this doctrine, primacy was given to the sun as the earliest entity to appear in the world. Thus, the doctrine was founded on the belief in the self-emergence of the sun god Atum to begin the creation in his own way by self-stimulation of his penis with his hand (Sethe 1929, 122). This theme was first mentioned in a religious textual context during the time of the Sixth Dynasty Pharaoh Pepi I. Utterance

527 (Spells §1248a-d) of the Pyramid Texts alludes to the role of the divine  *ḥf*-fist (Wb III, 272.16-73.6; Gardiner 1927, 584; Faulkner 1962, 190; Lesko 2002, 358; Hannig 2003, 944; Hannig 2006, 1873-1874) of Atum in giving birth to his first offspring saying:




(*T*)*tm pw ḥpr m iwsꜣw ir.f m Iwnw wdī.n.f ḥnn.f m ḥf.f iri.f ndmmt im.f msi sꜣty snt(y) Šw ḥnꜥ Tfn(w)t*



*“This (A) tum creates by the masturbation (literally: gladness), (that) he makes in Heliopolis. He put his penis in his fist, (to) make his desire, (then) the twins (were) born, Shu with Tefn(u)t”.*

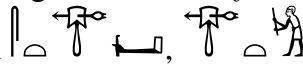

(Sethe 1910, 203-204; Mercer 1952, 206; Faulkner 1969, 198).


According to this inscription, Atum was an autogenous and intersex god and his androgyny and masturbation using his hand resulted in producing the first created god, Shu (Te Velde 1970, 182). The Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom emphasize the state of being androgynous and the combination of feminine and masculine characteristics in the character of Atum. In

Spell 136, he described himself as the two male and female principles and pronounced  *ink pn tn*, i.e., *“I (am) these (two) male (and) female”* (CT II, 161a; Faulkner 1973, 116).

According to Te Velde (1984, 247-248), the intersex Atum indulged in solo-sex and copulation with his fist.<sup>1</sup> Thus, he could be regarded as a form of unparalleled demiurge whose autonomous creative power depended on his self-coupling, a sexual method that engaged his phallus and hand as personifications of the masculine and feminine principles of creation, respectively. In accordance with that, Atum was described in Spell 306 of the Coffin Texts as



 *styw*, which alludes to impregnation by, *“the one who shoots/creates the semen”* (Wb IV, 347.10-348.1; Gardiner 1927, 593; Faulkner 1962, 253; Wilson 1997, 956) and  *msi-ntrw*, meaning *“the one who fashions the gods”* (CT IV, 60f; Faulkner 1973, 224)).

Sometimes the term  *sti*, was determined with the glyphs of a forearm and handholding a stick  (Gardiner 1927, 455, sign-list D40) or a man striking with a stick

in his hands  (Gardiner 1927, 444, sign-list A24). The two determinatives point to employing both the hand and arm in the forceful ejaculation of semen (Wb IV, 328.4; Faulkner 1962, 253; Wilson 1997, 956). Thus, Atum created the gods by means of expelling his semen during masturbation, the process, which likely involved his hand in the vital act of creation (Hart 1986, 47; Hart 2005, 41).

Concerning his intersexuality, Hornung (1973, 56) translates the name of Atum as “undifferentiated”. Similarly, Barta (1973, 81-83) described him as an androgynous demiurge who created the gods of the Ennead out of himself, as constitutive elements of a world system. Allen (1988, 14) explained the creation cosmogony as a process of transforming undifferentiated mass into the elements of nature. From these interpretations, we can consider the creator god Atum, as the original personification of unisex, who began to be differentiated by means of stimulating his phallus with his female hand to create the first couple in the world.

In addition to Atum, the god Nun, with his elevated hands, was typically conceived as an embodiment of the waters out of which the sun would be reborn (Assmann 1969, 315). From the time of Merenre I of the Sixth Dynasty, the hand of the god Nun also contributed to procreating the deceased king in the afterlife. The oldest textual evidence of this action occurs in Utterance 607 (Spell §1701a) of the Pyramid Texts, which points to giving birth to the king

on the   *drt*-hand (Wb V, 580.3-385.10; Gardiner 1927, 604; Faulkner 1962, 323; Wilson 1997, 1244; Hannig 2003, 1504-1505; Lesko 2004, 272; Hannig 2006, 2844-2845) of the god Nun. The spell reads:

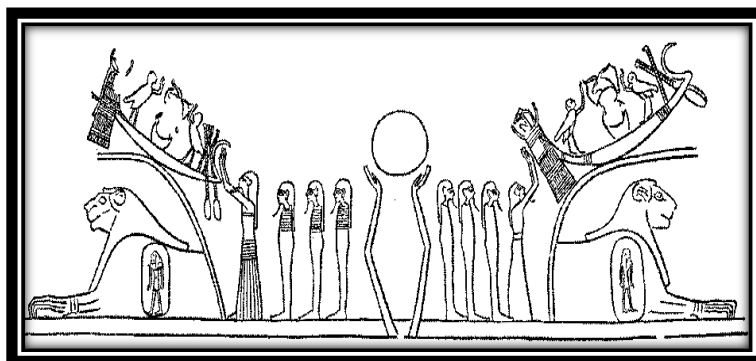


*msi.n Nww N hr drt.f*

“Nun begat N on his hand”.

(Sethe 1910, 397; Mercer 1952, 259; Vandier 1964, 60, no. 3; Faulkner 1969, 251).

The conception of rebirth on, or by the hand of the creator god Nun, gives rise to his certain mythical characteristics as a man half hidden in the depths of the primordial water with his upraised hands lifting either the sun disc out of the netherworld, or the solar barge out of the primeval ocean (**Figs. 1 and 2**).<sup>v</sup> In this context, Hornung (1956, 29) viewed such iconographic images of the god Nun as a kind of godly character of a creator divinity personifying the concept of solar rebirth and resurrection on his divine hand.

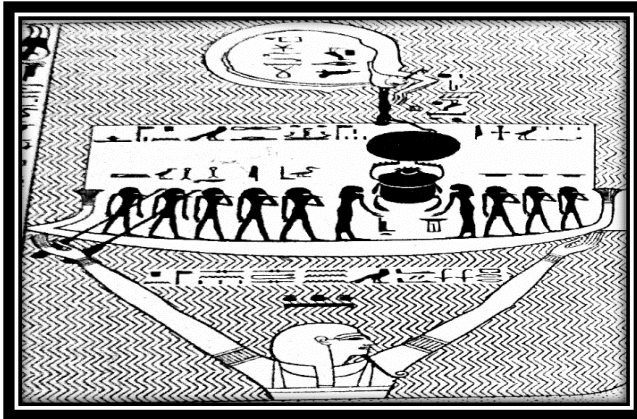


**Fig. 1**

God Nun elevating the sun disc in the moment of creation.

