

SURVEY AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF  
WATER SYMBOLISM IN THE ANCIENT BABYLONIAN  
AND EGYPTIAN COSMOLOGICAL CYCLES

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BY

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## Declaration

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## Summary

This thesis focuses primarily upon obtaining a greater understanding of Babylonian and Egyptian mythical environments, through the use of water symbolism within the physical and mythological frames of their cosmological cycles. In the Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological corpora, water appears to be a symbolic natural element, omnipresent and essential in the establishment of the tripartite world. The objective of this study is then to attempt to gather and analyse a concise survey of sources on both Babylonian and Egyptian water symbolism within their creation corpora, and also to identify the role it held in their cosmographical cycles. Furthermore, this survey will aim to reflect in these myths and artefacts the common cultural and natural patterns, as well as knowledge of water symbolism present in Babylonian and Egyptian social and natural environments. Thus, showing the common parameters of water symbolism and cosmographical structures in Babylonia and Egypt as the result of an analogous response to similar environments, remains the principal concern throughout.

Chapter One begins with an in-depth analysis and survey of water symbolism in the Babylonian cosmological cycle. It examines and categorises the numerous textual and pictorial sources of Babylonian water symbolism under three main sections: water as Creation, water as life and water as death. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the plurality of water as a hierophany and as a complimentary dualistic element within the tripartite world.

In Chapter Two, a thorough survey and study of water symbolism in the Egyptian cosmological cycle is conducted. Similarly to Chapter One, Chapter Two aims to identify and categorise the sources of Egyptian water symbolism under same three main topics: water as Creation, water as life and water as death. In this chapter, the environmental and mythological aspects of water as a hierophany are emphasised as being part of a larger concept: the tripartite world.

Chapter Three seeks to compare and contrast the elements discussed in Chapters One and Two, by highlighting their common aqueous features. Additionally in this chapter, the social aspect of water symbolism through ceremonial and cosmographical features is investigated, for example the Babylonian and Egyptian New-Years' festivals, which are

shown as linked to the mythological and environmental aspects of water displayed in the previous two chapters.

Hence, this thesis sheds light on a greater understanding of the context of use of water symbolism in Babylonian and Egyptian corpora. It seeks as well, to demonstrate the deficiency of ideas on water symbolism found in the meagre and sporadic references of scholarly research by highlighting the interconnectedness with water entrenched in the Babylonian and Egyptian civilisations. This shared conception of water is present within the cores of both civilisations.

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## Introduction

This dissertation aims to undertake an in-depth study on Babylonian and Egyptian mythical environments through the use of water symbolism within their cosmic cycles, and by collecting, presenting and comparing the available evidence of water symbolism within the physical and mythological structures of the Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological cycles.

I chose to focus on Babylonia and Egypt due to their similar environments and also because of the relationship and the balance these two civilisations maintained with the Euphrates and the Tigris, and the Nile respectively. Indeed, these two civilisations of the Ancient Near East, share a great deal in their cultural vision of the earthly and the divine. Thus, I am particularly interested in the symbolism of water in cosmographical and cyclical contexts as a mirror of these societies and as their model for the course of human life. Water described the structures of these two civilisations through its most opposed aspects, and water was present at all the levels of their universe from the Underworld, through the Earthly world, and on up to the Heavens. The myths of these two civilisations evoke water under five major themes: water as a source of life, water as a symbol of destruction and death, water as a means of purification, water as a means of renewal and, finally, water as a personification of the cycle of energy ruling the world.

Water is shown as a complex element. It was a key part in the cycle of the cosmos, becoming a major element of the Creation in Babylonian and Egyptian mythologies. Indeed, the issues concerning the origin of humankind are not new, they were not invented in modern times. These existential questions concerning the origin of our world and of humankind disturbed the thoughts of our ancestors long before our own. The human mind is not designed to withstand a reality without explanation; according to Fredrik Barth, “there is a real world out there [...]but[...] our representations of that world are constructions” (1989:87). Complete emptiness cannot be designed or comprehended by our minds because it is without form, without limit and without logic. Humankind visualises this inconsistency through water. Water is virtual and informal, it is an undifferentiated mass


which contains an infinity of possibility. It represents both the promise of development but also the threat of destruction. It was based on this dualism that the Egyptians and the Babylonians built their beliefs.

Water is difficult to control and it is able to play the role of a mirror that reflects the knowledge of its surroundings. It escapes because it has no shape and because it is in position to conform to all imaginable forms. It escapes because it has almost infinite capacity for division. It evaporates if exposed to air and, if we contain it, it takes advantage of the slightest fault to find a path out. Additionally, water possesses the unique feature that it can take on the shape of its surroundings without having a specific form of its own; as Mircea Eliade noted in *The sacred and the Profane*, water is such because it is unable to transcend its own mode of existence and to manifest itself in its own form. Eliade noted that everything with a form “manifests itself above the waters, by detaching itself from the waters” (1957:131). Thus, we can understand that water is the origin of the form and therefore it is the original hierophany from which the cosmos came into existence. The fluidity of water, its continuity and its consistency is indeed used as a symbol of infinity. Earth symbolises the action to take a shape, and water symbolises the dissolution in a liquid housing infinite possibilities. Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane* writes about the symbolic potential of water: “the waters symbolise the universal sum of virtualities; they are [...] spring and origin, the tank of all possibilities of existence; they precede every form and support every creation.” (1957:130). The ability of water to eliminate forms and take possession of new ones gives us different types of water symbolism. The philosopher and poet Gaston Bachelard in *Water and Dreams, The Imagination of Material Test* (1994) identifies different levels of processing water, ranging from clean, current, standing, dead, fresh, salted, shimmering, deep and stormy. Water can be influenced by a large number of factors, such as meteorological phenomena or mythological, depending on if it is water from the Heavens or the Underworld. Indeed, the symbolism of water from above or from below is very important. René Guénon notes in *Man And His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, that water from above is related to potential, while water from below is related to reality (2001:50).

“Religions” whether they are polytheistic or monotheistic are not superstitions or a kind of refuge in which man finds answers to his questions about the complexity of the

world and life. “The religious man”, an expression used by Eliade (1957:20) to refer to those who believe in the supernatural or who had religion in archaic and ancient societies, understood the world as an infinity of symbols, often hidden, and as sources which revealed the presence of the divine. Thus, “religious men” explained their understanding of the world in their myths that composed religions and beliefs. Eliade explained myths as “[...] narrates a sacred history; that is, a transhuman revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time, in the holy time of the beginnings. Being real and sacred, the myth becomes exemplary and consequently repeatable, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as a justification, for all human actions” (1967:23). Thus, in its general sense, mythology is a source of knowledge, a kind of code that ancient civilisations in particular used to store their knowledge of both themselves and of the world surrounding them. Myths enable concepts behind comprehension to be expressed with words, they humanise what is superhuman. In other words, a myth is a true and sacred story, or at least this is how it was seen by ancient civilisations. This is its symbolic value that reveals deeper meaning.

The structural approach introduced by Lévy-Strauss in his anthropological studies, states that the elements of a myth could be organised into binary opposition (i.e. chaos and creation, life and death), as seen for example in Babylonian mythology with Apsu, Marduk and Tiamat, or Osiris, Re and Seth in the Egyptian mythology. He thought that the myth’s purpose was to mediate these oppositions thereby resolving basic tensions or contradictions found in human life and culture (Lévy-Strauss 1963:224). On the other hand, the psychological approach to comparative mythology was introduced by Adolf Bastian who influenced the work of Carl Jung on the study of the unconscious (Bastian 2010). The psychological explanation of Jung, assumes that similarities found in myths are due to the homogeneity of the human psyche, the universal features of the human mind that forever produce the same images or archetypes as Jung called them. Archetypes “are those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration” (Jung 1969:5), such as the Mother, the Father, the Avenger (for example Tiamat, Apsu and Marduk). These archetypes or patterns are present in the unconscious levels, and “water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious” said Jung (1969:18). In my opinion, the use of water to describe the unknown was relevant to the Egyptians and the Babylonian because water itself symbolised the unknown. The myth was only a second elaboration of the archetypes that water embodied, water being the main structure that reunited opposed concepts emphasised in the structural approach.

Every religion and every civilisation has its theories and myths about the origin of the universe or the birth of the world. That could be the birth of a demiurge in the middle of the shapeless, or the sudden appearance of the cosmos which organised the world. Any origin is sacred and its description can only take the form of a myth, imagined by man or revealed by the creator himself. Babylonian and Egyptian cosmogonies began in chaos and shapelessness. The primordial ocean covered the surface of the world, it was called Nun  in Egypt and Apsu “*Apsûm*” in Babylonia. Creating the aquatic element is central. The aquatic chaos preceding the Creation symbolises both life and death. Indeed, water was the source of life, it fertilised the plains of the Tigris and the Euphrates, as well as the banks of the Nile. However, it was also destructive: floods caused destruction resulting in starvation, disease and death. By its lack of form, water was associated with the disappearance of form which follows death: the soul leaves the body and the body returns to the soil thus maintaining the balance of the cosmos.

The study of the environmental and cosmological aqueous complimentary dualism present in the Babylonian and Egyptian creation cycles, and especially their Creation myths, opens a way to see the establishment of these two civilisations under a common framework, and the structure of their societies founded on the concept of the tripartite world. The comparison of these two civilisations under water symbolism can be understood as a step forward for environmental determinism and/or an example of symbiosis between nature and culture. Environmental Determinism being the impact of dominant local geographical and environmental features that are internalised by the inhabitants of the land to such an extent that it serves to shape their entire world view and culture. Its role with respect to Babylonian and Egyptian water symbolism and cosmological structures is shown specifically through the personification of deities such as Tiamat, Marduk and Apophis who incarnate the beneficial and detrimental features of both the Euphrates and Nile rivers which cut through harsh desert environments. This is further manifested in their depictions of the cosmos, with their association between sky and water, suspended in heaven at all times, providing life but holding the threat of death as a reflection of the normally life giving rivers which could turn to death dealing droughts or floods.

Numerous works on Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological primary sources, including water in the cosmological cycle, have been published over the past century. However, the topic of water symbolism as such is fairly rare in both primary and secondary sources. Indeed, research on water in Babylonia and Egypt tends to focus on its hydraulic and agricultural functions as shown by Ikram (2010), and also on its consequences for the landscape, rather than its cosmological and cosmographical values. Thus, a comprehensive survey is needed and the theoretical cases for diversification need to be revisited in order to further understand water symbolism as a mythological, environmental and social concept.

The studies of Leick - *Who's who in the Ancient Near East* (1999) and *The Babylonians, An Introduction* (2003) - present a general introduction on Babylonian civilisation and offer some specificities concerning the annual monsoon, such as the annual swelling of the rivers and its irrigation purposes. Additionally, the work of Hole - *Drivers of Unsustainable Land Use in the Semi-Arid Khabur River Basin, Syria* (2009) - is somewhat more specific and provides useful information on the Mesopotamian fertile crescent and the role of water and rain as fertile promoters. Despite not mentioning water symbolism, Leick's and Hole's scientific arguments mention water as a strong element of life, and the dualism of the Mesopotamian environment, being both arid and aqueous. Moreover, the works of Willcocks - *Irrigation of Mesopotamia* (1917) -, MacDonald - *The Flood: Mesopotamian Archaeological Evidence* (1988) -, and Langdon and Watelin - *Excavations at Kish I (1923–1924)* (1924), - *Excavations at Kish III (1925–1927)* (1930), and *Excavations at Kish IV (1925–1930)* (1934) - provide some archaeological evidence concerning the role that water played for the Babylonians, mentioning destructive floods occurring during the Early Dynastic II and III periods, as well as during the 7th century B.C.E. These discoveries display a new facet of water symbolism, that of water embodying death and chaos. This dualism between life and death is also reflected in Babylonian primary sources, as a mythical projection of the Babylonian environment.

One of my major primary source concerning Babylonian literature is the library of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.E) in his palace at Nineveh on the Kuyundjik tell, where the *Enûma Eliš*<sup>1</sup> was found. It was primarily translated by Wallis Budge (1921) and King (1902),

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<sup>1</sup> In another version of the Creation myth, called *The Bilingual Version of the Legend of Creation*, shows Marduk and Arruru as the primary god and goddess, like Apsu and Tiamat in the *Enûma Eliš*. This Creation myth describes Marduk creating the cosmos when the land was only sea, following after that the path of the *Enûma Eliš*, which stated also that the primeval state of the universe was inertness/shapelessness. Furthermore, there is *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, a Greek language account of creation by Marduk by Berossus, a priest of Bel

and then divided into seven tablets of Creation, which reveal the organisation of the universe during the earliest ages of the cosmos, and it presents water as the main element of creation through three main gods: Apsu the primary god of sweet water, Tiamat the primary goddess of bitter water, and Marduk the avenger and creator of the cosmos. Marduk was the god who defeated Tiamat's army after she rebelled against her children, after Ea, Marduk's father, killed Tiamat's husband Apsu. From Tiamat's body, Marduk created the Heavens, the Earth, and also from her eyes brought forth the Euphrates and the Tigris. Moreover, from the blood of Kingu, her follower, Ea created humankind to serve the gods. Thus, the *Enûma Eliš* by itself sets out an extremely important pattern found both in the Babylonian and Egyptian cycles of water symbolism, which is of water covering all the aspects of the tripartite world as an element of creation, of life and of death. Furthermore, the twelve tablets of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (2750-2500 B.C.E) were found in the palace of Ashurbanipal, discovered and translated by George (2000 & 2003) during the excavations of the palace of Assurbanipal between 1840 and 1876. This epic reports the legendary story of the quest for immortality and glory of the king Gilgamesh of the third dynasty of Ur. Tablets IX, X and XI describe Gilgamesh's journeys to find Utnapishtim "in the mouth of the river", the only man who was granted immortality by the gods. To find Utnapishtim, Gilgamesh had to cross the ocean and the waters of death represented by the Hubur River, the river of the Underworld. The description of the environment for the journey of Gilgamesh provides important information concerning Babylonian cosmographical beliefs and confirms three main components of their environment: a central continent, a cosmic sea and an Underworld River. The last two aqueous elements symbolise spiritual and physical borders between humankind's Earthly world and the realm of the dead. In addition, it symbolises water as a bond between the worlds, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* also symbolises water as an element of purification and renewal, as described in the Flood story in tablet XI. Similarly, *The Atrahasis Epic*<sup>2</sup>, which was found in Sippar, southern Iraq, and dated from the 17<sup>th</sup>

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Marduk in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. The full text of the *Babyloniaca* has not survived, but excerpts from the writing of Berossus were included in works of later authors and thus preserved. Book I of the *Babyloniaca* concerns the primeval waters and describes the Babylonian Creation story and the establishment of order. Berossus mentioned the name *Thalath*, "deep", from the name of the primeval goddess of the bitter water "Tiamat". According to Berossus, all knowledge was revealed to humans by the sea monster Oannes after the Creation. Oannes was a creation of Ea, the god of water dwelling in the Apsu. The *Babyloniaca* of Berossus teaches us more about the link between wisdom and the waters of the Apsu, as well as the evolution of the accounts of the Babylonian Creation Epic which still mention the sea monster Tiamat.

<sup>2</sup> Translated by Speiser in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (3rd Edition) of Pritchard (1969).

century B.C.E, is the fullest Mesopotamian version of the Flood story and outlines the structure of the universe according to Babylonian beliefs. Anu was the god of the Heavens, Enlil was the god of the Earth and Enki the god of the subterranean sweet water. The epic tells us the rebellion of the minor gods working in the fields, and then the creation of humans from clay, saliva and blood to act as servants of the gods, and also the destruction of humankind by the Flood sent by Enlil. Like the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Atrahasis Epic develops the story of the Flood disaster. These two epics show water symbolically as an element of death and purification, and also represent important texts warning of the danger of floods of the Tigris and the Euphrates in the Babylonian natural environment.

The tripartite world described in primary sources offered a structure to Babylonian society. Their cosmography took shape not only in their myths but also in geographical locations. *The Map of the World* offers a unique point of view on the role that water played in the Babylonian tripartite world. The Map is a late Babylonian clay tablet conserved at the British Museum (British Museum 92687) and dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The map and inscriptions are on the obverse, while a description of the map is inscribed on the reverse. This fragment is the only Babylonian map discovered. It presents Babylon at the centre of humankind's world on a land crossed by the Euphrates and surrounded by the ocean "marratu", the ocean itself surrounded by unknown regions "nagu". The Map put forward the importance of the Euphrates, and demonstrates the geographical knowledge of the Babylonians concerning the Persian Gulf where the Euphrates joins the ocean, as well as of the foreign lands beyond their territory. The Map presents the geographical and symbolical importance of water. Wayne Horowitz in *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* analysed the Map of the World. In this comprehensive study, Horowitz examines all of the extant Mesopotamian texts (both Sumerian and Akkadian) relating to the ideas of the physical universe and its constituent parts (Heaven, Earth, subterranean waters, Underworld) i.e. the tripartite world. He shows that the Mesopotamian view of the universe was simultaneously cohesive as well as discordant and deficient. Horowitz discusses the various aqueous regions of the Map of the World, and their names, as well as geographical features of Babylonian cosmography, in various locales and time periods.



The tripartite world is present in Babylonian myths and the natural environment, however, it is as well present in their social structure, as shown by the study of the Babylonian New Year festival, called the Akitu, conducted by Van der Torn - *Het Babylonische Nieuwjaarsfeest* (1990) - and Sommer - *The Babylonian Akitu Festival: Rectifying the King or Renewing the Cosmos* (2000). The Akitu is described in the *Akitu Chronicles* (British Museum 86379) translated by Grayson in *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (2000), and it remains a subject of contention between historians of religion and Assyriologists, as to what its primary purpose was. Both sets of scholars describe the events of the ceremony, during which water and the Enûma Eliš play an important role. Indeed, water, and especially the water of the Euphrates, was, with the Enûma Eliš, used to purify Babylon, renew the cosmic and natural cycles and legitimise kingship. Additionally, water under the major themes of renewal and life was also found in *An address to the river of Creation*, a Neo-Babylonian tablet found at Nineveh and published by King in 1902. This hymn is addressed to the river to which all Creation was attributed. King suggested that this river was the Euphrates. Indeed, this hymn puts forward the Euphrates as a river of life, reinforcing the hierophany of water. Furthermore, this hymn describes perfectly the qualities of water as a divine element of transmission of life and of death, which created and reinforced a bond between the world of humankind and the realm of the gods. During the Akitu, the king played an essential role along with the god Marduk, the main god of the Babylonian pantheon. Marduk is himself linked to the Enûma Eliš, to watercourses and to the natural cycle. Oshima, in *Marduk the Canal Digger* (2003), notes that Marduk was the keeper of the courses of water, of rivers, of canals and of irrigation in general. This is also known from other contemporary Akkadian sources like the prayer to Marduk described by Lambert in *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1959), in which Marduk is described as bringing the flowing water to the land: rivers, irrigation systems, the annual flood and water falling from the sky: i.e. rain and dew.