The Book of the Earth.

(Piankoff 1954, 345, fig. 101).

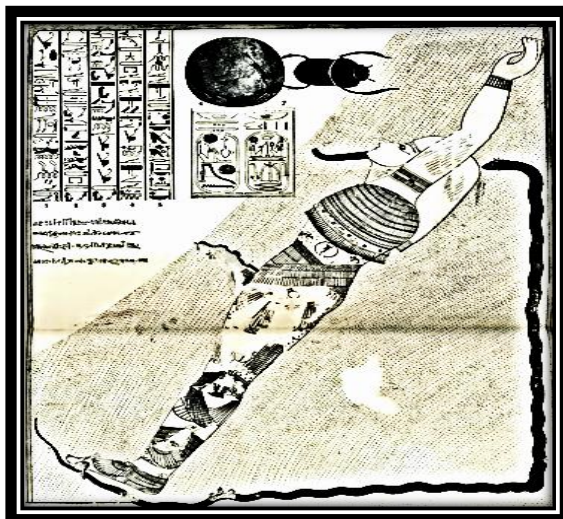
**Fig. 2**

God Nun upraising the solar bark of the sun god and his crew in the moment of creation. The closing scene of the Book of Gates.

(Brugsch 1885-90, 216).

### MASTURBATING WITH ONE HAND AND UPLIFTING WITH THE OTHER: A CHARACTERISTIC GESTURE OF RESURRECTION

As a superior life-giving god, Atum masturbated with his procreative hand to beget the first couple and start the creation of the universe (Sethe 1910, 203-204; Mercer 1952, 206; Faulkner 1969, 198). In the context of resurrection, the uplifted hands of the primeval god Nun were involved with elevating the dead as a kind of rebirth through returning to the primitive creative force of chaos.<sup>v</sup> The hand gestures of the creator gods, Atum and Nun, was separately inscribed for the first time in the Pyramid Texts during the Sixth Dynasty (Sethe 1910, 203-204, 397; Mercer 1952, 206, 259; Faulkner 1969, 198, 251). However, a single scene from the New Kingdom in the tomb of Ramesses IX (tomb KV6) the hands were combined (**Fig. 3**). This representation of resurrection signifies the rebirth of the Osirid king, Ramesses IX, who appears on the right wall of the third corridor as an ithyphallic bearded mummy reclining on his heels and raising his outstretched body from the sleep of death (Hornung 1999, 110). His left hand is upraised and almost touches the sky while he stimulates his erect phallus with his right hand. Over the figure of the king, is a scarab lying horizontally and pushing a solar disc to enhance the process of rebirth. This distinctive gesture symbolizes the raising of the king from the dead in accordance with its context.

**Fig. 3**

Representation of the Osiride King Ramesses IX as an ithyphallic mummy, uplifting one hand and grasping his erected penis with the other hand. KV 6.

(Guilmant 1907, pl. LXIII).

Darnell (2004, 347-348), has described this body posture of the rising king as lying on one of the sloping bases of the eastern horizon, a few minutes before achieving his eternal resurrection.<sup>v</sup> The accompanying text emphasizes the process of rejuvenation and describes the king as follows:




*“I (am A)tum, (as) he came into being alone from the primeval water”.*

(Darnell 2004, 337, pl. 35).

According to the previous interpretation, the risen king was identified as Atum and probably incarnated his self-rejuvenation in iconography. His masturbation gesture with one hand in the moment of his rebirth and connecting to the eastern sky with the other elevated finds its prototype textual evidence in the masturbation Utterance no. 527 (Spells §1248a-d) of the Pyramid Texts (Sethe 1910, 203-204; Mercer 1952, 206; Faulkner 1969, 198). In the two cases, masturbation resulted in bestowing life to the first couple in the Pyramid Texts and to the risen king, Ramesses IX.

Noteworthy, is that the textual versions of the masturbation spells in the Old Kingdom pyramids of King Pepi I and King Merenre I in Saqqara, include a mutilated glyph of a man

elevating one hand and stimulating his phallus with the other  to create the first divine couple in the world (Sethe 1910, 203-204; Mercer 1952, 206; Faulkner 1969, 198). This display also recalls the tradition of the fertility gods Min and Amun-Re, who sometimes appear with one raised hand and an erect penis grasped with the other in reference to their sexual potency and procreative ability (Davies 1953, pl. 2. I, III; Roeder 1956, tf. 30; Gundlach 1982, 136; LGG I, 320) (**Fig. 4**). According to Darnell (2004, 343), the masturbation scene of Ramesses IX alludes to the fertility needed for his rejuvenation and his upraised hand keeps him in touch with the renewed sun in the eastern sky. By masturbating and applying the same posture of the fertility gods, with the other hand raised, we have to consider the assumption of Meskell (2001, 33), who has pointed to the strong relationship between the rejuvenation and the sexual potency.



**Fig. 4**

Representations of the fertility gods Min (left) and Amun-Re (right), standing with one raised hand and an erected penis held with the other hand. Temple of Hibis in El Khargeh Oasis.

(Davies 1953, pl. 2. I, III).

## HAND FERTILITY: AN ESSENTIAL FEATURE OF THE ITHYPHALLIC CREATOR GOD

Most of the ithyphallic imagery in ancient Egypt attributed to the creation and fertility gods evokes their sexual potency. In his discussion about the god Min, Bleeker (1956, 48) described him as the lord of, “artificial ejaculation”, concerning his procreative power when stimulating his phallus with his left hand. The creator god, Atum, was one of the lesser-occurring deities in an ithyphallic form in the ancient Egyptian pantheon. However, his ithyphallic representation was of great significance, and it further points to the role of his hand as a life-bestowing body part, particularly during the Late Period (LGG VII, 412). In the meanwhile, he

also appeared standing with an erect penis and holding two eggs with his hands in the temple of Hibis in Kharga Oasis (Davies 1953, pl. 3VI; LGG VII, 412) (Fig. 5).



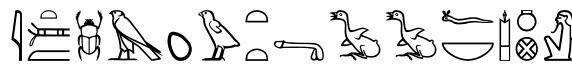
Fig. 5

Representations of the ithyphallic creator god, Atum, carrying two eggs in his hands.