Thus, while the previous works mentioned earlier hold different points of view on water symbolism, and lead us to think about the bonds of the cosmos, Horowitz, in his research, considers this question in depth, inducing me to consider water as one of the fundamental bonds of the cosmos.

In Egyptian primary and secondary sources of water symbolism, the tripartite world seems not as obvious as it is in Babylonian sources, however, water symbolism, despite being a rare topic, appears as a subject of research in the studies of Oestigaard - *Horus' eye and*

*Osiris' efflux: the Egyptian civilisation of inundation c. 3000-2000 BCE* (2011)- and Abbass - *The Lake of Knives and the Lake of Fire: Studies in the topography of passage in ancient Egyptian religious literature* (2010). Oestigaard in his study examines the entwined relationship between the death-giving and the life-giving waters of the Nile in ancient Egyptian religion. He develops a synthetic perspective for enhancing the understanding of the religious roles water played in the rise and constitution of Egyptian civilisation during the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom. His work helps to understand several primary and secondary sources on water symbolism, as he employs archaeological, inter-disciplinary and comparative water perspectives in which water not only forms the analytical framework but also provides empirical data. Thus, the Nile itself is used as the primary point of departure to analyse how, why and when religious changes took place, with a particular emphasis on the development of the Osiris cult and its linkage to the annual flood.

Abbass, in spite of being less specialised in water symbolism than Oestigaard's study, provides useful information in his investigation concerning the safe passage of the deceased over water as exemplified in the early Egyptian legends involving the "Lake of Knives" and the "Lake of Fire". The journey of the deceased from death to resurrection is envisaged as taking place in a boat crossing dangerous places and ordeals. I focused on chapter one on the text, which deals with the symbolism of water, knives and fire. The author concludes that water is the discharge coming from the body of Osiris and is offered up to him in ritual, that water mediated the passage of the deceased to the Underworld, and that it also caused violent death. In chapters three and four, the author examines the passage of the deceased over water with the examples of the ferryman spells and the Island of Fire. In these last two chapters, water is brought forward as a bond between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead, as it is used as a means of transport, and also as a substance of renewal. Both authors published their studies quite recently (2011 and 2010 respectively), however before them, in 1982, Hornung in his study - *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt. The one and the many* - conceived the existence of "Nile gods" or "fecundity figures" like the god Hapi, as did Champollion - *Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie, Vol. 1* (1844) - and Baines - *Fecundity Figures* (1985). The existence of these gods denotes a gap between Egyptian and Babylonian water symbolism, as the Egyptians personified the Nile under the image of a god or a "fecundity figure". However, gods like Hapi and Osiris did not represent the Nile itself but more its actions, such as floods, as this was the event that fertilised the lands. The same

concept is found in Babylonia, where the floods of the Euphrates and Tigris were more worshipped and feared more than the rivers themselves.

Even if the Nile as a river was not worshiped under the representation of a god, it was linked to the pre-Creation state in Egyptian cosmology. The *Nun* was the primeval ocean/abyss from which all the waters of the cosmos came from. In Egyptian cosmology references to the Nun can be found in the Hermopolitan and Theban cosmogonies. The Hermopolitan cosmogony reveals the “eight chaos gods” in the Coffin Texts, who emerged from the Nun, while the Theban cosmogony divulges the Primeval Hill which emerged from the *Nun*. Both cosmogonies can be found in the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead, translated by Faulkner - *The Ancient Pyramid Texts* (1969), *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (1973) and - *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (2010). These three corpora mention the pre-Creation state as the abyss/*Nun*. Moreover, the Book of the Dead also mentions the destruction of the world by the flood as a relapse into the state of pre-Creation, revealing the cyclical and renewing concepts of water symbolism in Ancient Egypt.

The qualities of renewal of the Nun were also expressed by Assmann - *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (2005) - in his study of the Chester Beatty IV Papyrus, concerning the sun’s journey through the primeval waters conducting it to its rejuvenation. Furthermore, the sun’s journey is illustrated in the Book of the Dead of Khensumose, 1075-945 B.C.E, in which the primordial mound is represented as surrounded by water, with three orange circles representing the sun at different stages. Additionally, the Book of Nut from the Cenotaph of Seti I, translated by Allen in *Genesis in Egypt, The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptians Creation Accounts* (1988), highlights the contradictions found in the cosmos, as well as what lies beyond it. It also highlights the decisive role played by the Nun in the establishment of the cosmos. Furthermore, the relief on a sarcophagus cover from the necropolis of Sakkara, XXX<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (378 - 341 B.C.E) or Ptolemaic Period (after 300 B.C.E), representing the different stages of the sun’s journey and the tripartite world, offers a similar map of the cosmos as the Babylonian Map of the World, but from an Egyptian perspective instead. Löning and Zenger - *To Begin with, God Created Biblical Theologies of Creation* (2000) - described the Map as representing the land of Egypt and regions surrounding it in circular form, below and between the arms and legs of the arched figure of Nut. The centre of the circle represents the Underworld with the different stages of the Sun, an inner circular band is

occupied by various standards associated with the ancient territorial divisions of Egypt (nomes). The exterior ring depicts various peoples and symbols representing Egypt's neighbours. To the left and to the right on the circumference of the outer ring are respectively the goddess of the East and the goddess of the West. The circle is then surrounded by a “celestial ocean”, the primeval waters, as is also the case with the Map of the World. The sarcophagus relief is an example of the tripartite world linked by water, and it offers a glimpse of the cosmography of the cosmos and the location of the Duat - the Egyptian Underworld.

The realm of the Duat, described in *The Egyptian Amduat: The Book of the Hidden Chamber* (2007) by Warburton, Hornung and Abt, reveals the cosmography of the Underworld and its greatest danger, Apophis or Apep, and the twelve hours of the journey of the sun god upon the Underworld's River travelling through the Duat during the night to be reborn in the morning. Thus, I focus my research on chapters I, VI and VII which describe the fight between the sun god and the ultimate Egyptian demon Apophis, in which the demon is described as using water as a weapon by swallowing it, emptying the sandbank to prevent the sun god from continuing his journey. Assmann in *The Mind of Egypt: history and meaning in the time of the Pharaohs* (2003) presents a dry sandbank as a sign of famine, meaning that the waters of the Nile and its fertile qualities are absent. The same gloomy omen is found in the *Admonition of Ipuwer*, from the papyrus Leiden 334 translated by Gardiner - *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage: from a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden* (1969). The papyrus describes the sandbank and the Nile, and the tragic consequences a too high or too low flood would have on Egyptian society, i.e. the failure of the relationship between the king and the gods, as the king was a divine emissary looking after his kingdom for the gods, and as such the behaviour of the water could affect his power. This relationship is illustrated by Assmann - *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (2005) - and Frankfort - *Kingship and the Gods. A study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (1948) - in their description of the Egyptian New Year ceremony, and of the re-enactment of the *Mystery Play of Succession*, which depicted the battle between Osiris, Seth and Horus. Thus, symbolically this was the eternal struggle between life and death (also illustrated by the Enûma Eliš during the Akitu). The red god Seth symbolised chaos and the desert, while Osiris represented the agrarian prosperous green god of the Underworld and the flood. Thereby, Frankfort demonstrates, through the permanent cosmological fight, the Egyptian attitudes toward nature related to their concept

of kingship. Furthermore, Assmann delivers a system of belief that shaped Egyptian civilisation in both its natural and cultural aspects. Indeed, Assmann's study, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt (2001)*, can be a response to the papyrus of Leiden 350, on the Theban cosmogony, which stated that the Primeval Mount appeared from the sandbank in the waters of the Nun, like plants emerging from the mud deposited by the flood. Assmann in his study on Egyptian transcendence, deduced that the entire Egyptian environment/landscape was understood through mythology and that the sacred was not beyond nature, but was in fact nature itself for the Egyptians.

The references presented above highlight a common theme found in Babylonian texts as well, which is that of the tripartite world and the extensive role water played within it. Hence, in my analysis of water as an intrinsic component, a structuring variable and a constructing agent in social and religious realms, these realms are not mutually exclusive but instead interact and overlap with one another. This is why the general theoretical literature on this subject is inconclusive on several vital questions due to its sparsity, as it fails to address the inclusivity and interaction played by water in the Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological cycles. As water reflects many aspects of human life expressed through water symbolism, I will focus on three main issues:

- 1) What is the evidence of water symbolism in both the Babylonian and Egyptian Creation myths and water's role in their cosmographical cycles?
- 2) Does water symbolism in these myths reflect a common cultural and/or natural pattern or knowledge about the Babylonian and Egyptian social and natural environments?
- 3) Thus, are the common themes of water symbolism and cosmographical structures in Babylonia and Egypt the result of an analogous response to similar environments?

To answer these questions, I was first and foremost dedicated to researching the necessary documentation on Babylonian and Egyptian cosmologies to give a general framework to my research. This allowed me to identify different archetypes and their opposites that composed each of these myths. This also enabled me to familiarise myself with the primary sources of Babylonian and Egyptian cosmologies. My goal was to initially assemble secondary sources separately for each of these civilisations, and then to compare them when enough separate evidence was assembled. It is on this basis that my plan is built. I then

examined the creation myths themselves by questioning the importance of water in these myths as a natural, religious and social symbol. This questioning led me to the observation and understanding of the symbolism of water under three topics: water as Creation, water as life and water as death. These three main sections constitute each part of the three chapters belonging to this thesis.

Chapters one and two are committed to answering questions one and two described above. These chapters endeavour to highlight and bring together a set of textual and material primary and secondary sources, on water symbolism within the Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological cycles. The first chapter is dedicated to Babylonian water symbolism, and the second chapter is devoted to water symbolism in Egypt. They aim at identifying in each civilisation the environmental and mythological aspects of water symbolism separately at first. They highlight water as a hierophany, as well as being a part of a religious, environmental, and social complementary dualism within a tripartite world. They also emphasise, the blurred lines between profane and sacred, nature and culture, through water symbolism and its importance in environmental determinism.

Chapter three, addressing question three above, is an examination and questioning of the information gathered in chapters one and two in order to compare the Babylonian's and the Egyptian's textual and material primary sources on water symbolism, by highlighting their common aqueous factors. Also in this chapter, the ceremonial and cosmographical features of water in the tripartite Babylonian and Egyptian cosmoses are shown, underlining simultaneously the challenges and differences met during this survey between Babylonian and Egyptian water symbolism.

Consequently, the changing qualities of water in Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological cycle open up a new empirical reality with wide-ranging theoretical implications. Water is both culture and nature. Thus, by placing an emphasis on the nature of water symbolism we deconstruct myths in order to understand the construction of these societies. Water having multiple facets, humans did not adapt to nature as a unified whole, but rather adjusted according to the elements they focused on. In the hot climates of Babylonia and Egypt, water gave rise to specific social norms and ideas on water symbolism which were materialised in religions and myths.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **BABYLONIAN WATER SYMBOLISM IN THE COSMOLOGICAL CYCLE: INTERPRETATION AND SURVEY**

“The city of Babylon [...] had a magnificence”, wrote the Greek historian Herodotus (484-425 B.C.E), “greater than all other cities of which we have knowledge” (Legrand, *Herodotus: Histories*, I - 178). However, for centuries the city of Babylon has been perceived as a city of decadence, in a negative way, as emphasised in the Bible<sup>3</sup>. However, outside of biblical writings, the city of Babylon was a political and cultural capital, and is today known for its architecture, mythology and its culture, which was quite unique as recorded by Herodotus.<sup>4</sup>

The Babylonian civilisation was one of the earliest of the world. It was born in the Middle-East, in modern day Iraq, in a region formerly known as Mesopotamia, from the Greek “μεσοποτάμιος” composed of “μέσος” standing for “between”, and “ποταμός” expressing “river” (Liddel and Scott: 1940). From these words, Mesopotamia means the land “between two rivers”.

The name “Babylon” derives from the Akkadian “*Bābili(m)*” which means “the gate of God” (Edwards et al. 1970:150). This gives some resonance to the discovery of the Istar Gate. The Istar Gate, was the 8<sup>th</sup> gate of Babylon, built by King Nebuchadnezzar II in 575 B.C.E. It overlooked a processional pathway of Babylon, used during the New Year festival, called the Akitu. This festival took place each year and celebrated the New Year for the renewal and continuation of celestial and terrestrial life. By acting in such a way, humankind could stay in contact with the divine. We can therefore call Babylon the “gate of the Heavens”, connecting the world of humankind to the gods.

Babylonian civilisation developed around two rivers, the Tigris in the East and the Euphrates in the West. The Euphrates has a greater length than the Tigris. The Tigris however, has a greater floodplain than the Euphrates and has three major tributary rivers:

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<sup>3</sup> Book Of Revelation, 17.5: “The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon the great the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” In, *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Herodotus might be known as the “Father of History”, however he is as well known for being the “Father of Lies” (Evans 1968:11), and as such the reliability of Herodotus can be questioned. Herodotus had more of a taste for existing events and exoticism than analytical history, leading to the belief that he invented his sources and exaggerated his travels. However, Herodotus seems to be inevitably used as a primary source in the ethnography and anthropology of the ancient Middle-East due to his travelling accounts. In fact, he is qualified as the “father of ethnography” (Jones 1996:315) and the “father of comparative anthropology” (Burn 1972:10). Despite the controversy surrounding him, in my opinion for this dissertation, Herodotus remains a reliable source, as I will quote his work not to illustrate historical facts, but environmental and anthropological facts instead.



the Diyala and the Upper and Lower Zab. The Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers both flow into the south of the Persian Gulf, forming a wetlands at the confluence of the two, outlining a natural southern border. It was an axis between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea as well as between the Mesopotamian civilisations and the tribes of the Sinai Peninsula. The Northern region consisted of several mountain ranges: the Zagros, the Alborz (bordering the Caspian Sea), the Caucasus, the Taurus (Western and Eastern borders), Mount Lebanon and the Amanus.

The organisation of Babylonian civilisation makes sense by observing the Mesopotamian natural environment. Mesopotamia consisted of two regions: Assyria in the North and Babylon in the South. During, the annual monsoon in the North, the rivers would swell from 200 m<sup>3</sup> to 300 m<sup>3</sup> (Leick 2003:5), which would enable irrigation of crops in the fertile plains between the rivers, as well as bringing silt to fertilise the plains. The area to the south of the desert of Syria and alongside the two rivers was called the “fertile crescent”, in which more than 250 mm of rain fell each year (Hole 2009:6). These fertile plateaus contributed greatly to the development of agriculture around 9000 B.C.E and to the creation of a pastoral economy. The development of agriculture encouraged technical advances such as the establishment of irrigation systems, but also the development of a sedentary society that developed on the edges of rivers. Hence, it was these fertile lands which were used as arable land, pastures for herds and as dwelling places. The rocky soil of the southern lands favoured the construction of canals that irrigated fields and linked cities. The Babylonians therefore learned to control the spring floods of the rivers in order to use them for their own interests. Thus, the South was highly populated and more likely settled in the plains and the northern settlements were scattered along the river. So, we have been able to learn the importance of the Tigris and the Euphrates in the socio-economic development of Babylon, as well as the social and spiritual adaptations of the Babylonian in this environment.

## **1. Water as Creation: The Mythical Environment**

Babylon was a religious capital. Because of its cultic richness, Babylon has experienced great fame and extended a vast influence on human thought. Despite various

incursions by invaders, the great temples of Babylon remained spiritual and intellectual centres until the Sassanid Period (224 C.E. - 651 C.E.). Our understanding of Mesopotamian creation myths and society, comes from archaeological sites and cuneiform sources, mainly royal and religious texts<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, our perception of the Babylonian creation myths is reduced solely to the interpretations of the constituents of the Mesopotamian upper classes, as only 1% of the population was literate (Rollston 2010:134). Dating back originally to the Uruk period (4000-3100 B.C.E.), priests and kings wrote lists of hundreds of names of gods and goddesses<sup>6</sup> which were then copied and edited throughout Mesopotamian history.

The Mesopotamian region was a collection of individual states. Therefore, there were many unique myths of creation attested by cuneiform sources<sup>7</sup>. The most common theme of these myths however, recorded that the universe was previously unformed, just a wide surface of water.

9. Of the holy house, the house of the gods, the habitation had not been made.
10. All lands were sea.

The “Bilingual” Version of the Legend of Creation (King 1902)

1. When in the height heaven was not named,
2. And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,
3. And the primeval Apsû, who begat them [...]

The Seven Tablets of Creation I (King 1902)

Most myths relate that the main gods of creation were Ea and Marduk.

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<sup>5</sup> For this dissertation mostly, The Hammurabi’s Code (1750 B.C.E.) and the Corpus of Sumerian Royal Lists:

- Babyloniaca (Berossus, 3rd century B.C.E.).
- Dynastic Chronicle (Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles 18), including the copies K 11261 (Neo-Assyrian period: 934-610 B.C.E) and K 12054 (640 B.C.E.).
- Apkullu-list (165 B.C.E.).
- Kish Tablet (Scheil dynastic tablet, early 2nd millennium B.C.E.).
- UCBC 9-1819 (“California Tablet”, 1712 B.C.E.).
- Weld-Blundell collection: 62 (2000 B.C.E.).
- Weld-Blundell collection: 444 (1817/1827 B.C.E.).

<sup>6</sup> The most ancient copies are dated from 2500 B.C.E. For more details see *Museum siglum Louvre* (Antiquités Orientales) 5376 (Lower Mesopotamia, early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.E.), - De Genouillac (1930). *Louvre Museum, Orientals Antiquities Department, Book XV, Orientalist Library*.

<sup>7</sup> For example: *The Bilingual Version of the Legend of Creation* [No. 93, 014. British Museum]. This version is less epic than the Seven tablets. The “Bilingual” version reports that Marduk created the world and humankind with the goddess Aruru. As well as the creation myth of the *Enûma Eliš* (mentioned as *The Seven Tablets of Creation* by Wallis Budge).

60. Ea, who pondereth everything that is, searched out their [plan].

Enûma Eliš I (Wallis Budge 1921)

17. Marduk laid a reed upon the face of the waters,  
18. He formed dust and poured it out beside the reed.  
19. That he might cause the gods to dwell in the habitation of their hearts' desire,  
20. He formed mankind.