Temple of Hibis, El Khargeh Oasis.

(Davies 1953, pl. 3.VI).

The inscription accompanying the ithyphallic figure of god Atum in the temple of Hibis, describes Atum as:



*ʾtm hpr-swht-Hr wtt-tʿwy.f nb ʾwnw*

“Atum, (who) creates the egg of Horus,<sup>v</sup> (who) begets his<sup>i</sup>two fledglings, Lord of Heliopolis”.

(Davies 1953, 8).

The title *wtt-tʿwy.f*, “the one who produces his two children” (LGG II, 604),<sup>i</sup> was used for the first time as a designation of the ithyphallic god Atum during the Late Period (LGG V, 699, LGG VII, 412).<sup>x</sup> Meanwhile, he was once depicted in the temple of Hibis as the ithyphallic creator, who produced two eggs on his hands. The two eggs were described in the Hibis temple as *tʿwy.f*. In the ancient Egyptian language, this expression is a general reference to the pair of deities, especially Shu and Tefnut, as the children of the sun god Atum (Wb V, 340.17). Thus, the two eggs in the hands of the ithyphallic god Atum in the temple of Hibis certainly represents his two children<sup>x</sup>, Shu and Tefnut.<sup>x</sup>


Generally, the ancient Egyptians conceived the *swht*-sacred egg as a symbol of birth and rebirth (Wb IV, 73.1-74.1; Gauthier and Lefebvre 1923, 66-67; Caminos 1975, 1185; Troy 1986, 23; Wilkinson 1992, 97; Bickel 1994, 233).<sup>x</sup> The theologians of Heliopolis grouped four gods and their consorts for the purposes of creating an elaborate philosophy involving the cosmic egg in the act of creation (Kuentz 1934, 50; Morenz 1950, 74-83; Clark 1959, 55; Morenz 1973, 177-179). Bickel (1994, 238) noted that the sun breaks the shell of the egg at sunrise in order to shine in the sky. The egg, as the seat of germinating life was also a guarantee for the rejuvenation of the dead in the next world. In a funerary context, the coffin may might symbolize the egg. This belief seems to be best indicated when the inner coffin, in which the mummy rests, was also given the same name of *swht*. (Wb IV, 74.4; Bonnet 1952, 164; Clark 1959, 271, no. 36). Maravelia (2019, 34) has explained that in the same way a


fledgling starts life hatching from an egg as if by magic, the deceased would be rejuvenated after their soul emerged out of the sarcophagus, which in this case symbolizes the egg. All these assumptions lead to a rethink about establishing a new life that comes out of the two hands of the ithyphallic figure of god Atum in the Temple of Hibis in the form of Shu and Tefnut.


With the range of theories on the relation between the creator god and the cosmic egg, which vary between considering him as the egg's metaphoric personification, and whether the god emerged from the egg, or the egg from him,<sup>x</sup> one might be confused in thinking there is a single explanation for the origin of the universe. However, the holding of two eggs by creator god Atum, definitely gives the allusion to a mythical involvement of the divine hand in granting a life to his children during the embryonic stage of creation.<sup>x</sup>

The prior inscription in the temple at Hibis explains the sexual occasion of the ithyphallic portrayal of Atum, but gives no reference to his female consort. It emphasizes a sort of self-impregnation that resulted in creating two eggs of his children, Shu and Tefnut. Furthermore, it highlights an implied sexual activity that involved two of his body parts; his erect phallus and hands, for producing the eggs. In this respect and owing to his masturbation in the Pyramid Texts, the ithyphallic representation of the creator god, Atum in the Hibis temple, could be conceived that the life-giving eggs were produced through the stimulation of his penis with his hands.

In addition to his ithyphallic figure, which gives a reference to the creation of the egg-form children of the demiurge on his hands, the close relation between the hand of the creator god and his fertility also manifested occasionally with the various ways his name was written in funerary literature. Concerning the orthography of the name of the creator god Atum, and his relation to the hand, Grapow (1909, 140-141) made some remarks. In a number of funerary





writings from the Middle Kingdom, he noticed the occurrence of a forearm with a hand 

(Gardiner 1927, 454, sign-list D36),<sup>x</sup> a forearm<sup>v</sup>holding a stick  (Gardiner 1927, 455,


sign-list D40),<sup>x</sup> and a forearm with a bowl <sup>x</sup> (Gardiner 1927, 454, sign-list D39) as phonetic spellings of *m* in the name of god Atum. In his interpretation, Myśliwiec (1979, 42) considered that this gives an allusion to the procreative power, definitely in the form of his hand, and recalls the Old Kingdom saga of his creative act by masturbation, which is inscribed in Utterance 527 of the Pyramid Texts (Utterance 527, Spells §1248a-d) (Sethe 1910, 203-204; Mercer 1952, 206; Faulkner 1969, 198).


### **The fertile bull and the life-bestowing hand: *Two comparable aspects of the demiurge***

In ancient Egypt, the ithyphallic gods of creation and fertility were typically associated with the power and virility of the bull. The bull's fertility could be compared to the fertility of the hand of the demiurge and its contribution to bestowing life. In the ancient Egyptian language,

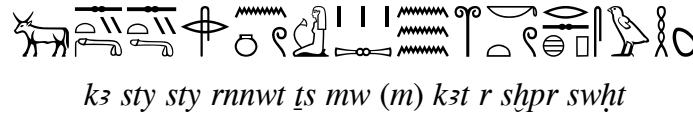
the bull is designated as  *k3* (Wb V, 94.7-96.8; Gardiner 1927, 458, 597; Faulkner 1962, 283; Wilson 1997, 1075; Hannig 2003, 1350-1352; Lesko 2004, 165; Hannig 2006, 2554-2559). This identification is generally inscribed with the *k3*-hieroglyph  in the form of two raised hands, in addition to determinatives including the bull sign  and the phallus  (Gardiner 1927, 453, 458, 456, sign-lists D28, E1, D52). Since the determinatives affirm the complete meaning of the word, the penis and the bull strengthens the fertility of the two

hands, and gives an allusion to the procreative power of the bull as a symbol of the virile principle.

The common feature between Atum and the bull is that both were lords of sexual pleasure.<sup>x</sup> On one hand, Atum masturbated with his hand in Utterance 527 (Spells §1248a-d) of the pyramid texts to create the first couple in the world (Sethe 1910, 203-204; Mercer 1952, 206; Faulkner 1969, 198). On the other hand, the bull bears the same designation in the Græco-Roman Period, when it was given the title  *k3 nb-ndmndm*, i.e., “the bull, the lord of lust” in the Temple of Edfu, in reference to his sexual practices and fertility (Chassinat 1932, 116.1).