The “Bilingual” Version of the Legend of Creation (King 1902:133-134)

However, some myths portray creative female figures, as the earthly Mother-Goddess, Aruru. We know that, she is mentioned in the Epic of Gilgamesh beside Marduk, during the creation of the hero Enkidu from a piece of clay.

101. The goddess Aruru, she washed her hands,  
102. took a pinch of clay, threw it down in the wild.  
103. In the wild she created Enkidu, the hero,  
104. offspring of silence, knit strong by Ninurta.

The Epic Of Gilgamesh I (George 1999)

Moreover, it is the same goddess, in the “Bilingual” version of the creation, who assists Marduk equally in the creation of humankind.

21. The goddess Aruru with him created the seed of Mankind.

The “Bilingual” Version of the Legend of Creation (King 1902)

Thus, I do think that from those myths we can deduce theological, social and cultural dualities. These dualities of existence that characterised Babylon reveal the roots of the knowledge possessed by the Babylonians.

### 1.1) The Enûma Eliš

The best-known creation myth in Mesopotamia, is the Babylonian myth called “The Seven Tablets of Creation” or “Enûma Eliš”, meaning “*when above*”. Its title comes from its first line.

1. When the Heavens above were yet unnamed<sup>8</sup>

Enûma Eliš I (Wallis Budge 1921)

However, many versions of myths of creation in Mesopotamia exist. For example, in the myth of *Enki and Ninhursag: a Paradise Myth* (Pritchard 1969), with the water god Enki (Heaven, “An” in Sumerian, and Earth, “Ki” in Sumerian, *Ea* in Akkadian)<sup>9</sup> from the city of Eridu<sup>10</sup>, and his wife Ninhursag, the primordial world, Dilmun, was composed of fresh and salt waters, which formed a female element, Nintu “The mother of the Land”.

59. Her well of bitter water, verily it is become a well
60. of sweet water,
61. Her furrowed fields (and) farms bore her grain,
62. Her city, verily it is become the ban\-(quay) house of the land
63. Dilmun, (verily it is become) the ban\-(quay) house (of the land),
64. Now Utu is . . .; verily it was so.
65. Who is alone, before the wise Nintu, the mother of the land,

Enki and Ninhursag: a Paradise Myth (Kramer, in Pritchard, 1969)

In the Babylonian version of The Seven Tablets of Creation found at Nineveh, it is Marduk who has the role of the supreme god. He is directly involved in the creation of Heaven and Earth.

107. [On] men whom he hath formed, the created things fashioned by his fingers.

Enûma Eliš VI (Wallis Budge 1921)

It would be too long and off topic to study each of those creation myths. That is why I chose to focus on the Babylonian creation myth, the Enûma Eliš. For better understanding of the importance of water in the Enûma Eliš, I took as a main source the Assyrian tablets discovered at Nineveh<sup>11</sup>, which show us the point of view of the Assyrians and Babylonians

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<sup>8</sup> “*e-nu-ma e-lish la na-bu-ú shá-ma-mu*” (Horowitz 1998:108).

<sup>9</sup> Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 234, 272.

<sup>10</sup> The city of Eridu was located on the Persian Gulf, south of Babylon. The lands of Eridu were dependent on silt deposited during the annual floods of the Euphrates. This, probably, led to their belief of the Earth (“*eršetu*” in Akkadian, which is a feminine name, in Horowitz 1998:273) as the supreme creator; where a female element gave birth to the Heaven and the Earth.

<sup>11</sup> 20,000 tablets of baked clays were found in the ruins of the Palace of Asuhurbanipal (668-626B.C.E.) at Nineveh between 1848 and 1876 by Austen Henry Layard, Hormuzd Rassam and George Smith. They

on creation<sup>12</sup>. The assyriologist Leonard William King, after translating the tablets of Nineveh in 1902, was able to reconstruct the sequence of the Enûma Eliš. He was able to determine the history of the Babylonian creation which was divided among seven sequential tablets. The Babylonian creation story is considered more as an epic story than as a liturgical narrative. Indeed, while reading we understand that the main subject of the story is not the creation itself, but the glorification of Marduk, son of Ea, god of Babylon. The creation, strictly speaking, is mentioned as an exploit of Marduk, as described in Tablet VI.

126. Verily, he is the light of the gods, the mighty [...],  
127. Who[...] all the parts of heaven and of the land,  
128. By a mighty battle he saved our dwelling in the time of trouble.

Enûma Eliš VI (Wallis Budge 1921)

It is likely that the great Mesopotamian cities agreed a common tale for the legend of the creation and replaced the hero Marduk with their own local god. Scholars, like King, have hypothesised that the prominence of Marduk in the legend of the Creation is due to the political importance of the city of Babylon (King 1902:4). Indeed, we know from the tablets discovered during excavations by German assyriologists at Ẕal'at Sharḳat in the city of Ashur, that the eponymous god Ashur, the national god of Assyria, had occupied the same place in their texts of the legend of the Creation, that Marduk would later occupy. King has also suggested that the original hero of the creation was Enlil, the god of Nippur, and after Babylon became the preeminent power in Mesopotamia (about 2300 B.C.E, during the First dynasty of Babylon), Enlil's role was usurped by Marduk (King 1902:4). This may have been due to the desire to give to Babylon, the new capital, a tutelary deity with the same royal aura as the previous capital, Nippur, which was associated with Enlil.

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identified numerous instances of the historical inscriptions of Shalmaneser II, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, as well as other kings mentioned in the Bible.

<sup>12</sup> There is a greek version of the Babylonian legend of creation, extracted from “*The History of Babylon*” (or *Babyloniaca*) by the Greek author Berossus, a priest of Bel-Marduk (“The Lord Marduk”) at Babylon, around 250 B.C.E. In his work, the author reports the history and traditions of Babylon from primary sources available to him at the time. He reported Babylonian beliefs regarding the origin of the world. His description is relatively close to the cuneiform sources, giving us an additional viewpoint and new explanations concerning the Babylonian Creation Myth.

“There was a time in which there existed nothing but darkness and an abyss of waters, wherein resided most hideous beings, which were produced of a two-fold principle.”

Smith 1876:41

The title “Bel” which means “master” or “lord” (Bottero 1992:290), slowly became the title of the god Marduk, who assimilated some attributes and aspects of other gods.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, one can observe that religious development followed political development. This leads us again to the definition of myth by Mircea Eliade who says that myth is a transcription of reality perceived by humankind (Eliade 1967:23). Thus, the Babylonians were more interested in explaining the physical and spiritual development of their world than in transcribing a historic timeline detailing their social and political changes.

## 1.2) The Enûma Eliš: mythological and real complementary dualism

My goal is to demonstrate that water is a hierophany<sup>14</sup> and it had a multitude of symbolic aspects that were deeply rooted in the vision of life that the Babylonians had. Thus, in order to demonstrate that water was a symbol of creation, it is logical to refer to the myth of creation itself. This is why I have chosen to select portions of the Enûma Eliš and explain the meaning with interpretations but also with examples from other primary sources.

### 1.2.1./ *At the beginning of Time: The Emptiness*

The first four lines of the Tablet I of the Enûma Eliš describe the universe before the cosmos was created at the formation of the universe.

1. When the heavens above were yet unnamed,

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<sup>13</sup> “Ninurta is Marduk of the hoe,  
Nergal is Marduk of the attack,  
Zababa is Marduk of the hand-to-hand fight,  
Enlil is Marduk of Lordship and counsel,  
NABU is Marduk of accounting,  
Sin is Marduk the illuminator of the night,  
Shamash is Marduk of justice,  
Adad is Marduk rain of [...]”.

Jacobsen 1976:235

<sup>14</sup> Mircea Eliade uses the term hierophany to refer to a manifestation of the divine, explaining it as “something sacred shows itself to us” (Eliade 1957:11). The term hierophany comes from the Greek “ἅβητος” meaning “holy places” and “λευκός” meaning “light”, “clear” or “bring”(Liddel and Scott 1940). *The Online Liddell-Scott Jones Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (last consulted 16/05/2016):  
<http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=85&context=search> for ἅβητος.  
<http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=17590&context=search> for λευκός.

2. And the name of the earth beneath had not been recorded,

Enûma Eliš I (Wallis Budge 1921)

These first two lines of the tablet of the Enûma Eliš, tells us about a major theme of water symbolism, i.e. the emptiness, the absence of form and order prevailing before the creation of the world. When in the cosmos<sup>15</sup> there were neither humans nor gods, it was this emptiness stretched beyond the limits of human history, which was a problem for the civilisations of the Ancient Near-East. As humans were not responsible for the origin of the world and having no witnesses to this act, humankind could only postulate as to what existed before the world.

Emptiness is a concept of absolute absence. It is directly linked and opposed to the notion of existence. However, nothingness and emptiness are two different concepts. The second is related to the notion of space itself and it is incompatible with the notion of nothingness (the absolute nothing, and an ability of abstraction that fights against any notion of order). Thus, the primordial waters would be the definition of what the Babylonians would have thought of as nothingness. According to the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) “nothing” would be a pseudo-concept without origin or in opposition to existence (2013:183). Therefore, nothingness is opposed to organised existence (such as human beings) or anything with an identity. Nothingness is not an absolute, it can only evolve into a movement bringing the nothing to a becoming. It is on this idea that the Enûma Eliš is based. The creation is a single element within a cosmic cycle: from creation by water to destruction by water. Thus, the symbolism of water is based on a concept of dualism and complementarity: life and death.

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<sup>15</sup> The cosmos is “the universe seen as a well-ordered whole”. In Online Oxford dictionaries (last time consulted 16/05/2016): <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cosmos>. The word “cosmos” is based on the Greek word “κόσμος” meaning “order” or “world”. In Grimm Wilibald, Thayer and Wilke Gottlob (1889). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament*. In mythology the cosmos is also a temporal dimension. The connection between the cosmos and time is religious by nature. They fit together because they are both divine creations. Everything is perfect or by extension, everything has been “cosmicized” (Eliade 1957:58). To create or give shape to, is like saying that we bring something into existence.

*1.2.2./ Complementary Dualism: Tiamat the monster, Apsu and Marduk the anthropomorphic gods*

At the beginning of the Enûma Eliš, the universe was composed of water. There existed only Apsu and Tiamat, the deities of fresh and salt waters. These first lines explain that even the Heavens and the Earth did not exist yet. The evolution of the universe began when Apsu and Tiamat mixed their waters.

3. Apsu, the oldest of beings, their progenitor,
4. "Mummu" Tiāmat, who bare each and all of them - their waters were merged into a single mass.

Enûma Eliš I (Wallis Budge 1921)

In the following twelve lines of the Epic of Creation, new gods arrived into existence, including the pairs Laḥamu and Laḥmu and then Anša and Kišar (Enûma Eliš I; 9-12).

In the first tablet of Enûma Eliš, Apsu (the lowest region in the universe of the Enûma Eliš) is described in three different forms.

61. He (Ea) designed and implemented a comprehensive plan.
62. He skilfully prepared it, his outstanding holy spell.
63. He recited it, made it rest on the water.
64. He poured sleep over him (Apsu) while he was resting peacefully.
65. When he put Apsu to sleep, pouring out slumber,
66. Mummu, the advisor, through lack of sleep was in a stupor.
67. He (Ea) untied his (Apsu's) bands and then removed his tiara.
68. Then he took his aura and he himself put it on.
69. After he defeated and slew Apsu,
70. He fettered Mummu putting a stop to him.
71. He erected his home on Apsu,
72. grasped Mummu holding his leash.
73. After Ea defeated and vanquished his enemies,
74. had established his victory over his foes,
75. He rested peacefully inside his cella.
76. He named it Apsu, whose shrines he appointed.
77. There he established his bed-chamber.
78. Ea and Damkina, his spouse, there dwelt in splendour.

Enûma Eliš I (Horowitz 1998:110)

From this extract of Enûma Eliš I, we can initially deduce that Apsu was the god of the freshwater ocean, furthermore, Apsu was the god killed by Ea and finally that Apsu was also the name of the newly established residence of Ea. This illustrates the concept of



complementarity and dualism of water in the Babylonian creation story. Apsu was life in the form of fresh water, and then later as the water of the Underworld he represented death because he was killed by Ea. Finally, he was a symbol of eternity as the divine residence of Ea. Thus, through Apsu water symbolises continuity, a link between the various worlds illustrated by the fact that it is the first element on Earth long before the formation of the cosmos and the universe.

Enûma Eliš I; 61-66 explains the formation of the cosmic ocean Apsu where Ea plunged Apsu into an eternal sleep. This explains why the underground waters, which are identified as Apsu, are calm, in contrast to the turbulent waters of the ocean on the surface of the Earth. Enûma Eliš I; 71-78, are a reference to the residence of Ea, also called Apsu. Ea and Damkina (his wife) lived in the cella of the Apsu. Enûma Eliš I; 71 reported that Ea also had other altars in the Apsu which were dedicated to other gods as was customary in a temple or shrine that revered many deities.

We know that the civilisations of the Middle-East had a special connection with aquatic elements. They also understood all of water's facets. The Euphrates in Mesopotamia is equivalent to the Nile in Egypt. It had a central place in the life of the Babylonians. It was a river of fresh water, suitable for consumption and which could feed the Earth. In other words, it represented a life giving force. The Babylonians had perfectly identified the important role of the Euphrates in their survival. Babylonian agriculture developed on the banks of the Euphrates. Thus, it is logical that this river had an important place in the Enûma Eliš. It was around this river that vegetable, animal and human life developed. Then, if the river was the source of all life, could it also be the origin of the world? It is likely that the Babylonians by the observation of their own environment, came to the conclusion that water was an element of creation. The presence of the water element in the Enûma Eliš also makes it a hierophany. Water was venerated by the Babylonians, because it was part of the world created by the gods, to whom all creations were sacred.

As I explained in my introduction, myths act as behavioural guides coming from the gods that humankind must follow. The gods were models because they gave life to humankind and created the world. The world was sacred and all it contained was sacred as well. Gods were a reflection of humans: both physically and with similar behaviour.

Indeed, humankind by recognising themselves in the gods, could better justify their actions, whatever they might be, as being of divine origin. It is in this dynamic of appropriation of the sacred by humankind, that there was an anthropomorphisation of the gods. The image of man (Marduk) represents the known world, order, security and above all, civilisation, i.e. what defined an individual and gives him his value. Meanwhile, the monster (Tiamat) is the danger, the deformed, the unknown i.e. what is not understood because it was too different from what humankind knew. The monster is imperfect and does not match the established order. On the contrary, its presence unbalanced this universal order. Thus, monsters are the mythical image of the fears of the human psyche.

### 1.2.3./ Complementary dualism of life and death: Tiamat and Apsu

The goddess Tiamat<sup>16</sup> is the goddess of salt water. However, she is above all in the first tablet of the Enûma Eliš, the mother goddess and the primeval goddess of creation.

4. Who bare each and all of them (the gods).

Enûma Eliš I (Wallis Budge 1921).

However, her salt water goddess characterisation shows us also a dangerous aspect about her. Tiamat, the primeval goddess, is a sea monster representative of the infertile and dangerous waters of the ocean. She is the incarnation of a limitless chaos<sup>17</sup> and danger. The Babylonians could not conceive of what was beyond their horizon line or what the oceans were covering. This ignorance caused them to create theories, most of them quite terrifying, as illustrated by Tiamat. As a monster, Tiamat was the disruptive element of the creation.

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<sup>16</sup> The goddess “Tiamat” is also known as “*Thalattē*”, which is a variant of the Greek word “*Thalassa*”, meaning “sea” (Burkert 1993:92f).

It is also interesting to note that the Hebrew word “*Tehom*” is similar to the name “*Tiamat*” which means “the depths”, “the abyss” (Tsumura 1989:159).

“The earth was a formless void and darkness [Tiamat/Tehom] covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis: 1;2).

<sup>17</sup> Chaos comes from the Greek “*χάος*” which means “confusion”, is a concept without form that we assumed to have existed before our universe (Woodhouse 1910:124,1006). Chaos is what is naturally opposed to our world within the worldview of the Ancient Near-East. First of all it is represented as a foreign land, without order or border (Enûma Eliš I 1; 5); which in the Ancient Near-East human mind was a concern above all. It is the symbol of the undifferentiated, the non-existent, but also of all possibilities, even those considered the most opposed, like life and death.

She was after all, the one that disturbed the balance of the cosmos during her war with Marduk, when she threatened to destroy the world. However, anything “negative” has its “positive” alter ego to create order. The alter ego of Tiamat was the god Apsu. He was the god of underground fresh waters. Thus, unlike Tiamat’s salty waters, he was a fertile element. That aspect of Apsu and Tiamat's relationship shows that the Babylonians saw in man the supreme fertile element and in woman, a kind of receiver. Perhaps the Babylonians had come to this conclusion, after observing their natural environment and with their knowledge about human sexuality, as we see in this excerpt from the fifth line of the Enûma Eliš (Enûma Eliš I ; 5). This extract clearly indicates the mixing of male and female elements to create life.

5. Their waters were merged into a single mass.

Enûma Eliš I; 5 (Wallis Budge 1921)

However, there is another interpretation made by Harriet Crawford. Indeed, her study of Dilmun interprets the fifth line of the tablet I as a geographical location in the Persian Gulf, where the fresh waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates delta mingle with the salty waters of the Persian Gulf (Crawford 1997:1-2). Indeed, the difference in density between the saltwater and freshwater is perceived by a separation where the waters mix.

45. Let him bring up the water into thy large. . . ,  
46. Let him make thy city drink from it the waters of abundance,  
47. (Let him make) Dilmun (drink from it) the waters of ab(undance),  
48. Let thy well of bitter water become a well of sweet water,  
49. [Let thy furrowed fields (and) farms bear thee grain],  
50. Let thy city become the ban\`-quay house of the land”.

Enki and Ninhursag: a Paradise Myth (Kramer, in Pritchard, 1969)

This separation is particularly symbolic in Bahrain, an Arabic word meaning “two seas” (Houtsma 1960:941). Indeed, Crawford also explained that Bahrain would be the ancient site of the Sumerian city of Dilmun<sup>18</sup>, the original site of the Sumerian creation (Crawford et al. 1995:17, and 1997:2).

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<sup>18</sup> The Sumerian story of the garden of Dilmun (3500-2000 B.C.E.) describes Dilmun as a land pure and bright, without disease. It is also a place of peace.  
13. In Dilmun the raven utters no cries,

### 1.3) The Map of the World: a Babylonian example of complementary dualism

To represent this concept of complementary dualism: life and death, negative and positive concepts, illustrated in Enûma Eliš I; 3-4, I chose to study a fragment of an inscribed tablet. The fragment concerned is called the Map of the World. It is dated between 700 and 500 B.C.E. (Late Babylonian Period/Neo-Assyrian Period), and is probably from the city of Sippar (modern day Abu Habba), in the south of Iraq.

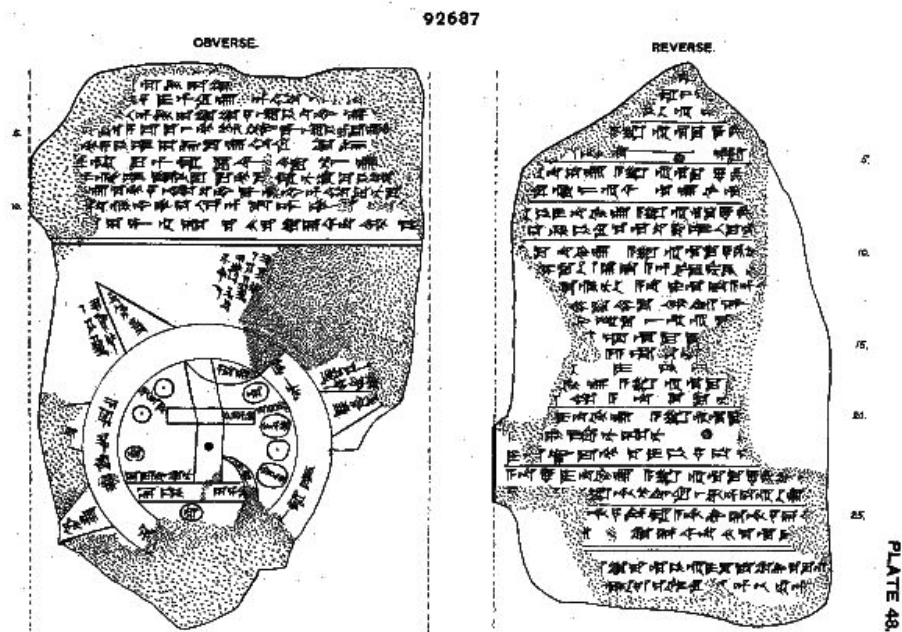


Figure 1: Obverse and reverse of the Map of the World. Image courtesy from the British Museum.

This fragment made of clay is currently preserved in the British Museum. It has quite a small size: only 12.2 cm wide and 18.2 cm long. The fragment has inscriptions both on the obverse and the reverse. The obverse is composed of two registers. The upper register is a text in Akkadian and the lower register is a map. The reverse is only composed of text in Akkadian divided into nine registers stylistically separated into paragraphs. It is not certain that texts on the obverse and reverse were composed contemporaneously with the map. It is possible that the text on the reverse was inscribed to explain the map because

- 
14. The ittidu-bird utters not the cry of the ittidu-bird,
  15. The lion kills not,
  16. The wolf snatches not the lamb,
  17. Unknown is the kid-devouring wild dog,
  18. Unknown is the grain-devourin....,

the term *nagu* (region in Akkadian) is included in both (Horowitz 1998:27). However, the text on the obverse was probably written separately and added to the map in later times (Horowitz 1998:26).

In addition, in the centre of the fragment there is a hole. It was made deliberately by the scribe; other holes appear in the middle of the text above the map and on two points on the reverse. Some of these holes could have been created by the compass used by the scribe to trace circles on the map.

This map is unique among Mesopotamian topography. Most of the maps represent geographic maps, plans of cities or local agricultural maps. Only the Map of the World describes the Babylonian world on an international scale. However, it still obeys Babylonian geographical conventions, as demonstrated by the placement of the “cosmic” ocean (*marratu* in Akkadian, in Horowitz 1998:26) within two concentric circles<sup>19</sup>. This representation of the ocean is similar to some symbols used to represent rivers and canals in other Babylonian maps, for example the Cuneiform Map of Nippur.



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<sup>19</sup> The Map of the World is unique among the cuneiform documents. There are indeed, textual evidences, that some Greek geographers have developed comparable maps during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.E. For example, Herodotus (*History* IV; 36) refers to a circular map before describing his own version of the inhabited world. Unfortunately, none of the maps of Herodotus have reached us. Herodotus also describes the world as being surrounded by water.

“I laugh when I see so many men drawing maps of the Earth, as none till now have drawn reasonable, for they draw Oceanus flowing in a circle around the Earth as if drawn with a compass making Asia equal to Europe, but I myself will explain how big each of them is and how to draw them”.

Herodotus, *History* IV:36

Figure 2: The Cuneiform Map of Nippur. 1300 B.C.E. Showing distribution of fields, presumably in the area of Nippur. This map displays a “central canal”, thought to be the Euphrates, as in the Map of the World. Image courtesy from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The scale at which the Map of the World is represented is precise, but it also exaggerated some elements. For example, the circle that represents the city of Der is as big as the circle representing Assyria. In addition, this fragment was probably made in Babylonia and not in Assyria. Indeed, Babylon is represented by a large imposing rectangle, while Assyria is represented in a small circle. That means that for those who made the map Babylon was the centre of the world that they represented. Three geographic regions are also represented. Firstly, Bit-Yakin, the territory of Aramaic tribal groups south of the Euphrates River and north of the “outflow”. Secondly, Hibbaan, a Kassite tribal group on the Kermanshah territory, west of Iran. Thirdly, Urartu was an independent kingdom situated near the borders of modern Iran, Turkey and Russia. We can note that at the eastern edge of this region a mountainous region is depicted. In this region are the southern mountains of Turkey. It is the location of the sources of the Tigris and the Euphrates that Shalmaneser III visited.

In the 15th year of my reign, I went by the headwater(s) of the Tigris and Euphrates. My royal relief I [Shalmaneser III ] erected on their cliffs.

Layard 1852:92-93

Each year during the monsoon, the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates influenced the hydrography of Mesopotamia with flooding bringing minerals necessary for agriculture. Thus, the sources of the Euphrates and the Tigris in the mountains had important cultural significance. Indeed, the symbolism of the mountain relates to height and central importance in the cosmos. According to the Sumerians, mountains are the undifferentiated primordial mass. Terms used to designate “the primordial ocean”, which was also an undifferentiated mass (Kramer 1998:32-37), emphasised the role of mountains during the creation.

47. In the second year [the shrine was as high as] a hill, and the summit of E-Sagila<sup>20</sup> reached the [celestial] Ocean.

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<sup>20</sup> Temple dedicated to Marduk in Babylon, which highlights as well the belief saying that Babylon was the primordial place of creation, because being close from the primordial water or ocean.

48. They made the ziggurat<sup>21</sup> [to reach] the celestial Ocean; unto Marduk, Enlil, Ea [shrines] they appointed, [...].

Enûma Eliš VI: 47,48 (Wallis Budge 1921)

The mountain was high, vertical, and close to the sky; it participated in the symbolism of transcendence and divine manifestations. It was the meeting place of the Heavens and Earth, i.e. humankind and the gods. Mountains also expressed the notions of stability, immutability and purity. They were the residence of the gods and their ascent up from the ground was understood as an elevation towards the sky and the ouranian gods. This reinforced the sanctity of the Euphrates and the Tigris, because their sources were located in the mountains to the North. Thus, coming from the residence of the gods, water contained a divine essence, reinforcing the idea that water was a hierophany. Water was the link between the world of humankind on Earth and the divine in the Heavens which fertilised the Earth, flowing from the Heavens to the underground world. Thus, this map is a testament to both the geographical and cosmological knowledge of the Babylonians.

### 1.3.1./ *The Marratu and the Euphrates: A concept of cyclic harmony*

The obverse of the Map of the World shows the cosmos as two concentric circles. Indeed, the continent is a circle surrounded by another thin circle of water called the “Ocean” (*marratu*<sup>22</sup>) or the “Bitter River”. This map shows that the Babylonians believed that a cosmic ocean encircled the continent on the Earth’s surface. Parts of this ocean which

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<sup>21</sup> Ziggurats are examples of representation of “cosmic mountain” (Eliade 1957:40). Also, Ziggurats inspired the legend of the Tower of Babel. In the biblical tradition, they are the symbol of the excess of humankind which wanted to emulate the gods and which thought themselves being able to climb to the sky by purely physical means. In the Babylonian tradition, ziggurats have the symbolic value of a scale. Indeed, these gigantic towers were seen as an easy way for the gods to descend to Earth, and for humankind to climb up to the Heavens. For example, the ziggurat of Larsa has the evocative name: “*home of the link between Heaven and Earth*” (George 1993:80).

<sup>22</sup> The oldest reference to the term *marratu* (salt-sea) appears in an inscription of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.E.). The word is identified as a term used to qualify the Persian Gulf. It comes from the Chaldean dialect, and then was adapted to Akkadian: “Conqueror from the Great Sea of the Land of Amurru of the setting of the Sun of the Sea of the Land of Chaldea which they call the *marratu*”. The Mediterranean is called *tamadu rabitu*. However, the Map of the World identifies the ocean as being a *marratu*. The earliest reference to the Mediterranean Sea such as *marratu* has been found in an inscription of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.E.) where the King is described as reigning on *idmarratu eliti* and *idmarratu šapliti* “Upper and Lower Ocean” i.e. life (the ocean on the top of the world) and death (underground water or Apsu) (Thompson 1940:1-12, 112).

were known to the Babylonians were the upper sea (Mediterranean) and the lower sea (Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean) (Horowitz 1988:204). However, it is clear that on the Map of the World, the cosmic ocean is understood as originating to the east of Babylonia, beyond Iran, in the northern mountains of Turkey. It is possible that they thought the ocean extended further to the north<sup>23</sup>. The Euphrates flows from the North from the “Mountains” (*šadu*, in Horowitz 1998:20) to a horizontal band in the South called “swamp” (*apparu*, in Horowitz 1998:21) at the left of the “channel” (*bitqu*, in Horowitz 1998:21). On maps and Babylonian cuneiform plans, parallel lines represent banks of a river, as is the case on this map with the Euphrates (Horowitz 1998:27). The swamp and the channel probably represent the marshes in the north of the Persian Gulf where the Euphrates meets the cosmic Bitter River. It is a way to show the division of the Euphrates where it meets the Persian Gulf. Thus, as represented in this first description, saltwater and freshwater, i.e., the ocean and the river.

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<sup>23</sup> If this is the case the Babylonians probably could have been influenced by the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, as other parts of the cosmic ocean.



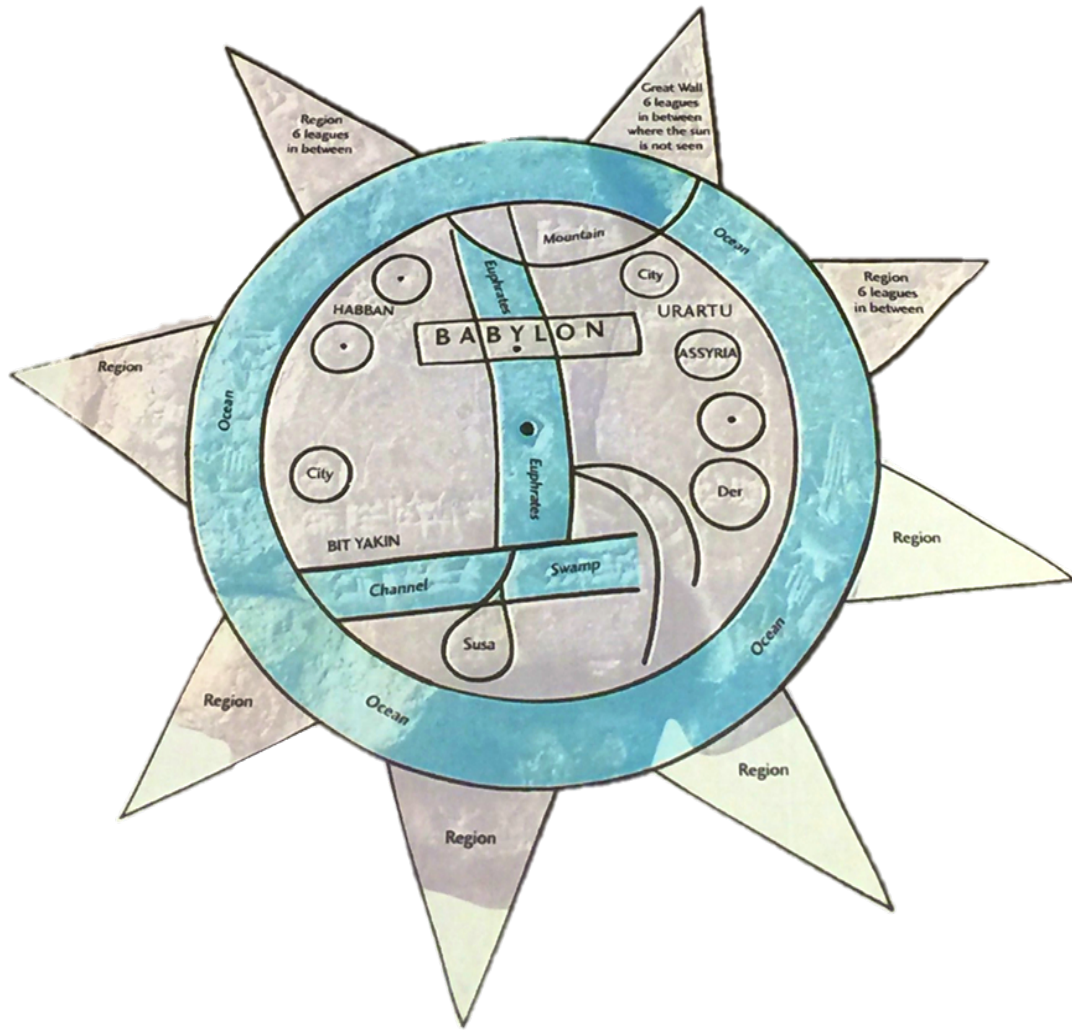


Figure 3: Description of the Map of the world. Image courtesy from the British Museum.

The term *marratu*, which refers to the ocean, is a synonym, dating back from the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium B.C.E., to the Akkadian term “*tamtu*” meaning “sea” (Horowitz 1998:301, 302). This term is found in an inscription of Sargon II of Assyria, in which he claims that the gods entrusted him with the leadership of the people “*ištu idmarrati eliti adi idmarrati šaplīti*”, i.e. “from the Upper Ocean to the Lower Ocean” (Thompson 1940:12, 112-111).

The modern Euphrates does not flow directly into the Persian Gulf. Instead, it joins the Tigris to form the Shatt Al-Arab, a channel connecting the two rivers to the Gulf. On the left side of the Map of the World, the channel connects to the ocean, so this channel is probably an older course of the Shatt-Al-Arab. It is likely that this channel was a passage which allowed boats to pass from the south of Mesopotamia to the ocean. We can also observe that the Tigris is not represented in the Map of the World.

The term *marratu*, as opposed to *tamtu*, is often written with the determinative *ID* normally used to refer to rivers and canals (Horowitz 1998:29). This suggests that the *marratu* was a narrow aquatic element, instead of an endless ocean. On the map, the *marratu* stands on both sides as a circle. In addition, it is not depicted as wider than the Euphrates. This representation of the ocean can lead to two conclusions: firstly, the Euphrates composed the cosmic sea, or secondly it is an error of topographic scale due to the narrowness of the map. I do not think it is a topographic error or that the Euphrates is the cosmic ocean. Indeed, on the Map of the World the ocean is qualified as the “Bitter River”, i.e. salt water. I think however, that the Euphrates was a cosmic river of importance equivalent to the cosmic ocean. This leads to the conclusion that while the Euphrates and the *marratu* are geographically separated, they represent the same water, i.e.. the primordial waters of creation, as the primordial waters were the only source of water in the cosmos.<sup>24</sup> The Greek writer Flavius Philostratus (2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> C.E.), in *The Life of Apollonius*, emphasises the natural division of the Mesopotamian world, as well as the importance of the water cycle on Mesopotamian civilisations. On one side there is the Earth - “continent” - and on the other side the water - “sea”, “river”. His description below, is closely related to the Map of the World, which describes as well the water cycle<sup>25</sup>, and by this I mean, the source from which water comes from, i.e. the celestial ocean, as a primeval element that surrounded the creation, - making the Babylonians “islanders” - as presented in the Map of the World and the extract below.

Now Mesopotamia is bordered on one side by the Tigris, and on the other by the Euphrates, rivers which flow from Armenia and from the lowest slopes of Taurus but they contain a tract like a continent, in which there are some cities, though for the most part only villages [...]. These races are so shut in by the rivers that most of them, [the Mesopotamians] are so convinced that they are islanders, as to say that they are going down to the sea, when they are merely on their way to the rivers, and think that these rivers border the earth and encircle it. For the curve around the continental tract in question and discharge their waters into the same sea.

Flavius Philocratus, *The life of Apollonius*, I-20

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<sup>24</sup> The primordial water is personified by Apsu and Tiamat.

<sup>25</sup> In Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the lines 271 to 290 state that Gilgamesh and Utnapishtim took the plant of immortality. Utnapishtim shows the way to Gilgamesh. This passage reveals that perhaps the Apsu and the ocean were linked by a “channel”. Indeed, Utnapishtim and Gilgamesh sailed upon the Apsu, the field of Ea, where Utnapishtim lived. Subsequently Gilgamesh “opened a [channel]” (Epic of Gilgamesh XI;288) in the Apsu and dived into the Ocean. Thus this passage suggests a physical connection between the ocean and the Apsu. This evokes the image of Tiamat and Apsu mixing their waters, but it also refers to a geographical feature, the Gulf of Bahrain where the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris mixed with the ocean. It could be as well, the location represented by “channel”, in the Map of the World (figure 3).

The water cycle was at the centre of Babylonian beliefs. Water was everywhere: there were the underground waters of the Apsu, the salt waters and the Euphrates. These last three were related, in a single stream symbolising the different stages of the cosmos: the creation, life and death. Thus, the Babylonians saw water as the symbol of time. They associated their beliefs with specific locations, like the Euphrates. In the earliest times, there was a single male and female principle (Tiamat and Apsu) which was at the origin of life. In my view, water was neutral, indeed, water was a perfect example of the union between male and female. It was male with the waters from the Apsu, but also female with the salt water of the goddess Tiamat. Thus water was the source of the image of the circle on the map: a concept of cyclic harmony.