The connection between the god Atum as a creator and the bull of Heliopolis was also indicated in the religious literature (Pillet 1923, 121-123; Bonnet 1952, 71; Myśliwiec 1978, 31; Wilkinson 2003, 101). In Chapter 142 of the Book of the Dead, it says:  *(I)tm k3-3 psdt-3t*, i.e., “(A)tum, the great bull of the great Ennead” (Lepsius 1842, pl. LIX.23; Allen 1974, 120). Thus, Atum was the creator of the Ennead of Heliopolis and the demiurge, whose strength and vitality could be assimilated with that of the bull.

Another common feature between the bull and the demiurge Atum can be traced back to their way of creation. Both of them were supposed to create an egg containing the children inside. As outlined above, Atum appeared in the temple of Hibis as an ithyphallic god holding two eggs as a symbol of creating his children, Shu and Tefnut (Davies 1953, 8, pl. 3.VI) (Fig. 5). Similarly, the bull was described in the temple of Edfu as the creator of the egg, as follows:

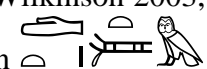


“The procreative bull (who) impregnates the maidens (and) joins the semen (to) the vulva to create the egg”.


(Chassinat 1932, 116.3-4).

**DEMIURGE'S CONSORT: A DISTINCTIVE PERSONIFICATION OF “THE HAND OF THE GOD”**

Commonly, the hand of the creator god endowed a special function in the creation of the world (LGG VII, 628).<sup>x</sup> By the Middle Kingdom, theologians decided to embody the female principle of creation in the form of a goddess, a female counterpart of the demiurge Atum. In this regard, Bonnet (1952, 72) writes that Atum and his hand were a pair of gods. He added that, in accordance with the individual feature of god Atum as a creator, he was independently contrasted with a female element that rested within him in the form of the hand.

In the Middle Kingdom, the hand of Atum was personified as the female creator deity, the feminine principle of creation, and the producer of the earliest divine children, Shu and Tefnut (Leclant 1957, 168; Vandier 1966, 125; Mueller 1974, 133; Hart 1986, 130; Wilkinson 2003, 99, 141; Hart 2005, 83). During the Second Intermediate Period, the expression  *drt-(I)tmw*, meaning “the hand of (A)tum” (Wb V, 580.13; Erman 1901, 24, 26; Jelínková-Reymond 1956, 9, no. 1), was especially given to several goddesses symbolizing the female counterparts of the demiurge Atum, being his wives in the Egyptian pantheon (Mueller





1974, 133; Brunner 1980, 217).<sup>x</sup> From the New Kingdom, several goddesses, who represented the usual principle of creation, and were closely related to the conceptions of fertility, creation, and birth, have borne this title (Refai 2001, 89, 93). In the Eighteenth Dynasty, the title  *ḏrt-nṯr* was used as a name for the hand of the sun god (Wb V, 585.1),<sup>x</sup> particularly Atum (Leclant 1977, 813), which he used in the masturbation process that resulted in the production of the first deities, Shu and Tefnut (LGG VII, 628).

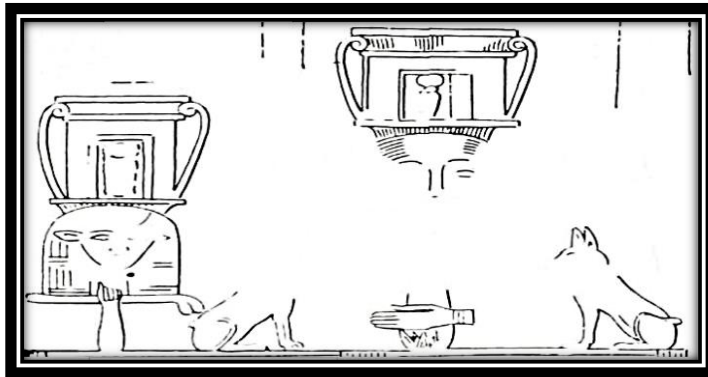
Te velde (1984, 247-248) discusses the sexual loneliness of the god Atum, and conceived his hand as the goddess, who was reduced to being a part of his body and the personification of his companion. The group of goddesses, who were conceived as embodiments of the hand of Atum includes Meskhent, during the New Kingdom (Erman 1901, 24, 26, Line 5.9; LGG VII, 628), Nepet-hetpet from the Late Period until the Græco-Roman Period (Lines 25.22. Faulkner 1933, 55; Faulkner 1937, 171; Vandier 1964, 60; Vandier 1965, 110; Vandier 1966, 81; Brunner 1980, 217; Zivie 1986, 135.12; Wilkinson 2003, 156), Iusaas (Chassinat 1932, 268.2; Vandier 1966, 130; Osing 1998, 158-159c, cf. 13; Hart 2005, 83), and Hathor-Nebet-hetpet (Chassinat 1918, 94.2; Chassinat 1935, 34.2; Zivie 1982, 29.11-12; Refai 2001, 90) during the Græco-Roman Period.

Several scholars discuss the assimilation of the creator goddesses and several consorts of the demiurge Atum in particular with their common relationship to his hand. (Derchain 1972, 27; Mueller 1974, 133; Björkman 1977, 1171; Brunner 1980, 217; Te Velde 1984, 247-248; LGG VII, 628-629). For example, Allam (1963, 129) states that the goddess Hathor in her Heliopolitan form was only the hand of Atum and the instrument with which he accomplished his self-marriage. Derchain (1972, 48) emphasizes that in all the texts which cite the mother of Shu, and Tefnut, the hand was always explicitly named. Thus, each of the goddesses who represents the female counterpart of Atum, never fulfilled the real function a mother who gave birth. According to Mueller (1974, 133), all the consorts of Atum had a common creative aspect. However, they could only be conceived as personifications of his erotic desire, masturbation, and heterosexuality rather than the true mothers of Shu and Tefnut. In this respect, Refai (2001, 89, 94) has strengthened the idea that the female complement of creation was always present in the myths surrounding Atum, but was never given a precise form. In Derchain's (1972, 50, 52-53) point of view, the hand of Atum was always cited in connection with the birth of children and the hand's identification as the mother of his children only applies to it in the figurative sense. He also assumed that Atum never needed feminine assistance in creation as he drew this from himself. Thus, the hand of Atum could only be conceived as a metaphoric mother, never really fulfilling the function of creation.