### 1.3.2./ *Nagu: The Unknown Region*

Eight regions called “*nagu*” were placed around the “Bitter River” though only four are visible<sup>26</sup>. These regions with the forms of mountains, are located between the terrestrial and celestial oceans. Moreover, they connected the terrestrial and the celestial worlds. Each regions are identified as *nagu*<sup>27</sup>, and contains a note: “6 *beru*<sup>28</sup> between”. The word *nagu*, which in the texts and geographically simply means “region”, seems to have a cosmic or mythological sense in this tablet. However, *nagu* seems to have a geographical sense in the Epic of Gilgamesh (Tablet XI; 140-141 in George 2000:93), when the waters of the flood calmed down and Ut-Napishtim said “I scanned the horizons, the edge of the ocean, in fourteen places (*nagu*) there rose an island”. This quote and the triangular shape of the *nagu* on the map brings the idea that the *nagu* could be understood by the Babylonians as images of mountains/islands or even unknown lands or “regions”, to describe the silt brought by the flood which would form new fertile “lands”, or even the modification of the landscape after a flood.

140. I scanned the horizons, the edge of the ocean,  
141. in fourteen places there rose an island [*nagu*].

<sup>26</sup> Only two are identifiable and the other two are barely visible. The other four are not visible.

<sup>27</sup> During the 1st millennium B.C.E. the term *nagu* was common in Neo-Assyrian Royal inscriptions, but was rather rare in literary and royal inscriptions of the Late Babylonian Period. In most royal inscriptions, *nagu* had a political meaning, because it meant districts and provinces. For example, Sargon II claimed that he conquered 430 cities belonging to seven *nagu* (Musée du Louvre (1910). *Textes Cunéiformes*. Paris, 3/ 66; 422). However, *nagu* as “province” is not appropriate for the Map of the World, because we don’t know if these regions were conquered. However, from my point of view the term *nagu* was used to refer to unknown regions beyond the realm of civilisation. This sense is therefore more appropriate for this map.

<sup>28</sup> *Beru* was a Babylonian unit for measuring time (Horowitz 1998:182).

142. On the mountain of Nimush the boat ran aground,  
 143. Mount Nimush held the boat fast, allowed it no motion.

George 2000:93

Indeed, it is possible that the term *nagu* meant “islands”, because they extended through the sea from the mainland. Moreover, from a mythological point of view, maybe the missing parts of the Map of the World could represent another water body such as the “Water of Death”.

84. The crossing is perilous, its way full of hazard, and midway lie the Waters of Death,  
 blocking the passage forward.

Epic of Gilgamesh, X; 84 (George 2000:78)

The inscription, “Great Wall 6 league between where the Sun is not seen”, could indicate that *nagu* were mountains, or lands that extended well beyond the borders. Cosmic mountains that emerged from the cosmic ocean. They could then be the Babylonian equivalent of the Egyptian “primordial mount” on which life thrived. Thus, any traveller wanting to go to these *nagu* had to cross the cosmic ocean. If the *nagu* had a mythical significance, they could also represent the Underworld, as it was a realm beyond civilisation.

In the Enûma Eliš, the serpent, the dragon, the Scorpion-man and the bison are among the monsters created by Tiamat (in the “deeps”) for the battle against the god Marduk. These creatures are mentioned as well on the reverse of the Map of the World when describing the inhabitants of these *nagu*.

1. ...]... [.....]
- 2 ...]. The ruined cities [...]
3. [.. the vas] t [AES] which Marduk sees. The bridge in[side her]
4. [...]. And the ruin [d] gods which he set [tled] inside the Sea
5. [...]... are present; the viper, great sea-serpent inside. The Anzu-bird, and scorpi [one-man].
6. [.. moun] tain goat, gazelle, zebu, [p] anther, bull-m [year]
7. [.. l] ion, wolf, red deer, and hye [na]
8. [monk]ey, female-monkey, ibex, ostrich, cat, chameleon
9. [...] beats which Marduk created on top of the res [tl] less Sea<sup>29</sup>,

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<sup>29</sup> The action of Marduk creating these animals “on top of the restless sea” in the Map of the World, can also be compared to the creation of the animals in *The Bilingual Account of the Creation of the World by Marduk*. Indeed, in this epic Marduk creates the Earth on the sea by constructing a raft floating on the sea.

9. [...] beasts which Marduk created on top of the res [tl] less Sea,

Horowitz 1998:23

10. [...] U] tnapīštim, Sargon, and Nur-[D] agan the King of Buršaḫa [nda],  
11. [... w] ings like a bird, which/whom no. one can com [prehend.]

Horowitz 1998:23

122. The Whirlwind, the ravening Dog, the Scorpion-man,  
123. The mighty Storm-wind, the Fish-man, the horned Beast (Capricorn?)  
124. They carried the Weapon which spared not, nor flinched from the battle.  
125. Most mighty were Tiamat's decrees, they could not be resisted,  
126. Thus she caused eleven [monsters] of this kind to come into being

Enûma Eliš I; 122-126 (Wallis Budge 1921)

In the first two lines of the obverse we can understand the words “*ruined cities*”. That can be a reference to uninhabited cities whose names have been forgotten, as indicating by the circles on the map saying just “*city*”. These words can also refer to the gods of these distant regions whose names have been forgotten and whose temples are in ruins. Thus, these gods according to the Babylonians have gone down to the Underworld (via the Water of Death). In addition, the line “*which he set [tled] inside the Sea*”, probably refers to this Underworld abode. All these monsters were then understood as living in the Underworld or the underground waters. As these monsters embodied fear and chaos, they were formless, they were the opposite of civilisation. An inscription from Sennacherib describes the battle in which Assur replaced Marduk in the battle against Tiamat. It is described that Tiamat kept her monsters within herself, in the same way that “ruined gods” are within the sea: “[Ti] amat together with the creatures inside her” (Horowitz 1998:34). A reference to this legend is also made in *The Babyloniaca* by the Babylonian author Berossus (3rd century B.C.E). He described that the creatures are placed within primary water that are identified as the waters of the primary sea goddess.

They say there was a time when everything was darkness and water, within which  
monstrous beings lived, which were born alive having strange forms.

Bonnechere 1998: 3/1, 370

Thus, the author Berossus also described the strange story of half human monsters created in the primary waters before the creation of the world and ruled by Tiamat.

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17. Marduk laid a rush mat upon the face of the waters,  
18. He mixed up earth and molded it upon the rush mat,

The Bilingual Account of the Creation of the World by Marduk (Wallis Budge 1921)

Hence, we can see that the Map of the World is relying greatly on the Enûma Eliš, as a geographical source to describe unknown lands, blurring the border between cosmology and geography.

#### 1.4) Water as the bond between the Earthly and Celestial worlds

The descriptions of the various places in the Map of the World and the emphasis on the distances that separate them, show that the goal of this map was to locate and describe these areas in relation to places known to the Babylonians: Babylon, the Euphrates, and Assyria, as well as unknown regions describe as distant places in relation to legendary figures and exotic animals, and conditions prevailing in these regions. Thus we understand that the Babylonians had an interest in distant regions during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium, when the Babylonian and Assyrian empires reached their peaks.

The cosmic sea refers to a belief saying that the world during the creation was surrounded by terrestrial and celestial waters. Moreover, in *The Bilingual Creation of the World by Marduk*, there is a reference made about a continent surrounded by water. In fact as seen above, Marduk creates a so-called “dry” Earth on a raft floating and surrounded by the cosmic sea (Wallis Budge 1921: xvii-xviii). Furthermore, in the Enûma Eliš, we have the description of the creation of the world by Marduk.

135. The Lord [Marduk] paused, he examined Tiâmat's carcass.
136. He separated flesh [from] hair, he worked cunningly.
137. He slit Tiâmat open like a flat (?) fish [cut into] two pieces,
138. The one half he raised up and shaded the heavens therewith,
139. He pulled the bolt, he posted a guard,
140. He ordered them not to let her water escape.

Enûma Eliš IV; 135-40 (Wallis Budge 1921)

In lines 137-38, Marduk divided Tiamat into two parts: one is “Heaven”. Then, in lines 139-40, Marduk stretches her skin at the level of the “Heaven” so that the watery body of Tiamat would not fall into the Apsu. In fact, the god, appointed guards to prevent waters from Tiamat from escaping. Marduk placed the celestial waters of Tiamat above the stars, the Sun and the Moon. The sky being blue like the Apsu and the Euphrates, it is therefore possible that the Babylonians believed that the celestial realm was in fact water suspended

above them. These waters suspended would be those of Tiamat that Marduk trapped with her skin. Thus, water formed the dome of Heaven. These waters were a constant threat to the world because they might fall and create chaos. This concept of chaos is linked to Tiamat, who acted as a destructive element in the Enûma Eliš.

Wallis Budge described the lower and upper Tiamat (1921:66). These two elements are references to the upper and lower Oceans. It is possible, that the Babylonians saw Tiamat as an element of infinity. The word *tehom* in ancient Hebrew, meaning “deep” is a reference to Tiamat (Whatham 1910:329). This shows, that the Babylonians thought that the two parts of the body of Tiamat created the heavenly ocean, and the other half was used to create the earthly ocean<sup>30</sup>, in other words, “the waters that were above” and “the waters that were beneath”, the firmament and the ocean respectively.<sup>31</sup>

Tiamat the “deep”, being a reference to an “Upper” and “Lower” aquatic element, might be linked to the Akkadian word *tâmtu*. Indeed, *tâmtu* is a reference to the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. The Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean is usually called *tâmtu šaplītu* “Lower sea”, and the Mediterranean *tâmtu elītu* “Upper sea”. In middle and neo-Assyrian inscriptions, lakes in northern Assyria are also called *tâmtu*. Thus, *tâmtu*, “sea”, can mean lake or sea (Horowitz 1998:303). Hence, we can link the “Upper” and “Lower” waters of Tiamat, to actual geographical references.

The Map of the World is a testament to the cosmology of the Babylonians being highly influenced by their own environment. Their world was surrounded by the Lower Tiamat/*Tâmtu* or Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean and the Upper Tiamat/*Tâmtu* or Mediterranean Sea, with the Euphrates crossing through the middle. These locations might form the *marratu*, the link between the Underworld, Earth and Heaven. Therefore the Babylonians thought they were living on an island surrounded by water, as represented by

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<sup>30</sup> The Lower Tiamat might as well be a reference to the Waters of Death in the Epic of Gilgamesh (X; 84).

<sup>31</sup> A similar idea is also presence in *Genesis* 1; 6-7-8 (*The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 1984).

6. And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.

7. So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.

8. God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning - the second day. The Ancient Hebrews thus saw the sky as a solid mass stretched to the infinite with the celestial waters above. Therefore, there may be another geographic interpretation: the Upper Ocean was the Mediterranean, the Lower Sea was the Persian Gulf.

the Map of the World. This feeling was reinforced in Babylon, because the city was located between the Euphrates and the Tigris, in a very fertile alluvial area, irrigated annually during the floods of the Tigris and the Euphrates, to become one of the richest granaries in the ancient world. The floods of the two rivers gave an insular aspect to the city, as described by Olof Pedersen<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the influence of the Babylonian natural environment on their mythology is undeniable.

The Euphrates was then a cosmic river in the same way as the cosmic ocean created by Marduk. It was a natural and mythological link that connected the Babylonian's world to what surrounded them geographically and mythologically. Water maintained the balance of the world through the concept of dualism. The Euphrates and the cosmic ocean are represented at the same scale on the map to show their equivalence mythologically. Water was both the source of life (freshwater represented by Aspu and the Euphrates) and death (saltwater represented by Tiamat surrounding the continent). It is this dualism that was created by Apsu and Tiamat, which kept the world in a cyclic harmony of creation of life inside a mythic environment.

## **2. Water as Life: Potential and Regression, Marduk and Tiamat**

Water was multifaceted for the Babylonians: fertilising, germinal, medicinal, cleansing and regenerative of humankind. Germinal and fertilising water is explained by the fact that one of the first pieces of advanced knowledge developed by humanity was to establish the link between rain and the growth of vegetation. Water fell from the sky and produced a fruitful land after having purified it. In addition, water is medicinal<sup>33</sup> as it

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<sup>32</sup> Olof Pedersen, *Waters at Babylon*, 107-129.

<sup>33</sup> Water as medicine can be explain by analysing the Akkadian words *tāmtu* and *ajabba*, used to qualify the Mediterranean Sea (see Biggs et al. 1956:vol. A/1, p221 No. a). In the prologue of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the sentence « *ajabba tāmātu rapāštu* » refers to the cosmic ocean that Gilgamesh crosses in the Tablet X, to meet Ut-Napishtim.

“Gilgamesh, (cro)sser of the ocean, (v)ast sea as far as sunrise.”

The Epic of Gilgamesh I; 38



induces fertility. It can also restore, extend and save lives because it gives life. Water is also cleansing as proven in the common experience of water being used for washing and for removing impurities. Similarly, water was a symbol of infinite time. For example, the Flood story in addition to being a sign of purification, is also linked with the myth of the eternal return to the origins, the transition from chaos to cosmos.

This aspect of water at birth, as in life, as well as at death, gives an important role to the ceremony of the New Year (called Akitu) performed in Babylon on the day of the New Year, symbolising a return to the origins of the world.

Immersion in water signifies regression to the preformed, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence; immersion is equivalent to a dissolution of forms. This is why a symbolism of water implies both death and rebirth.

Eliade 1957:130

Eliade notes, as well, that contact with water always brings about a regeneration “because dissolution is followed by a new birth (and) [...] because immersion fertilises and multiplies the potential of life” (1957:130). This aquatic cosmology, he notes, has its counterpart on the human level in the belief that humankind was born of the waters. Thus, water symbolises all the potentialities and the matrix of all possibilities of life. These precede any form, and through immersion in them they symbolise the regression into the pre-formal i.e. a complete regeneration, a new birth, because water contains the seeds of a new life. As such, water is a highly ranked symbol of life.

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Thus, *ajabba* and *tāmtu rapaštu* are the same aquatic element. In incantations, waters of the *ajabba tāmtu rapaštu*; “ocean of the vast sea” are apparently used to cure disease or curses :

“Whom should I send to the heavenly daughters of Anu?

May they list up their flasks of hulālu-stone, their posts of pure lapis lazuli.

May they draw from Ajabba (the waters of the ocean), the wide sea (and) the water of the Tigris and Euphrat(es) [...]. May they sprinkle and cool off the fever, the burning of his eyes”.

Farber 1990:vol. 49, No. 4, p313

## 2.1) Whims and Justice of the gods: the Akitu festival

The most prestigious festival in Babylon was the New Year celebration, also known as Akitu<sup>34</sup>, which means “head of the year”, “to begin” in Akkadian (Van Der Toorn 1990:10). The ceremony took place at the spring equinox. The Akitu was an annual event, which revolved around purifying the city through the annual expulsion of demons, diseases and sins. Rituals were held before and after the day of the New Year and they were an occasion to feast, to make ablutions and to purify oneself.<sup>35</sup>

The Akitu ceremony was a ceremony of renewal by the ablution of the past, as described by Eliade, “the periodic repetition of Creation and the periodic regeneration of time” (1959:111). It was like a new birth leading to the restoration of the cosmic, theological and political orders. It was the celebration of the origin of the world and the rise of Marduk, who was the god who ordered Ea to create humankind. Hence, the Babylonians were preserving their cultural and biological memory. This ceremony was already present at the beginning of the Sumerian period.<sup>36</sup>

The sovereign had a very important role during the ceremony because he was revered and feared as the representative of the gods on Earth. He was responsible for the maintenance of the natural cycles, as well as the preservation of the gods’ realms on Earth. Therefore, he was the regenerator of time. During the Akitu, which lasted twelve days, the Enûma Eliš was recited in the E-sagila, temple of Marduk in Babylon during the evening of the fifth day (Sommer 2000:88).

He shall (then) go out to the Exalted Courtyard, turn to the north and bless the temple Esagil three times with the blessing: “Iku-star, Esagil, image of heaven and earth”. He shall (then) open the door. All the ēribbīti-priests and the singers (shall do) likewise. [and after] the second meal of the afternoon, the urigallu-priest of the temple Ekua shall recite (while lifting his hand?) to the god Bel the (composition entitled) Enûma Eliš. While he recite Enûma Eliš to the god Bel, the front of the tiara of the god Anu and the resting place of the Enlil shall be covered.

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<sup>34</sup> The Akitu festival is described in the Akitu Chronicle (British Museum 86379), translated by Grayson, *Assyriam Babylonian Chronicles* (1975), and *Texts from Cuneiform Sources* (1966).

<sup>35</sup> During the first millennium, the Babylonians continued to celebrate two Akitu festivals a year, one in Nisan (first month) and one in Tashritu (the seventh month), both months are qualified as “the beginning of the year”, then instead of one, we have then two Babylonian New Year festivals. The festival of Nisan was the opening of the civil year and the festival of Tashritu was the opening of the religious year. I will focus on the festival of Nisan as it was celebrated in the city of Babylon (Van der Toorn 1989:332).

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the Akitu was initially a Sumerian festival dating from 3000 B.C.E., called *a-ki-ti-še-gur10-ku5*, and meaning “cutting of barley” (Van Der Toorn 1990:10).

The Babylonians were returning to the primordial creation time, when the world was created and the seasons began. The struggle between Marduk and Tiamat was then re-enacted. In particular, the sections where Marduk put an end to the chaos with his final victory, when he created the cosmos from the fragments of the body of Tiamat and finally when he ordered the creation of humankind from the blood of Kindu, to whom Tiamat had given the Tablets of Destiny (Enûma Eliš VI; 23-26). The struggle between Marduk and Tiamat was mimed by two groups of actors (Eliade 1959:56)<sup>37</sup>. The ceremony was starting with the words “May he continue to conquer Tiamat and shorten her days” (Eliade 1959:56) and celebrated the creation of the twelve following months. During the eighth day, the festival reached its peak when the statues of the two main gods, Nabu and his father Marduk, were shown to the public<sup>38</sup>. After that, the statues of the gods were gathered in the Chamber of Destinies to determine the fate of the country and to find a way to defeat chaos again<sup>39</sup> (James 1958:56). The program was constituted of blessings for health and success, but also for the renewal of nature. Indeed, the Akitu took place just at the end of the winter when the arable lands were still dry and unproductive. After this, the king joined the gods “grasping the hands of the great Lord Marduk” (James 1958:57), in a procession through the city passing under the Istar gate to reach the Euphrates where they boarded ships. They then proceeded, guided by the king himself, to the House of Akitu outside of Babylon. During the procession of the Akitu down the river, the gods were carried there by boat as well (Pedersen 2014:114). The procession might have recreated the army of the gods

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<sup>37</sup> There was a similar ritual in Egypt during the celebration of the New Year, during which the myth of the murder of Osiris by his brother Seth and resurrection of Osiris by his son Horus and his wife Isis, was played by actors. In Ancient Egypt, the New Year (*Oupèr renpèt néferèt*, i.e. “opening of a good year”) was the first day of the calendar, and the first day of the first month of the season of the flooding of the Nile, called Akhet. Thus, this was a celebration of the renewal of nature (Lanners 2006:46-48).

<sup>38</sup> Marduk was imprisoned “under the mountain”, i.e. the Underworld (James 1958:56) since the beginning of the Akitu. His captivity was reflected by the desolation of the Babylonian’s land. Indeed, the Akitu took place just at the end of the winter when the arable lands were still dry and unproductive. During the 6<sup>th</sup> day, the statue of Nabu joined his father’s in the E-sagila temple. The son of Marduk, was in Babylon to deliver his father from beneath the mountain. On several Akkadian seals dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.E. (Frankfort 1939:117, pl. XIX a-d; xxg; xxi.), we can see a depiction of a group of fighters releasing the god. They were accompanied by the goddess Inanna/Istar, seeking and then guiding Marduk out of the mountain. Nabu was the son and the avenger of Marduk. Moreover, the fact that Marduk returns from under the mountain (“Underworld”), after being rescued by his son, symbolises the resurrection of nature. This passage in the Akitu may be compared to *The Descent of Inanna*, who went in the Underworld and died after being killed by Erishkigal. Then, she was resurrected by Enki (god of the fresh water), after he used the water of life (Pritchard 1969:56).

<sup>39</sup> The gods were able to determine the fate of the world, since Marduk took the Tablets of Destiny from Kingu, who had them from Tiamat (Enûma Eliš IV;121-122).

marching against Tiamat. This mythological event is represented on the copper door that adorned the Bit Akitu in Ashur during the reign of Sennacherib (Zimmern 1926:18), it presents Marduk accompanied by the king on a golden chariot of the gods. This shows us that the king personified the victory against the forces of chaos. It is also possible that during the ceremonies at the Akitu temple, that re-enactments of the battle took place.

In addition, it is possible that a ritual reproducing “the sacred marriage” between Šarpānītu and Marduk was held on the 11<sup>th</sup> day. The king played Marduk and a priestess embodying Šarpānītu (Green and Black 1992:157). This union recalled the celebration of the fertility of nature and the renewal of the year that the festival embodies. In addition, it reminded the people of the sacred union between Apsu and Tiamat, who created the cosmos and the gods.

During the 12<sup>th</sup> day, the gods gathered in the Chamber of Destinies and ratified the decree regarding the fate of the community for the coming year. The fate of humankind depended on the fulfilment of their duties as servants of the gods. Particularly as the gods were the origin of humankind and the world and they controlled all the natural cycles. After the ceremony the gods returned to their cities and temples. The Akitu was then the time of the appearance and disappearance of nature. Indeed, the Akitu marked the end of and the beginning of a time period based on the observation of the bio-cosmic rhythm. This rhythm needed to be regenerated each year. This is another example in which the Babylonians were influenced by their environment by creating a link between these rituals and the rain, especially after a dry winter. Water was therefore a symbol of ablution and regeneration. The Akitu was an agrarian ceremony in addition to being political and religious, during which vegetation entered into an annual regeneration cycle.

### *2.1.1./ Water during the Akitu Festival: Power and Renewal*

During the first four days the city and holy places were purified. On the second day of the festival, a sheep/ram was beheaded and his carcass was used by an exorcist to perform a purification ritual for the temple of Nabu. After the ritual the sheep's head was thrown into the Euphrates, and the exorcist and the executioners left the city until the end of the Akitu (Sommer 2000:86).

He shall wall a slaughterer to decapitate a ram the body of which the mashmashu-priest shall use in performing the kuppuru ritual for the temple. He shall recite the incantations for exorcising the temple. He shall purify the whole sanctuary, including its environs, and shall remove the censer. The mashmashu-priest shall lift up the body of the aforementioned ram and proceed to the river. Facing west, he shall throw the body of the ram into the river. He shall (then) go out into the open country. The slaughterer shall do the same thing with the ram's head. The mashmashu-priest and the slaughterer shall go out into the open country. As long as the god Nabu is in Babylon, they shall not enter Babylon, but stay in the open country from the fifth to the twelfth day (of the month Nisannu).

Pritchard 1969:333

Their departure was necessary due to the fact that they had become unclean. Blood was an element that was both purifying and destructive. Water was associated with the circulatory motion of blood flowing in humans and animals, as well as sap in plants. Indeed, water was an integral element that made up the constitution of both clay and blood; the two materials that were used to create humankind by the Mother Goddess.

20. Let one god be slain,
21. And let the gods be purified by immersion
22. In his flesh and his blood.
23. Let Nintu mix clay,
24. God and man,
25. Let them together be smeared with clay.
26. Unto eternity let us hear the drum.

The Creation of Man by the Old Goddess Mother (Pritchard 1969:100)

In the Enûma Eliš's interpretation, the creation was also performed with Kindu's blood.

26. His blood he (i.e., Ea) fashioned mankind for the service of the gods, and he set the gods.

Enûma Eliš VI; 26 (Wallis Budge 1921)

Those who performed the ritual were considered unclean because they had manipulated a powerful substance. Thus, they had to leave the city until the order established by Marduk was renewed. This ritual symbolises the blood shed by Tiamat during the battle against Marduk and the construction of Babylon at the beginning of the world (Enûma Eliš V; 117-130, in Wallis Budge 1921). Indeed, the ritual also symbolised the creation of the world by Marduk and the mixture of chaos and order to create life, as described by the sheep's head thrown into the Euphrates. It was a symbolic way to recreate

the moment of Creation: the mixture of chaos, Tiamat (blood), and order, Marduk (the Euphrates), to renew the cosmos.

During the Akitu, water was first of all an element of purification. Indeed, on the 5<sup>th</sup> day the E-sagila was purified with the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris, hence, justifying the purity and the holiness of these two rivers.

[...] he sprinkles the temple with water from a well on the Tigris and a well on the Euphrates. He makes the copper bell sound forth shrilly in the temple. He makes a censer and a torch pass through the interior of the temple.

Gane 2004:Chap. 5, l. 341-343

On the fifth day of the month Nisannu, four hours of the night (remaining?), the *urigallu*-priest shall arise and wash with water from the Tigris and Euphrates. [He shall enter into the presence of the god Bel, and] he shall . . . a linen gadalū in front of the god Bel and the goddess Beltiya.

Pritchard 1969:332

The world therefore contained both the traces of the primordial chaos (since the world was constructed from Tiamat) and the order imposed by Marduk. The festival did not deny chaos, because there had not been a permanent victory. In addition, the fact that Marduk appropriated the Tablets of Destiny indicated that the fate of the Babylonians was in the hands of Marduk, and that he was the only one who was able to control and conduct the future cycles. Thus, the festival continuously refreshes the victory of Marduk over the chaos, emphasising Marduk as the supreme leader and creator.

The Akitu was the renewal of the powers of Marduk through the king and the advent of the power of Babylon. The Akitu was therefore both a political and cosmological event, strengthening the powers of the king. Thus, the role and the powers of the king<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The king was considered to be a representative of the divine on Earth at Babylon. However, the power of nature was the gods' power. The king could maintain the natural harmony of the world by supervising the worshipping of the gods. His services were rewarded through the fertility of the land. The Mesopotamian kings interpreted the well-being of their kingdoms as proof that they did not disappoint the gods. The gods chose them to be king, thus the king was working to earn the blessing of the gods so that their lands would be fertile, as seen in this example where Sargon of Akkad prayed for water in abundance that would fertilise his lands.

were justified by the achievements of the god Marduk, the god of kingship, and the achievements of the king of Babylon as Marduk's representative on Earth. Thus, the purpose of the Akitu ceremony was first to establish a harmony with nature, essential in the course of life, and also to reaffirm the link between Babylon and the gods.

## 2.2) Marduk the master of the watercourses

The god Marduk was the god of Babylon during the 3<sup>rd</sup> dynasty of Ur (2112-2004 B.C.E., in Leick 2010). Takayoshi Oshima (2003) has recorded instances of his veneration since the Early Dynastic Period (2900 B.C.E, in Leick 2010). His name "Marduk" in Akkadian means "bull-calf (of) the sun" (Lambert 1984: 47, 1-19). It would seem that Marduk absorbed some attributes and functions of the gods of the region of Eridu. Especially, Asalluhi, the god of magic, which was subsumed by the pantheon of Eridu (Enki's city and Marduk's father), and thus acquired his role as a god of incantations (Geller 1985:13). This link, was in order to give Marduk a strong association with the city of Eridu (Abusch 1999:543-544). The rise of Marduk was connected to the rise of Babylon which went from a city-state to a capital of an empire. This explains the prominent role of Marduk in the Enûma Eliš.

Marduk was indeed a popular god, due to his attributes and his varied functions. He was the god of magic and wisdom (derived from his connections to Asalluhi) - "*O my [son] [Marduk], who knoweth all wisdom; Pacify [Tiamat] with thy pure incantation.*" (in King, Enûma Eliš: II-127,128); and the god of water and vegetation (derived from his connections with his father Ea), - "*O Asari [Marduk], "Bestower of planting," "[Founder of sowing]"; "Creator of grain and plants", who caused "[the green herb to spring up]!"*" (in King, Enûma Eliš: VII-1,2). One of Marduk's symbols were a triangular-headed spade or hoe, called *marru*, and the snake-

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"O Ea, lord of wisdom, creator of all things, to Sargon, king of the universe, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, builder of thy abode - open thy fountains; let his springs send forth the waters of plenty and abundance; give water in abundance to his fields. Quick understanding and an open mind decree for him; prosper his work; Let him attain unto his desire."

Prayer of Sargon of Assyria (Loud 1936:132)

dragon which may reflect his primary role as an agrarian god (Oshima 2003:77).



Figure 4: Marduk on the Horned Dragon (Oshima 2003:79).



Figure 5: The Spade on the Horned Dragon (Oshima 2003:79).

The spade was primarily an agricultural tool used to dig and even mould bricks. Moreover, we know that Marduk was the king of the gods, the creator of the universe, the god of redemption who maintained the course of water, and brought fertility (Black and Green 1992:128).

The artistic motif showing Marduk standing on a horned dragon, is attested since the Kassite period. Indeed, this pattern was found on a cylinder, inscribed by a Babylonian king (Marduk-zakir-sumi) to Marduk, dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E<sup>41</sup> (see Figure 4). Oshima in *Marduk the Canal Digger* argues that the spade was very rarely used for ploughing, but instead was much more commonly used to dig canals and troughs. Added to these two pieces of information, is the story of the Atrahasis, in which we have a description of the use of the spade. Indeed, before the creation of humankind, the Iggi-gods were slaves digging rivers and canals. After forty years of slavery they revolted against the god Enlil and they burned their tools: the spade (*marru*) and the hod (*supsikku*).

19. The Annunaki of the sky
20. Made the Iggi bear the workload.
21. The gods had to dig out canals.
22. Had to clear channels, the lifelines of the land.
23. The gods dug out the Tigris River

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<sup>41</sup> The date of this cylinder is a source of debate, because two kings had the same name: Marduk-zakir-sumi. Wetzel argues that the cylinder dates from the 9th century B.C.E under the reign of the King Marduk-zakir-sumi I, in *Das Babylon der Spätzeit*, (Berlin 1957). However Lambert (1985:89-90) argues that he is the king, Marduk-zaki -sumi II, who reigned over Babylon only one month in 730 B.C.E. For the benefit of the doubt, it is important to note that Marduk is not the only god to stand on a horned-dragon. This is also the case of Ninazu, NingisZaro, Tispak, Assur, Ninurta, or Nabu (Seidl 1989:187-91).



24. And then dug out the Euphrates.

51. The gods listened to his speech,
52. Set fire to their tools,
53. Put aside their spades for fire,
54. Their loads for the fire-god.

Atrahasis Tablet I (Dalley 1989:9-10)

Thus, this shows us that the *marru* was used to maintain irrigation systems, allowing agriculture to thrive in Babylonia. Hence, the importance of the god Marduk was to maintain the pure fresh water from the ground: rivers and canals. Water was a symbol of life, the god Marduk was then by extension the god of life. He was also the personification of the concept of civilisation, as his symbol, the *marru*, contributed to developing the soils and streams of water on a large scale within the community. This allowed civilisation to develop around these water points.

Many sources present Marduk as the one who held or controlled the water and water courses, making him, the one who brought fertility. One of these sources comes from a hymn to Marduk dating from the Kassite period and translated by Lambert.

5. The one who puts rivers in order in the midst of the mountains,
6. The one who opens spring-wells in the mountain region.
7. The one who pours out the seasonal flood [mīlu-flood]<sup>42</sup> of abundance for the entire world.
8. [The o] not who supplies... of the wide land, grain.
9. [The one who lets] dew fall from the udders of the heavens,
10. [The one who send]s(?) winds and heavy rains over the field.
11. [The one who brings(?)] the abundant produce to the cultivated fields of barley, the meadow.
12. [The one who brings about(?)] wealth and profusion of produce.

Prayer to Marduk (Lambert 1959:60,61-65)

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<sup>42</sup> A mīlu-flood could occur after a heavy rain. The Babylonians normally related it to the wellsprings of the mountain regions. The mīlu-flood is a sign of a successful harvest. However it seems that they perceived the mīlu-flood as being a negative omen during the Nisannu month (March/April). It was considered as a sign of plague, also the colour of a mīlu-flood provided further predictions (Oshima 2014:254).

1. If a mīlu-flood comes in the month of Nisannu and the river is like dark-red blood, there will be an epidemic in the land. [...]

67. If a mīlu-flood comes in the month Nisannu there will be many epidemics in the land.

Oshima 2014:254

In this excerpt Marduk is described as bringing the flowing water to the land: rivers, irrigation systems, the annual flood and water falling from the sky: rain and dew. Marduk, excavated and maintained the irrigation system (river, channels tanks). He is also described as bringing the annual flood<sup>43</sup>. The creation of the Tigris and the Euphrates is also attributed to Marduk. In the *Enûma Eliš*, the god deploys the waves and depths (i.e. the underground water) by opening the head of Tiamat, which was filled with water (*Enûma Eliš* IV; 130-131-132, in Wallis Budge 1921). He also opens the eyes of Tiamat from which flowed the Tigris and the Euphrates (*Enûma Eliš* V; 54-55, in Horowitz 1998:118).

Oshima noted that the function of Marduk as keeper of the courses of water, of rivers and canals, was also known from other Akkadian sources in prayers to Marduk (Oshima 2003:82). Marduk was “the Lord of the springs in mountains and seas” (King 1896:12/28), “the one who opens spring-wells and ditches” (King 1896:12/29), and “the one who keeps the rivers in order” (King 1896:12/29). In addition, king Assurbanipal in the seventh century gave to Marduk a nickname: “the canal inspector of the Heavens and the Earth” (Oshima 2003:82). In addition to providing fertility to humankind, Marduk gives it also to the gods - “the one who gives the share and cereal offering to the gods of m [y (?)] City” (King 1896:12/31). Therefore, Marduk is undeniably linked to water and its beneficent fertilisation function, bringing life to humankind and the gods and, moreover, Marduk is the one who maintained watercourses, i.e. the natural order to preserve harmony. His two characteristics coincide with his role of leader in the *Enûma Eliš*. Indeed, he opposed and defeated the chaos of Tiamat, and then created the world and humankind. He was the one who saved the world and the gods from chaos. However, Marduk also had a darker role concerning the Flood. Indeed, he has the same attributes as the Sumerian god Ninurta, god of the flood, of water courses and water channels in the mountains, who also had the serpent/dragon as his symbol. Ninurta used the flood as a weapon (like Marduk). Marduk is described as follows “the Lord (Marduk) wielded the Deluge, his great weapon”, and Ninurta: “I bear the Deluge of battle, my fifty-headed mace, I bear the mir-snake that

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<sup>43</sup> The annual flood was the sudden rise of the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates at the end of the winter/early spring. It flooded the fields of the Centre and South Mesopotamia. This flood had a crucial role in the development of agriculture, because it brought silt to the fertile land. The flood came from the Mesopotamian mountains of the northeast, following the snowmelt. The *Atrahasis* tells us that land were covered with salt when Enlil prevented the rain to fall, creating a famine (Dalley 1989:22-23).

attacks humans, my flood-bow” (Oshima 2003:86-87).

Hence, the god Marduk symbolises water as a symbol of life, but also as a symbol of destruction and death, as it is the case for Tiamat. Thus, he personifies the complementary dualism of water as an element of life and death. Marduk also has the attributes of his father Ea/Enki (in Sumerian), who is described as the god of fresh water and fertility - “the one who keeps spring-wells in order” (Oshima 2003:86). In Atrahasis, Ea/Enki<sup>44</sup> was also in possession of the Bolt-the-Snare of the Sea, and was responsible for the flood coming from the depths (Charpin 1986:358-360).

Thus, it is possible that the cultural developments of Ninurta and Marduk were closely related as Ninurta held a similar role to Marduk in the construction of canals. The symbol of Ninurta before the rise of Marduk was the deck (Oshima 2003:87). In addition, Marduk was linked to Ea, because Ea was already the god of water and watercourses in Babylon before the rise of Marduk in the Babylonian pantheon. Both the fertilising and also the destructive powers of Marduk were necessary for civilisation and they were celebrated at the Akitu in spring during the period when nature was reborn each year.

### 2.3) The primeval goddess Tiamat

Paul Claudel said “there is no difference between water and the primeval material: the mother”<sup>45</sup>. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous sections, water was an active symbol of fertility and life, first represented by the goddess Tiamat (Enûma Eliš I; 4) during the

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<sup>44</sup> From the Enûma Eliš, the Tigris and the Euphrates come from the eyes of Tiamat (Enûma Eliš V:54-55, Horowitz 1998:118). Ea/Enki in the Enûma Eliš after defeating the primeval god Apsu (Heidel 1942:I;69), settled in the Apsu on the body of Apsu. Subsequently, Apsu will be the name given to his temple in Eridu, *E-abzu*, “Abzu Temple”. His son Marduk will inherit also the name “firstborn son of the Apsu” (Black and Green 1992:27). See *Worship basin decorated with fish-goats*, Musée du Louvre (Medio-Elamite period, 13th/12th B.C.E Susa). This basin allowed the priest to make offerings. This container would actually be a replica of the Enki/Ea domain, the Apsu, body of fresh water located beneath the Earth and feeding all watercourses. It is featured on the bronze model called Sit-Shamshi (Louvre, n°Sb 2743).