All the prior assumptions indicate a complex feminine function with the demiurge and emphasize the role his hand played in his sexual life. In addition, the aforementioned interpretations highlight the feminine principle alongside the demiurge in his work governing the world every day (Derchain 1969, 34). The hand of Atum could therefore be considered as his creative power and feminine aspect, which helped him, create the world but not give birth to his children (Mueller 1974, 133). As personifications of the hand of Atum, his wives might only contribute to granting life to his children rather than engaging in producing them naturally after having sexual intercourse with him.

Noteworthy is the fact that there are several similarities between the hand of Atum and its feminine personifications. Derchain (1972, 27), suggests the existence of a play on words between the name of the goddess Iusaas,  *iw.s-ꜥꜣ.s* (LGG I, 152-153), and the term of  *iwsꜣw* (Wb I, 57.17), which indicates the masturbation of Atum

(Derchain 1969, 33; Derchain 1972, 28; Barta 1973, 28-29; Troy 1986, 29). Furthermore, there are numerous allusions by the Hathoric emblems in religious contexts. Vandier (1966, 81) and Derchain (1969, 46), implied that the sistrum had sexual meaning, evoking the hand Atum to masturbate, and its role in producing his children, Shu and Tefnut. This is clearly illustrated twice in a single scene in the temple of Hibis. In the first depiction the sistrum is flanked by two cats and combined with a hand and stands on a post formed by a hand holding a phallus in the other one (Davies 1953, 12, pl. 4.VI; Vandier 1964, 61, fig. 12a) (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 6**  
A sistrum accompanied by a hand and another sistrum on a post formed by a hand holding a phallus. Temple of Hibis, El Khargeh Oasis. (Vandier 1964, 61, fig. 12a).

This scene implies that the Hathoric sistrum and phallus in the company of the hand, provoked Atum to masturbate and create. In addition, this scene probably points to the unusual representations of Shu and Tefnut as cats. It invokes the occasional identification of the cat goddess Bastet as Tefnut (De Rochemonteix 1892, 496: Tableau Rs. 3g. III) In later periods, Vandier (1966, 82), assumes that although there is no evidence associating Shu with the cat, this is not a sufficient reason to assert that he could never be identified with it. Vandier (1966, 82), strengthens this assumption by stating that if the sun god Re was the great cat in Heliopolis, his son Shu, could naturally take on the same aspect. <sup>x</sup> Vandier (1966, 82), concludes that the two cats in the temple of Hibis, would replace the divine pair of lions, which are called *rwty* (Wb II, 403.11; LGG IV, 654-656) and designate Shu and Tefnut as the children of the demiurge Atum (Urk II, 63.9; Bonnet 1952, 643).

**Collaboration between Atum and his *drt*-hand in Creation: Textual evidence**

The intersex nature of Atum as a self-creator only belongs to a later development when the personification of his hand was added to him as a female complement during the act of creation (Barta 1973, 83). The demiurge Atum and his hand formed a divine couple on several sarcophagi dating between the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom (Leclant 1977, 813). Vandier (1964, 60), attributed the oldest of these sarcophagi from the necropolis in Asyut (PM IV, 266-267, 269), where the hand of the creator god was described as his feminine counterpart in the creative act. The group of sarcophagi that came from Asyut have similar texts, which say:



*ḥtp-dī-n-R<sup>c</sup>-(I)tm-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-drit.f ḥtp-dī-n-Šw-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Tfn(w)t dī-n-Gb-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Nwt ḥtp-dī-n-Wsir-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-3st*

*“Offering given by Re-(A)tum and his divine hand, Offering given by Shu and Tefn(u)t, (offering) given by Geb and Nut, Offering given by Osiris and Isis”.*



x

*ḥtp-dī-n-R<sup>c</sup>-(I)tm-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-drt.f ḥtp-dī-(n)-Wsir-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-3st ḥtp-dī-n-Stḥ-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Nbt-ḥt*

“Offering given by Re-(A)tum and his hand, offering given (by) Osiris and Isis, offering given by Seth and Nephthys”.



x

*ḥtp-dī-n-R<sup>c</sup>-(I)tm-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-drt.f ḥtp-dī-n-Wsir-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-3st ḥtp-dī-n-Stḥ-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Nbt-ḥt*



x



x



x



x

x



x

*ḥtp-dī-n-R<sup>c</sup>-(I)tm-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-drt.f ḥtp-dī-n-Wsir-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-3st ḥtp-dī-n-Stḥ-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Nbt-ḥt*

“Offering given by Re-(A)tum and his hand; offering given by Osiris and Isis; offering given by Seth and Nephthys”.



x

*ḥtp-dī-n-R<sup>c</sup>-(I)tm-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-drt.f ḥtp-dī-n-Wsir ḥtp-dī-n-Stḥ-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Nbt-ḥt*

“Offering given by Re-(A)tum and his hand; offering given by Osiris; offering given by Seth and Nephthys”.



x

*ḥtp-dī-n-R<sup>c</sup>-R<sup>c</sup>-(I)tm-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-drt.f ḥtp-dī-(n)-Wsir-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-3st ḥtp-dī-(n)-Stḥ-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Nbt-ḥt*

“Offering given by Re, Re-(A)tum, and his hand; offering given (by) Osiris and Isis; offering given (by) Seth and Nephthys”.

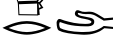


x



*ḥtp-dī-n-(I)tm-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-drt.f ḥtp-dī-n-Wsir-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-3st ḥtp-dī-n-Stḥ-ḥn<sup>c</sup>-Nbt-ḥt*

“Offering given by (A)tum and his hand; offering given by Osiris and Isis; offering given by Seth and Nephthys”.

This list of inscriptions include several offering formulae on behalf of the Ennead of Heliopolis.