One of the names of Ea/Enki is Nudimmud, “image fashioned” god of “shaping” and seems to highlight his functions of craftsman god. His name comes from the adjective “*Mummu*” from the Sumerian “*umun*” meaning “mold”, “form”. The god Ea is notably the one who created man in the Enûma Eliš from the blood of Kindu (in Enûma Eliš VI; 26) (Frankfort 1948:112).

<sup>45</sup> The text in French: “Il n’y a pas de différence entre l’eau et la matière première même: la Mère”. P. Claudel, *Cinq grandes odes*, in Gritti (2001). *L’eau. Mythes et symboliques*, p19.

early time of Creation. The ceremony of the Akitu emphasised the femininity of Tiamat as the mother-goddess.

The lower and upper waters, as we have seen, represent both the masculine and the feminine, life and death. We can interpret them in different ways. Firstly, the lower waters can be those of the “spring of the Apsu” (Thompson 1903 17:13-14), the waters of the creation, the source of the knowledge on Earth<sup>46</sup>. The upper waters are those of the Tigris and the Euphrates which fertilise the Earth, and which according to the *Enûma Eliš* flooded from the eyes of Tiamat (*Enûma Eliš* V; 54-55, in Horowitz 1998:118). Secondly, the upper and lower waters could be a reference, to Tiamat’s waters that Marduk imprisoned (*Enûma Eliš* IV-140, in Wallis Budge 1921), and the Waters of Death. Thirdly, the upper and lower waters may also be a reference to Apsu and Tiamat, i.e. fresh and salt waters, which were mixed to create life (*Enûma Eliš*, I; 5, in Wallis Budge 1921). It is possible that Tiamat and Apsu were at the origin of the first intercourse reported in the Babylonian world. This divine principle was necessary for the creation of civilisation, as described by Mills.

Sexuality also involves the origins of life and the spread of the race, it also involves the continuity of society and the development of culture. Hence, sexual relations are an integral part of socio-cultural relationships.

Mills 2002:29

Water was a ouranian element and a fertilising agent of soil that took the form of rain that fertilised the Earth. Rain was the symbol of celestial influence received by the Earth. Indeed, in the *Enûma Eliš*, the waters of Tiamat were locked by Marduk above the Heavens (*Enûma Eliš* IV; 140, in Wallis Budge 1921). It was therefore possible that rain came from the celestial waters of Tiamat. That would give a double symbolism to Tiamat, regenerative and lethal.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> In the *Enûma Eliš* V 119-122, Marduk indicates that the city of Babylon was situated above the Apsu (Horowitz 1998:121).

<sup>47</sup> Especially in the Flood story, when Enlil provoked the waters of Tiamat to fall from the sky, and restored the world by destroying it (*Enûma Eliš* IV; 140, *Epic of Gilgamesh* X; 312).

### 2.3.1./ *Tiamat: From goddess to Monster*

Creative actions are almost entirely carried out by male deities, who are shown as creators of the cosmos but who used a feminine element to achieve Creation (Enûma Eliš I; 3-4) (The “Bilingual” Version of the Legend of Creation 20-21, in Wallis Budge 1921). At the end of the Enûma Eliš, we realise, as Tikva Frymer-Curt wrote that: “we live in the body of the mother, but she has neither activity nor power” (1972:76). Thus, Marduk was rewarded for having killed and dismembered a goddess, who in tablet I of the epic was the progenitor and the guardian of the gods.

The femininity of Tiamat, as well as her role as mother of the gods, was constantly emphasised. Her death, unlike Apsu’s, was brutal and even her body was not left intact, because she was dismembered and used by Marduk to create the cosmos (Enûma Eliš IV; 135 to 138 in Wallis Budge 1921). Thus, he changed Tiamat’s body from chaos to order. We notice that the image of the belly of Tiamat and the skin that covered it, had several uses. Indeed, she bore in her womb the gods (Enûma Eliš I; 4 in Wallis Budge, 1921), then eleven monsters (Enûma Eliš I; 134, in King 1902), and subsequently Marduk used the skin of Tiamat to contain her waters (Enûma Eliš IV; 139-140, in Wallis Budge 1921).

In the Enûma Eliš, Tiamat is first described as being a mother and a wife, and therefore representing the perfect image of the housewife, i.e. the image of the order which prevailed in Babylonian civilisation. In addition, when Apsu wanted to destroy the gods, he spoke in front of Tiamat (Enûma Eliš I; 33-34, in Wallis Budge 1921), which shows that Tiamat was powerful and was considered as being the equal of her husband Apsu. However, she preferred to help her children, and by doing so she destroyed the balance and the union that had been forged between her and Apsu; she failed as a wife and thereby she lost her identity. She failed also as a mother when she fought her children. This was why subsequently, Tiamat was transformed into a monster who threatened order and civilisation. She embodied an independent, terrifying and powerful female entity. She became unnatural when she decided to destroy her children (Enûma Eliš IV; 79-80, in King 1902). It was at the time of the birth of the first gods that Tiamat undertook her transformation.

9. The gods came into being in the midst of them.
10. The god Lakhmu and the goddess Lakhamu were made to shine, they were named.

Enûma Eliš I; 9-10 (Wallis Budge 1921)

Tiamat then passed from being an aquatic deity to a civilised and domestic goddess entity, as well as passing from wife to mother. Thus, even though the role of Tiamat had changed, the text does not specify if the physical appearance of the goddess also changed, i.e. if she had an anthropomorphic aspect. In the Enûma Eliš, Tiamat is identified as a woman or female entity.

122. [...] Tiamat, who is a woman, pursue thee with weapons.

Enûma Eliš II; 122 (Wallis Budge 1921)

The monster form of Tiamat is not attested in the Enûma Eliš. However, her transformation as an evil force is displayed by her investment in creating new creatures (Enûma Eliš I; 114-117, in Wallis Budge 1921) that reflect her malfeasance.

The transformation of Tiamat from mother of the gods to mother of monsters, coincides with her transformation from passive to active force. Thus, this gives us some clarification on male and female contributions during the creation. Tiamat and Apsu created the gods by mixing their waters. However, the story evolved, and it was found that the male gods had organisational qualities and the capability of independent creation, as we see at the end of the Enûma Eliš when Marduk organises the universe, and when Ea creates humans (Enûma Eliš VI; 26, in Wallis Budge 1921). This could also translate to the evolution of Babylonian society and the role of women. Notably, the ascent of the god Marduk corresponded to the political rise of the city of Babylon. A male creator god would perhaps justify the patriarchal system of the Babylonian civilisation and the supreme role of the king, who was the representative of the gods on Earth and the symbol of male potency. Thus, Tiamat was not only an evil force, she was also an unnatural force because she abandoned her husband, she tried to kill her children, and she attempted to proclaim herself leader of the gods and of the cosmos. Thus, Tiamat ceased to be a goddess and became a monster, i.e. the anti-civilisation.

However, the Enûma Eliš is not the demonisation of the image of woman. It is rather its enhancement in the balance of the world, and the role they should play to maintain order in Babylonian society. Thus, water and its dualities were a model for human

stories and behaviours to adopt. Indeed, Tiamat was the goddess of salty waters, however such water is not drinkable nor fertile. Nonetheless, when she was with Apsu, god of fresh groundwater, the balance of life was restored, their waters mixed, and the waters of Tiamat are no longer synonymous of death because they are mixed with the waters of Apsu, a male god with independent processing capabilities. However, when Tiamat abandoned her husband and tried to kill her children, she became a symbol of death and infertility, because she was now single and independent. In the modern western world independence is considered a positive quality, however for the Babylonians the independence of a woman was not well looked upon as it was thought that she should be under the guardianship of her husband (or of another man of her family), or else returned to the guardianship of her family if she was widowed.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, through the aquatic element, the story of the Enûma Eliš is an epic transcription of the behaviours to adopt or avoid in patriarchal Babylonian society. The story recalls the place that men and women held in society, through the natural divine order of the origin that preserved society from chaos.

### **3. Water as Death: The aquatic symbology and cosmography of the beyond**

The Babylonians believed that at the time of their death, their minds escaped from their bodies and descended to the dark Underworld. They understood human existence beyond the grave as a pitiful and miserable version of life on Earth.

1. To the Land of no Return, the realm of [Ereshkigal],
2. Ishtar, the daughter of Sin, [set] her mind.
3. Yea, the daughter of Sin set [her] mind
4. To the dark house, the abode of Irkal [the],
5. To the house which none leave who have entered it.
6. To the road from which there is no way back,
7. [To the house wherein the entrants are bereft of light],

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<sup>48</sup> For the Babylonians, social order was more important than individual rights. With regard to the male/female relationship, the wealth of a family was managed by the husband or father, and they exercised authority on their wives and their children until their death. The main role of women was to have male children, preferably, to secure the male lineage. A hymn to the Mesopotamian healing goddess of Gula, refers to the evolution of the role of women in Mesopotamian societies.

“I am a daughter, I am a bride, I am a spouse, I am a housekeeper.”

Nemet-Nejat 1999:87-88.

8. Where is their fare and clay their food dust<sup>49</sup>,
9. (Where) they see no light, residing in darkness,
10. (Where) they are clothed like birds with wings for garments,
11. (And where) over door and bolt is spread dust.

Descent of Istar in the Netherworld (Pritchard 1969:107)

There was no reward after death for the achievements or riches acquired during life; everybody was sent into the Underworld as an equal. It is for this reason that it is not surprising that the most popular epic story about the vain quest for eternal life, the Epic of Gilgamesh, is the most dramatic and creative of Babylonian literature. According to the Babylonians, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the goddess Aruru created humans from clay. Thus, being born from the Earth, humans returned to it at their death - “where is their fare and clay their food dust”.

Babylonian mythological literature does not describe the afterlife as a positive place. Indeed, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the hero is haunted by the fear of his own death and decides to visit Utnapishtim. Utnapishtim and his wife were the only mortals to have ever been granted immortality (Epic of Gilgamesh IX; 5-9, in George 2000). In addition, Gilgamesh meets Siduri, the wine maiden, who warns him of the dangers of the “Waters of Death” that he must cross during his quest for immortality (Epic of Gilgamesh X, 83-84, in George 2000). The myth of *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld*, gives us many details concerning death and the afterlife.

1. From the (great above) she set her mind toward the great below.
4. My lady abandoned heaven, abandoned earth, to the nether world she once.

81. if thou art Inanna of the place where the sun rise,
82. Why pray hast thou come to the land of no return?
83. on the road whose traveller returns not, how hath thy heart led thee?

Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld, 1, 4, 81, 82, 83 (Pritchard 1969:53-54)

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<sup>49</sup> This dust in the underground world is both a creative sign and also a sign of death. It symbolises the formal and informal, in the same way as clay. Clay is the element that the goddess Aruru used to create human beings (Epic of Gilgamesh I; 101-104, in George 2000).



First of all, we can take from this that the Underworld lay beneath the world of the living, to the East and that it was a world apart. In addition, the expression “the land of no return” (*Aralu* in Akkadian, in Jeremias 1902:18) to qualify the beyond, speaks to the purpose of existence in the beyond at the time of death and the inability to return to the mortal state. Thus, death can be understood as an evolution of the state of existence of life. Life and death evolving into a state of complementarity, causing nothingness to evolve into a becoming. The water symbolism in the story of Utnapishtim (Epic of Gilgamesh XI) incarnates this transition towards this state of complementarity, as well as the perishable and impermanent aspects of existence. Thus, water embodied the fear of destruction and rebirth.

### 3.1) The Waters of the Underworld: The Waters of Death

#### *3.1.1./ Geographical location of the Waters of Death: symbolisation of the natural and celestial environments*

According to Babylonian beliefs the upper waters that Marduk created from the body of Tiamat, were above the firmament (Enûma Eliš IV, 137-140, in Wallis Budge 1921). However, it is not clear what happened to the lower waters. It is possible that they were identified as those of Apsu and that they were mixed under the Earth.<sup>50</sup> In the geography of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Waters of Death<sup>51</sup> lie in the deepest part of the great ocean that lies between the boundary of the known world and unexplored regions in the East, where the sun rises and where the gods settled Utnapishtim.

78. Said the tavern-keeper to him, to Gilgamesh:
79. Gilgamesh, there never has been a way across,
80. nor since olden days can anyone cross the ocean.
81. Only Shamash the hero crosses the ocean:
82. Apart from the Sun God, who crosses the ocean

The Epic of Gilgamesh X (George 2000)

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<sup>50</sup> The Underworld is located below the Apsu (Horowitz 1998:12). Thus, the Apsu would be an ocean maintaining the balance between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It therefore reinforces the idea that water in Babylonian mythology was an immutable link, transcending realities, which maintained and bounded the different states of life and of the world.

<sup>51</sup> *Mé mûti* in Akkadian (Horowitz 1998:103).

Shamash, the Sun god, rose in the East after crossing the underground world. He was the only one to be able to fly over these “*nagu*” i.e. the unexplored regions and the ocean (*marratu*), to access to the gates of the Underworld. This description supports the idea of water as a door, a link between the worlds.

Given their name, “Waters of Death”, it is difficult to dissociate the lethal waters from the areas that the dead had to cross to reach the Underworld. The chthonian waters of the Underworld were often identified by a river called “*Hubur*”. According to Andrew George, Hubur was a Sumerian word meaning “river”, “stream of water”, “underground”. Thus, the Hubur River was “the river of the netherworld” (George 2003:500). The geographical situation of this river is not specified in Babylonian sources, we only know it lay near the gates of the Underworld. There are several accounts that describe the location of the gates of the Underworld. One entry to the Underworld was at the East boundary of the mortal world where the sun rose each day (Epic of Gilgamesh X; 78-82, in George 2000). This entry point is also mentioned in the myth of *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld*, when Inanna arrives at the gate of the Underworld and she describes herself as travelling from near the place where the sun rises.

80. I am Inanna of the place where the sun rises.
81. If thou art Inanna of the place where the sun rises,
82. Why pray hast thou come to the land of no return?
83. On the road whose traveller returns not, how hath thy heart led thee?
84. So besides, Gilgamesh, once you have crossed the ocean,
85. When you reach the Waters of Death, what will you do then?

The Inanna's Descent to The Netherworld (Pritchard 1069:54)

It is therefore possible that the Hubur River was located in the same region as Inanna. In Babylonian geography, to get to the end of the Earth, where the sun set, it was necessary to cross the great cosmic ocean, *marratu*, which encircled the world, (see the Map of the World). It is possible that the Hubur River and the ocean, which stood in the way to the East could be confused and thought of as the “Waters of Death”. The Hubur River could then only be one with the great ocean which encircles the world.

The belief, that the limits of the ocean were connected to the Underworld and therefore to death, derives from the celestial and geographical observations of the world by

the Babylonians. The world of the dead was where the sun was rose from and returned to each day.

The geographical terms used to qualify the underground world came from real words but were modified, for example with the names of the Habur and Ulaya Rivers. The Ulaya River is a river of Elam, and the name of the river of the Underworld Hubur, comes from Habur, a tributary of the Euphrates in western of Mesopotamia, away from the heart of Babylonian civilisation. These two rivers marked the limit of the Babylonian known world (Vogelzang et al. 1996:212). Thus, the similarity of the Habur and Hubur terms comes from the geographical symbology that these rivers inspired for the Babylonians. Indeed, the Babylonians saw the underground world as completely separated from the world of the living by a body of water; water being a natural border with the mountains. Additionally, the River Habur was situated far from Babylon, reinforcing this idea of separated realms embodied by water. Thus, the Hubur originated in geographical symbolism, due to the observation by the Babylonians of their environment.

### 3.1.2./ *The Waters of Death: An invisible bridge between the worlds?*

There are no Mesopotamian sources which state that the waters of the river of the Underworld were connected to the sea or to any other aquatic body on the surface of the Earth (Horowitz 1998:318). Linda Fourbister (2003:21), however, suggested that the waters of the Underworld, Apsu and Hubur, were related to the rain and rivers of the fertile crescent. Moreover, the assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch had another definition of the word Hubur than Andrew George (1966:29). Indeed, he suggested that the Sumerian word “Habur” means “mighty water source”, “source of fertility”. So, Habur being etymologically related to the Hubur River, qualifies the Hubur River as a source of life of the Underworld. This supports the theory that the lower waters of Tiamat are those of the river of the Underworld called Hubur<sup>52</sup>. After all, when Marduk cut Tiamat into two parts, her blood was carried into the Underworld (Enûma Eliš IV; 131-132, in Wallis Budge 1921). Furthermore, the fact that Tiamat carries the name/title of *Mummu-Hubur* “The

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<sup>52</sup> The River Hubur is mentioned in an inscription of Ilum-Ishar on a brick of Mari-Tell-Hariri, excavated by André Parrot, in the remains of the Palace of Mari. See Colonna d'Istria et al., *Ilum-Išat et Apil-kīn deux nouvelles inscriptions de Mari*, 645-646.

Mother Hubur” or *Khubur* (Enûma Eliš II; 19, in Wallis Budge 1921) supports this suggestion. Indeed, Tiamat, the primeval and destructive goddess created the world in her own image. She was a personification of the balance between life and death, i.e. the upper and lower waters.

Souls had to cross the Hubur to access to the world of the dead. However, in no case has it been proven that the dead crossed the Apsu<sup>53</sup>. The Hubur River and the Underworld are described in the Sumerian myth of *Innana's Descent to the Netherworld*. In this myth, the goddess crosses no rivers in the Underworld. However, in Babylonian literature, it is attested that the destiny of humankind is to follow the route of the River Hubur.

Our fathers gave in, travelled the road of death. “They crossed the River Hubur” as the old saying goes.

Lambert 1959:16-17, 70

To cross the river according to an Assyrian text that recounts a dream on the Underworld: *A Vision of the Nether World*, the deceased had to cross the river with the boatman Hummut-tabal (“Remove Hastily”, in Horowitz 1998:356), a monster of the Underworld.

“Remove Hastily”, the boatman of the nether world, (had) the head (of the) Zu-bird; his four hands (and) feet [...]

A Vision of the Netherworld (Pritchard 1969:109)

He was the Babylonian equivalent of the greek figure Charon. He crosses the deadly waters of the Hubur to reach the Underworld. Utnapishtim was another figure similar to Hummut-tabal, in the Epic of Gilgamesh (Tablet XI). He assisted the dead crossing the river after he was ordered to do so by the gods. His name is traditionally interpreted as meaning “Man of the God” (Horowitz 1998:500).