All of the captions start with the name of god Atum and his  *drt*-hand followed by the other members in the Ennead as representations of their progeny. This exact arrangement

confirms that the creator god Atum, and his  *drt*-hand personify the male and female principles needed for the creation of the universe. Vandier (1964, 60), remarked that sometimes

the term  *drt*-hand is inscribed with the determinative of a seated woman  (Gardiner 1927, 448, sign-list B1) as a confirmation that the hand of the demiurge was indeed considered a goddess, or divine companion, who personifies the female principle.<sup>x</sup>

Additional evidence of the hand of Atum symbolizing the feminine principle of creation, can be found in a magical spell for a mother and a child on the magical papyri (pBerlin P. 3027) in the Berlin Museum dated to the end of the Second Intermediate Period and beginning of the New Kingdom (Vandier 1964, 61). The papyrus includes a text expressly linking the hand of Atum to the birth of his children, Shu and Tefnut (Jelínková-Reymond 1956, 9, no. 1). The text also identifies the hand of Atum in the form of goddess Meskhent, who was closely related to the conception of childbirth (Wb II, 148.11-13; Derchain-Urtel 1982, 107; LGG III, 437). The text says:



*Mshnt tmti drt-(I)tmw msit Šw hn<sup>c</sup> Tfn(w)t*

“*Meskhent, the complete one, the hand of (A)tum, (who) gives birth (to) Shu and Tefn(u)t*”.

(Erman 1901, 24, 26 Line 5.9).

Goddesses Iusaas and Hathtor-Nebet-hetepet, as personifications of the functions of the productive hand of Atum were widely endowed with the functions of his companions and mothers of his children, Shu and Tefnut, in textual contexts during the Græco-Roman Period. Additionally, they were occasionally described in the temple of Edfu as follows:



*drt-ntr Iw.s-<sup>c</sup>(z).s ir(t)-R<sup>c</sup> mwt nt Šw Tfnwt*

“*The hand of the god, Iusa(a)s, the ey(e) of Re, the mother of Shu (and) Tefnut*”.

(Chassinat 1930, 400.7; Derchain 1972, 51).



*Iw.s-<sup>c</sup>(z).s hmt Hr-zhty nb(t)-htpt ir(t)-R<sup>c</sup> mr(t) ib.f nb(t)-Iwnt pw drt-(I)tm kmzt s3ty<sup>x</sup> .f*

“*Iusa(a)s, the wife of Reherakhty, Nebe(t)-hetepet, the ey(e) of Re (that) his heart loves, this mistress of Dendara, the hand of (A)tum (who) creates his two children (mostly Shu and Tefnut)*”.

(Chassinat 1932, 268.1-2; Vandier 1965, 112; Derchain 1972, 51-52).



*Ht-Hr-nb(t)-htpt drt-ntr msi psdt*

“*Hathtor-Nebe(t)-hetepet, the hand of the god (who) gives birth (to) the Ennead*”.

(Marquis de Rochemonteix 1892, 100.17-101.1; Derchain 1972, 52).

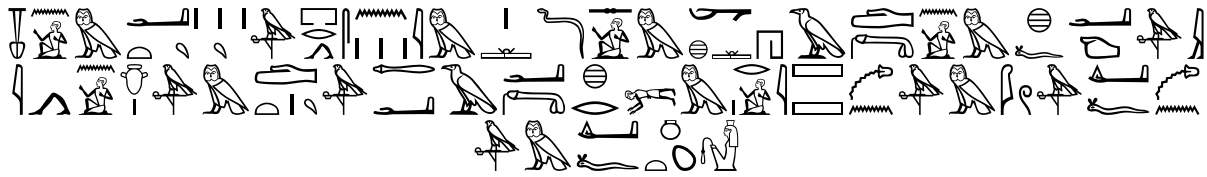


*(Ht-Hr-nbt)-htpt drt-ntr ... mwt pw nty Šw (Tfnwt)*

“*(Hathtor-Nebet)-hetepet, the hand of the god... this (is) the mother of Shu (and) Tefnut*”.

(Chassinat 1939, 32.7; Derchain 1972 52).

During the Ptolemaic Period, Atum retained his oldest role as a masturbator in the Papyrus of Nesmin from Thebes, known as Papyrus Bremner Rhind (British Museum no: pBM 10188). The papyrus explains his way of creation by his hand as follows:



*smz.n.i m wt.i pri.sn im ds.i m-ht hzi.n.i m hf'.i ii n i ib.i m drt.i z' hr m rz.i išš.n.i m Šw dif.n.i m Difnwt*

*“I united with my limbs, (so) they (i.e., Shu and Tefnut) (had) emerg(ed) from myself after I copulated in my fist, my desire comes to me in my hand (and) semen falls out of my mouth! I spewed out, namely Shu. I spat out, namely Tefnut”.*

(Lines 28.27-29.1. Faulkner 1933, 71; Faulkner 1938, 41; Allen 1988, 30).



*dzdz.n.i m drt.i hr.n.i (z') m rz.i ds.i išš.n.i m Šw tfnwt.n.i m Difnwt*

*“After I had copulated in my hand, (seed) fell from my mouth; I myself spewed out Shu. I spat out Tefnut”.*

(Lines 26.24-27.1. Faulkner 1933, 60; Faulkner 1937, 172).





In this Ptolemaic text, the unity between Atum and his phallus is highlighted. This might be a reference to the physical sexual contact between his phallus and hand that issued from him as two seemingly opposing forces, but they might in fact be part of the dynamic balance between the masculine and feminine principles of creation. The myth of creation in Papyrus Bremner Rhind narrates a story recalling the Memphite cosmogony on the Shabaka Stone (British Museum no. 498), which concerns the function of the god Ptah as a creator, giving life to the other gods by means of his heart and tongue (Lichtheim 1975, 54). When thinking about the identity of the gods and the pronouncement of their names the god Ptah, brought forth all of creation (Holmberg 1946, 42-45; Allen 1988, 39, 42, 45; Bickel 1994, 145). Similarly, by copulating in his hand, the creative desire came out of the heart of Atum into his hand, and his semen fell out of his mouth in the form of saliva carrying Shu and Tefnut.<sup>x</sup> In this regard, Refai (2001, 89), has referred to the absence of any goddess contributing to the act of creation along with Atum in the funerary literature from the Old Kingdom, when he carried out creation alone without any female participation in the Pyramid Texts. Thus, Atum relied on spitting out Shu and Tefnut to give them birth without them being developed in a female womb.

x

## CONCLUSION

The ancient Egyptians considered several sources for the creation of life, one of which was that it came forth from the activity of the divine hand. The Egyptians were also highly advanced in their belief in the fertile hand and considered it as a symbol of the god's fertility and creation.

In ancient Egyptian beliefs, it seems that the life-bestowing hand and its role in giving birth and ensuring rebirth were closely related to the supreme creator. As a demiurge, Atum was a self-arising god and a solitary creator who strictly combined the male and female organs in a single body. The Egyptians believed that the male and female principles of creation were embodied together in the intersex god Atum, who fathered the first gods, Shu and Tefnut, by means of masturbation. Occasionally, his phallus supported his masculine side and his hand represented his feminine aspect. They were inseparable and needed for sexual differentiation and the beginning of creation. Thus, his body parts were complementary and given different sexual identities as a way of combining genders.

Most probably the  *hꜥ*-hand of Atum was the prototype of the feminine principle of creation, who gave birth to his first offspring, Shu and Tefnut which, can be seen in Utterance 527 (Spells §1248a-d) of the Pyramid Texts. By the New Kingdom, it was developed and replaced by the  *drt*-hand which, began to be personified by several creator goddesses, each of whom was conceived as his consort and embodied the conception  |  *drt-(I)tmw* or "The hand of Atum". Indeed, they were only embodiments of the female instruments needed in the creation process, not real mothers. Thus, they granted life to the children of the demiurge after masturbation, not sexual intercourse.

Atum practiced sexual stimulation, in which his fertile hand was not only for sexual pleasure, but granted life to his children and a new life to the dead. The masturbation spell in the Pyramid Texts and the representation of the risen king, Ramesses IX, in his form as Atum express that the conceptions of birth and rebirth might be accomplished by masturbation. The assimilation between the deceased king and the life-giving god Atum was of chief importance and influenced the idea of rebirth by masturbation.

## NOTES


<sup>i</sup> The ancient Egyptians differed in attributing the creation of the universe to only one god, so that many creation deities emerged, including the autogenous god Atum and his offspring of the Heliopolitan Ennead, a set of eight primordial deities called the Ogdoad of Hermopolis, the contemplative god Ptah in Memphis, and the great transcendent god Amun in Thebes. While these legends differ in their content, to some extent, they were complementary to each other and agreed in their cosmological essence. They also refer to the ancient Egyptian aspects of understanding creation. (Clark 1959, 49). For more details about the creation myths, cf. (Seton-Williams 1988, 7-8; Lesko 1991, 90-91).

<sup>i</sup> The ancient Egyptians believed that above earth stood a great celestial world inhabited by deities of the two genders. (Frankfort 1948, 154; Bonnet 1952, 535; Hornung 1956, 29; Kees 1956, 215; Allen 1988, 4; Hart 1990, 9). God Nun was a primeval creator deity and he was also responsible for giving birth to the dead in the next world. This concept was commonly discussed in Utterance 486 (Spell §1040a) of the Pyramid Texts, which says:



*msiw (N) m Nww* = “(N is) born in Nun”. (Sethe 1910, 80; Mercer 1952, 181; Faulkner 1969, 173). For more details about this concept, cf. (Hassan 1946, 174; Hornung 1956, 29; Barta 1973, 82-84).

<sup>i</sup> In ancient Egyptian perception, there was always a great fear that the primordial watery abyss would crash through the sky and drown the earth in water and utmost darkness. The Egyptians viewed such an undesirable situation as an accompanying event to the extinction of the sun that might happen in the case of defeating the sun god in his daily battles against his enemies (Hornung 1998, 162). Most probably, this concern had a great effect on considering god Nun as a god with raised hands elevating the sun to ensure its rebirth. Noteworthy is also that the situation of saving the world from submerging in the watery abyss differs from the unfavorable expected fate of those who, after their condemnation, would die in water and be deprived of survival in the hereafter. For further discussion about death by water, cf. (Muhlestein 2005, 173-179).

<sup>i</sup> In this respect, Bonnet compared the two lion cubs ( *rwty*) and the demiurge Atum, considering their unisexual. (Bonnet 1952, 643).

<sup>v</sup> For other examples, cf. (Piankoff 1934, 60; Hassan 1946, 174, fig. 72; Piankoff 1953, 53; Piankoff 1954, 222, 345, 359, figs. 73, 101, 111; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, 6, 21, 27, 49, figs. 2, 9, 33; Schott 1965, 188; Hornung 1972, 444, 461, abb. 92, 98; Schäfer 1974, 26-27, figs. 8, 11-12; Hornung 1981, 226, fig. 10; Hornung 1989, 39; Wilkinson 1992, 139; Abitz 1995, 138; Hornung 1998, 198; Hornung 1999, 98, 104, fig. 55).

<sup>v</sup> Compare with the miracle of rejuvenation in the last hour of the Amduat, which takes place within the giant Naw-serpent, who embodies the primeval creative force and swallows the already existing world every night before vomiting it in the next morning (Hornung 1963, 190; Wiebach-Koepke 2003, 186).

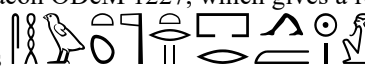
<sup>v</sup> For similar reclining positions of god Osiris, cf. (Piankoff 1949, 129-144; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, 75-77; Derchain 1962, 261).

<sup>v</sup> God Atum was occasionally<sup>i</sup> described as the father of Horus in the religious literature, as for example in Utterances 461, 465 (Spells §874b, 881b) of the Pyramid Texts and Spell 335 in the Coffin Texts. (Sethe 1908, 488, 492; Mercer 1952, 161-162; Faulkner 1969, 154, 155; Troy 1986, 28; Barta 1973, 162; CT IV, 205c-206a; Faulkner 1973, 263).

<sup>i</sup> The small temple of King Osorkon II in Bubastis also presents a clear example of the same title during the Late Period, when it was borne by the composite god Re-Herakhty-Atum, who assimilated in his essence between god Atum and god Re-Herakhty. (Naville 1891, pl. LIG I; LGG II, 604). During the Græco-Roman Period, god Atum

was also given the same title of  *wtt-t3wy.f* in the temple of Edfu (Chassinat 1897, 53.6; LGG II, 604).

<sup>x</sup> The cult of god Atum in his ithyphallic form as a creator and self-impregnator deity was not mentioned in the textual context before the Late Period. In the meantime, Kharga Oasis was probably the main place where this cult was established. (LGG V, 699, LGG VII, 412).

<sup>x</sup> This vision could be compared to the explanation of the Ostrakon ODeM 1227, which gives a reference to the magical emerging of a divine egg from the sun god Re and says  *swht-ntry pri m R*, i.e., “The divine egg, (which) comes forth of Re”. (Fischer-Elfert 1997, 151; Rashed 2017, 7, 9). Note also that god Atum created god Ptah as his egg. (Bickel 1994, 137).

<sup>x</sup> In Spell 223<sup>i</sup> in the Coffin Texts, the egg was the functional equivalent of god Shu in separating between the sky and earth (CT III, 208e-209a; Faulkner 1973, 176). Clark (1959, 56) also mentioned that both of god Shu and the egg had a close relation to the air, in which he was conceived as the air god and it was filled with air before hatching.

<sup>x</sup> Several textual sources confirm this conception, the oldest of which is inscribed in Spells 714a-b, 1968d-1969c

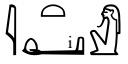
(Utterances 408, 669) of the Pyramid Texts. (Sethe 1908, 391; Sethe 1910, 474-475; Mercer 1952, 138, 293; Faulkner 1969, 133, 284).

<sup>x</sup> According to Bickel (1994, 236-237, 239), the egg that the creator deposited and from which his son came was only a natural step in the evolution of the child of Atum or a metaphor for the son of the creator. For the conception of the egg, which hatched the creator, see for example: Spells 80, 81, and 335 in the Coffin Texts and Chapters 17, 77 in the Book of the Dead. (CT II, 36c, 44d; CT IV, 292b; Faulkner 1973, 84, 87, 264; Naville 1886, pls. XXV.58, LXXXVIII.2; Allen 1974, 30, 66).




<sup>x</sup> For this conceit, cf. (Bickel 1994, 238-239).



<sup>x</sup> For an example of *Itm* , cf. (CT I, 348b).


<sup>x</sup> For examples of *Itm* , cf. (Lacau 1904, 80; CT I, 32a).


<sup>x</sup> For examples of *Itm* , cf. (Birch 1886, 27.13; CT II, 2a; CT V, 130a).




<sup>x</sup> For this title, cf. (Wb<sup>x</sup>II, 381.18-19; LGG III, 679).


<sup>x</sup> Generally, the title  *drt-ntr*, which identifies “the hand of the god”, was typically given to the category of various priestesses, who were also described as  *hmt-ntr*, i.e., “the wife of the god”. (Wb V, 585.1-6; Wb III, 78.14-15; Leclant 1977, 813; Wilson 1997, 373). From the Middle Kingdom onwards, it became popular to describe an individual woman as both wife and hand of the god. With the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, the title  *drt-ntr* became a constant designation of the wife of the god. (Leclant 1977, 813). For an example of an individual

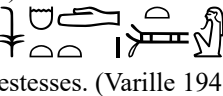
woman called Merytre, who was described as both  *hmt-ntr* and  *drt-ntr* in (TT 49), cf. (Davies 1933,

pl. L). For the anonymous divine wife of the red chapel of Hatshepsut who was identified as  *hmt-ntr* and


 *(dr)t-ntr*, cf. (Legrain and Naville, 1902, pl. XI.b). For Hatshepsut II Meretre, the wife of Thutmose


III as  *hmt-ntr* and  *drt-ntr*, cf. (LD III, 62b). For Neferure daughter of Hatshepsut, as  *hmt-ntr*

and  *drt-ntr*, cf. (Fakhry 1939, 722).

<sup>x</sup> During the New Kingdom, the title of  *hmt-nsw(t) drt-(I)tmw*, i.e. “the royal wife (and) hand of (A)tum”, was also given to the priestesses. (Varille 1943, 22, pl. LXV).

<sup>x</sup> The sun god Re is described as the great cat of Heliopolis in Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead. Allen 1974, 30; Piankoff 1955, 55. In the thirty-three and fifty-sixth forms of the solar god in the Grand Solar Litany, the cat

also represents one of the main forms of the sun god, who is identified there respectively as  *miwty*,

i.e., “One of the Cat” and  *miw-3*, i.e., “Great Cat”. Piankoff 1964, 27, no. 56; Hornung 1976, 25, no. 33, 69, no. 56; Wiebach-Koepke 2003, 382-383, no. 33, 386-387, no. 56; Assmann 1983, no.168; Hornung 1998, 124.

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Wepay from Deir Durunka, preserved in the Museum of Minya, no. 274. (Kamāl 1916, 81: côté gauche: 2; Gauthier and Lefebvre 1923, 8).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Kheti. (Chassinat and Palanque 1911, 17).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Nakht. (Chassinat and Palanque 1911, 25).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Tai. (Chassinat and Palanque 1911, 170).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Tef-ibi. (Chassinat and Palanque 1911, 192).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Heqa from Deir Durunka, preserved in the Museum of Tanta, no. 549. (Kamāl 1916, 78; Gauthier and Lefebvre 1923, 15).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Imy. (Kamāl 1934, 51).

<sup>x</sup> Anonymous Sarcophagus. (Chassinat and Palanque 1911, 172).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Dega. (Chassinat and Palanque 1911, 187).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Shepsu-héres from Deir Durunka. (Kamāl 1916, 72).

<sup>x</sup> Sarcophagus of Anw. (Kamāl 1934, 52).

<sup>x</sup> For the attestations, cf. (Chassinat and Palanque 1911, 25, 187, 192; Kamal 1934, 51).





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## جزء من جسد الإله الخالق أتوم المانح للحياة في السياق الديني المصري القديم: شواهد نصية وأثرية

### الملخص

باعتبارها جزءًا من الجسم يمنح الحياة، لعبت اليد دورًا فعالًا في خلق الآلهة وبقاء البشر في مصر القديمة. ولقد قامت نصوص الأهرام في عصر الدولة القديمة، بوصف القوة الخلاقة ليد الإله أتوم، المولد ذاتيًا، في خلق شو وتفنوت كأول زوجين إلهيين في العالم. يؤكد هذا المفهوم أنه منذ اللحظة الأولى لوجود العالم، كانت مسؤولية يد الخالق أن تخلق وتمنح الحياة. ومع نهاية عصر الانتقال الثاني وبداية عصر الدولة الحديثة، أصبح التعبير "يد أتوم" لقبًا خاصًا تحمله أمهات أبناء الإله أتوم كإشارة لدورهم في عملية الخلق. ولقد عبر الفن المصري القديم خلال عصر الدولة الحديثة، عن اليد الخلاقة للموتى الذين بعثوا ذاتيًا، والذين في هذه الحالة اعتبروا تجسيد للإله أتوم، ولعبت يدهم دور كبير لاستعادة حياتهم بعد الموت. من هذا المنطلق يسعى البحث إلى توصيف ثقافة اليد الخصبة والتي كان لها أهمية قصوى في تفعيل القدرة الإنجابية للإله الخالق أتوم والأموات القائمين من الموت.

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### بيانات المقال

#### تاريخ المقال

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### الكلمات الدالة

أتوم؛ شو؛ تفنوت؛ يد؛ خلق؛  
حياة.