Wayne Horowitz suggested that it is possible that the Hubur River, as well as being the link between the world of the dead and of the living, was the link between the Underworld and the Apsu. The first was the realm of Ereskigal and the second was the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid p344.

realm of Ea. Thus, Utnapishtim belongs to Ea and not to Ereskigal (Horowitz 1998:501). This assumption is based on tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh, when Utnapishtim refers directly to his master Ea.

32. I understood, and spoke to Ea, my master.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, XI (George 2000)

Thus, the boatman dwelt in the realm of Ea, the Aspu, and would also cross the river to get to the realm of Ereskigal, the underground world. Hence, what we can understand through the analysis of the chthonic River Hubur, is that Babylonians thought that the place of the dead was part of the cycle of the cosmos. Death was both in another world separate from the world of the living, and a world which fits perfectly into the cosmos, through the link that the River Hubur embodied. Death was the culmination of life, embodying the collapse at the end of a cycle.

### 3.2) Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh: The Flood story

The flood was considered a historical fact by the Mesopotamian population. It was one of the oldest memories that the inhabitants of Mesopotamia had kept from their distant past. In fact, the Sumerian Kings list recorded eight kings who ruled in five cities before the flood<sup>54</sup>.

There are two versions of the deluge in Babylonia: the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Atrahasis myth. The exploits of Gilgamesh are described in twelve tablets which were found in the library of Assurbanipal (668-626 B.C.E) during the excavations of Nineveh<sup>55</sup>. The myth of the flood was incorporated into the Epic of Gilgamesh in tablet XI in the story of Utnapishtim. It is possible that the story of the Flood was added to the standard version of

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<sup>54</sup> Black et al. Sumerian King List: Translation, I-39. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/>) (last time consulted 05/04/2016). Oxford.

<sup>55</sup> The story of the Epic of Gilgamesh was discovered by Layard, Rassam and Smith, between 1845-1847 and 1849-1851, at Nineveh on the left bank of the Tigris. The twelve tablets belonged to the library of Assurbanipal, they are dated from the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The story has Sumerian origins and would be 2000 years older. It was subsequently translated into Akkadian by Sir E. Wallis Budge ed. (1920) *The Babylonian Story of the Deluge and the Epic of Gilgamish*, p1-26.

the Tablet XI by an editor who used the story of the Deluge from the epic of Atrahasis. The story of the flood was included because Utnapishtim was the hero who was granted immortality. Thus, this corresponded to the theme of the Epic of Gilgamesh: the quest for immortality.

### *3.2.1./ The Regeneration of the world through a return to the origins*

The Babylonian flood story quoted in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI, and in the Atrahasis joins the myth of the eternal return to the origin. The cyclical notion of time in this epic expressed this reality. This notion of cyclical renewal was also expressed during the Akitu festival in Babylon during spring. The goal was to reach the ideal of the original time, because it had not yet been corrupted by history. The flood was the purification event that allowed the end of humanity and the beginning of a new one.

We can identify two key concepts of the Babylonian flood myth. First of all, four gods including Enlil decided to destroy humankind for reasons that are not mentioned.

11. The town of Shuruppak, a city well known to you,
12. which stands on the banks of the River Euphrates:
13. this city was old - the gods once were in it
14. when the great gods decided to send down the Deluge.
15. Their father Anu swore on oath,
16. and their counsellor, the hero Enlil,
17. their chamberlain, the god Ninurta,
18. and their sheriff, the god Ennugi.

The Epic of Gilgamesh XI (George 2000)

However, we know that in the Atrahasis the reason was the noise that humans were making. This noise was annoying Enlil (Old Babylonian Version, Tablet II; 3-4, in Pritchard 1969). Thus, more than a punishment of human behaviour, the flood was a method that allowed the gods to reduce the human population.

110. for a day the gale [winds flattened the country]
111. quickly they blew, and [then came] the [flood]
112. Like a battle [the cataclysm] passed over the people.
113. One man could not discern another,
114. nor could people be recognised amid the destruction.

The Epic of Gilgamesh XI (George 2000)

Thus, humans having been created from clay by the goddess Aruru (Epic of Gilgamesh I; 101-104) returned to their original state.

132. I looked at the weather: stillness had set in,  
133. And all of mankind had returned to clay.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, IX (Pritchard 1969:94)

The Deluge therefore has a dual image: a return to the time of creation as an act of renewal and purification, but also of destruction. The Deluge expressed the fear of the destruction of humankind in the collective unconscious. As expressed in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the quest of humankind was sustainability over time through the continuity of human memory and species. To maintain the existence of the human species, the role of humans was sharply defined; they were the servants of the gods, whom humans were required to obey. As punishment, Enlil used water. Thus, he transformed this element that brought life to the Babylonians into a deadly weapon<sup>56</sup>. However, by doing so, Enlil symbolically returned the world to its primeval state from before the creation.

27. Aboard the ship take thou the seed of all living things.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, IX-27 (Pritchard 1969)

In the preceding section, we saw that water had a cleansing virtue and brought life. In the accounts of the flood, this principle is applied but instead through death and destruction. This image comes from the story of Utnapishtim, when he spoke to Gilgamesh about the plant of immortality.

269. If thy hands obtain the plant, [thou wilt find new life].  
270. No sooner had Gilgamesh heard this,  
271. Than he opened the wa[ter-pipe],  
272. He tied heavy stones [to his feet].  
273. They pulled him down into the deep [and he saw the plant].

The Epic of Gilgamesh, IX (Pritchard 1969:96)

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<sup>56</sup> The flood is used as well by Marduk as a weapon in the Enûma Eliš against Tiamat: “The Lord raised up the wind storm [flood], his mighty weapon” (Enûma Eliš IV; 49).

This image represents life in the depths of the water, the immortality. Thus, what we understand of the flood, is that it expressed the purifying, regenerating and destructive powers of water. The flood was the perfect image of the dark side of the aquatic element that the Babylonians experienced in their natural environment.

### 3.2.2./ *The influence of the Environment on humans' beliefs: Environmental determinism*

The Euphrates and the Tigris were for the Babylonians, in a paradoxical way, a blessing and a curse. Babylonia depended on these two rivers, without them there would be no irrigation, no culture, no civilisation. However, these two rivers were the most unpredictable streams: their flows could extend up to ten kilometres wide, their floods were violent and sudden and covered most of the country.

The Euphrates and the Tigris often flooded during the spring, due to melting snow on the mountains of the Zagros combined with heavy rains. The floods of the Tigris were especially sudden during the period from February to May (Black and Green 1992:83), which caused extensive flooding in the broad alluvial plains. Cities of lower Babylonia in the alluvial plains, were closer to the sea near the north of the Persian Gulf than they are today (Wallis Budge 1921:27). Thus, these destructive floods were frequent in the southern part of Mesopotamia.

It is possible that the story of the Flood in the Epic of Gilgamesh commemorates important and especially long floods which brought death and destruction to Lower Babylonia. Indeed, some Mesopotamian sites reveal traces of floods (Macdonald 1988:14-20). In 1926, Stephen Langdon and Louis Charles Watelin excavated the Sumerian city of Kish<sup>57</sup>. They discovered traces of two floods: one at the end of the Early Dynastic II around 3000 to 2900 B.C.E, and another one at the beginning of the Early Dynastic III, around 2600 B.C.E. Furthermore, Willcocks (1917:16) recorded that, in 629 B.C.E a flood in Babylonia destroyed all structures and all the dams which had protected life for several centuries, and created a huge and broad marsh, like a sea, called the Batayeh (Vaumas

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen Langdon (1924). *Excavations at Kish I (1923–1924)*. Langdon and Watelin (1930). *Excavations at Kish III (1925–1927)*, and (1934) *Excavations at Kish IV (1925–1930)*.



1958:235-332).

106. The stillness of the Storm God passed over the sky
107. and all that was then turned into darkness bright.
108. [He] charged the land like a bull [on the rampage,]
109. he smashed [it] in parts [like a vessel of clay]

The Epic of Gilgamesh XI (George 2000)

The Babylonian version relates that the flood was caused mostly by rainfall.

127. for six days and [seven] nights,
128. there blew the wind, the downpour,
129. the gale, the Deluge, it flattened the land.

The Epic of Gilgamesh XI (George 2000)

However, some extracts suggest that the destruction caused by the floods, had been intensified by other elements. Indeed, many are now still trying to understand what caused the flood in Mesopotamia. It is possible that this was due to a violent storm coupled with an earthquake and a giant wave.<sup>58</sup>

97. At the very first glimmer of brightening dawn,
98. pink there on the horizon a dark cloud of black,
99. and bellowing within it was the Storm God Adad.
100. The gods Shullat and Hanish were going before him,
101. bearing his throne over mountain and land.
102. The god Errakal was uprooting the mooring-poles,
103. Ninurta, passing by, made the overflow weirs.
104. The Anunnaki gods carried torches of fire,
105. scorching the country with brilliant flashes.

The Epic of Gilgamesh XI (George 2000)

Mesopotamians were influenced by their environment in their cosmographical views of the world. The Sumerians were the first to generate literature around the phenomenon of the flood, probably inspired by similar events, like the two floods that occurred in Kish. The Babylonians maintained this literature through the Atrahasis and the Epic of Gilgamesh, probably inspired by the same phenomena, such as the flood of 629

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<sup>58</sup> The Hebrew in Genesis have their own vision of the flood. In their version, it rained forty days and forty nights (*Genesis*, VII-4), and according to another version the Deluge came because “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the floodgates of heaven were opened” (*Genesis*, VII - 11). See *The Holy Bible, New International Version*.

B.C.E. The Babylonians, like the Sumerians, had a complex and intertwined relationship<sup>59</sup> with their environment. This could demonstrate environmental determinism (Fedaku 2014:132-139), i.e. the influence of human civilisation by nature. Indeed, humankind influences its environment through development, such as with irrigation, in the same way as the environment influences the development of the people populating an area. Thus, in the myth of the Flood of the Epic of Gilgamesh in the Tablet XI, the Babylonians transcribed their knowledge of their natural environment. It is a kind of praise out of the fear of the powers of the gods through the forces of nature.

### 3.3) Water as a monster: Tiamat as the agent of fear

If the environment affected the way of thinking of the Babylonians, metaphors describing the monster Tiamat also act as a map of the fears of the Babylonians in their way of thinking and communicate these thoughts and feelings on this monstrous subject. Nothing was comparable to the ocean, its vast scope led the population to wonder what kind of creatures resided within its dark abysses. The only aquatic element that would be able to contain a creature like Tiamat, was the ocean, due to its immensity<sup>60</sup>, but also because Tiamat is “the Deep” “the Bitter River” or *marratu* “salt water”. The monster Tiamat was therefore the product, not only of the Babylonian’s unstable and aquatic environment, but also of the Babylonian’s imagination. It is this imaginative force which plunges us into the Babylonian’s perception of the world.

#### 3.3.1. / Demonisation and deification of Tiamat

The word “monster” comes from the latin word “*monstrum*”, from the verb “*monstrare*” which means “to show” or “to reveal” (Asma 2009:13). This definition perfectly

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<sup>59</sup> As seen for example in their Flood myths : The Epic of Gilgamesh and the Atrahasis in Babylonia, and the Deluge in Sumer (Pritchard 1969:42-44), but also in their vital dependance towards the Euphrates and the Tigris coming from the northern mountains and fertilising the land.

<sup>60</sup> The Babylonians seem to describe the ocean as limitless. We have no clear evidence regarding the limits of the ocean. However, on the Map of World, the *marratu*, is represented in the shape of a circle. Beyond this circle there is nothing except the *nagu*. Nonetheless, it is not known if the ocean stretches without limit beyond the *nagu*, or whether they represent the limit of the *marratu*. Moreover, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh and Uršanabi meet *me māti* “waters of death” on the road that lead them to Utnapishtim. Thus, it is difficult to know if *me māti* is the extension of the *marratu* or if there is a clear boundary between the two.

characterised Tiamat. In the *Enûma Eliš*, she is described as a woman (II; 122), but she later reveals herself as a being monstrous and with evil intentions. Indeed, Tiamat sought to destroy her own children. She was also an evil being who begat monsters (*Enûma Eliš* I; 114-117, in Wallis Budge 1921). Thus, the *Enûma Eliš* describes Tiamat as a monster, not physically but more through her actions. The story does not insist on her physical appearance. The monster Tiamat is therefore a divine omen, which transcribed the concepts that the Babylonians regarded as monstrous: she betrayed her husband, tried to kill her children, she rebelled and threatened the established order. Tiamat embodied what the Babylonians' culture and environment taught them to fear. Tiamat described as a sea monster in Babylonian literature represents Babylonian insecurities, including a major characteristic: the fear of an invasion of "foreigners" or "abnormality", the "threatening figure of anomaly within the well-established order of things" (Beal 2002:4). She represents the most extreme embodiment of the unknown and pushed the boundaries of xenophobia. In the *Enûma Eliš*, Tiamat represents not only an apocalyptic presence within the narrative, but also an apocalyptic presence for the reader, because she was a revealing literary reference and an agent of fear.

In chaos and cosmos, krakenish creatures such as Tiamat, were disturbing because they did not belong to another world, they operated in the world of humankind, "they are paradoxical personification of otherness with sameness", and "they represent the outside that has gotten inside" (Beal 2002:4). The Babylonians must therefore have feared that Tiamat represented a real danger, she had to be continually fought, because her waters hovered above the world and threatened to destroy it (*Enûma Eliš* IV; 139-140, in Wallis Budge 1921).

Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957:20), described religious beliefs as creating a sacred cosmic order against the forces of chaos. Religious beliefs maintain a sacred space and a time against the "formless expanse" of the chaos that surrounds the world.

The form is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but has lots of "other world", a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, "foreigners" ... It is not difficult to see why the religious time [i.e., the manifestation of the sacred] implies the cosmogonic moment. The sacred reveals absolute reality, and at

the same time makes orientation possible; hence it founds the world in the sense that it fixed the limits and establishes the very order of the world.

Eliade 1957:29-30

Eliade adds, “An attack on our world is equivalent to an act of revenge by the mythical dragon, who rebels against the world of the gods, the cosmos, and struggles to annihilate it. Our enemies belong to the power of the chaos” (1957:12). Thus, through the words of Eliade, we can understand that the Babylonians’ beliefs revolved around that which was sacred, and about order and harmony opposing the demonised chaos. Tiamat was a demonised chaos whose behaviour was opposed to that of the Babylonians. It was this “alien” behaviour which did not conform to the established order, which was a threat to Babylonian civilisation.

In the *Enûma Eliš*, Tiamat “stand[s] for the haunting sense of precariousness and uncertainty that looms along the edges of the world, the edges of religious understanding and faith” (Beal 2002:57). Tiamat was the container in which the Babylonians invested their fears and doubts. Freud stated that if the word *heimlich* made reference to what belongs inside a house and inspires a security and rest feeling, then the word *unheimlich* threatens this peace, not from the outside but from the inside (1955:222-226). The *unheimlich* is what should be outside but instead is inside. We can extend the term *heimlich* to the Babylonian’s society and cosmos, and the *unheimlich* to that which would invade or disrupt this social and cosmic order. Tiamat was a personification of the *unheimlich*. She was what gave an unsafe feeling to the Babylonians in their own environment. She was a figure of chaos and disorientation within the order of the world. She revealed an uncertain aspect to the existence of society and the cosmos, and linked them into this insecurity. This is what emerged in Babylonian society through the most concrete example on this subject: the *Enûma Eliš*. Despite the separation of the worlds by Marduk into an underground world, an earthly world and a heavenly world, water created a link between these worlds through Tiamat. Marduk used the body of Tiamat to shape the universe. Her eyes were the sources of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and she was also linked to the Hubur River and, finally, to the celestial waters that constantly threatened the world.

We therefore have a paradox: Marduk had appropriated to himself Tiamat’s power of creation by using her body, thus, he took control of it and prevented Tiamat from

destroying the world, but on the other hand it also integrated her power into the world, creating this balance between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. In the Enûma Eliš Tiamat is demonised, because she threatened the order of the world. However, during the creation of the universe, Marduk deified her. Her body became a hierophany, a sacred chaos, testifying to the creative powers of Marduk. Hence, the unnatural became supernatural, because of the religious scope that Tiamat embodied. That point on the demonisation of Tiamat and her deification only strengthens the symbolism of the paradox of water as a complementary dualism of life and death in Babylonian society.

Tiamat as a monster was a warning, showing what the Babylonians should avoid. However, Tiamat was not an anti-divinity, or purely evil creature, in a dual sense. She was rather a monster of chaos which was divided within the continuity of the cosmos, but also a living being, in the human sense of the term, who could be defeated. She was the personification in a single being of the complementary dualism of life and death embodied by water.

## **4. Conclusion**

In this first chapter dedicated to the symbolism of water in the Babylonian cosmological cycle, two main themes are identified: environmental and mythological. Firstly, water symbolism as a bio-cosmic element and as a hierophany in Babylonian myths and literature, through the primary sources mentioned (with emphasis on the Enûma Eliš), as well as through the artefacts and rituals presented (The Map of the World and the Akitu mainly), serves to demonstrate the knowledge the Babylonians possessed of their own natural and social environments, for example as shown by the goddess Tiamat and the Flood myths, and how the study of the environment in the Babylonian creation corpus reveals the influence of their environment on the Babylonian's own mythology, as shown for example in the Enûma Eliš and the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Secondly, the character of water as a neutral element through the symbolism it embodies in the Babylonian creation corpus, is used to illustrate the cyclic renewal of the

cosmos through the duality of existence present in the cosmos i.e. life and death, chaos and creation, male and female, and how each of these pairs complement and complete each other while linked by water

to create order and harmony in the cosmos.

In chapter two devoted to Egyptian water symbolism in the cosmological cycle, I will review water symbolism as an element of creation, life and death by examining the same points stated above, as well as describing the blurred lines between profane and sacred, the cosmographical environment through water, and the personification of water via deities.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Egyptian Water Symbolism in the Cosmological Cycle: Interpretation and Survey**

“Egypt”, wrote the Greek historian Herodotus, “is a land acquired by the Egyptians and a gift from the river” (*Histories* 1970:II-5). It was thanks to the Nile, this nourishing river, that the Egyptian civilisation prospered. Hence, it is thought that it was through their environment that the Egyptians forged their culture and their cults.

Egypt was known as *Tawy*, the “Two Lands”, referring to upper and lower Egypt (Ikram 2010:3), as well as *Kemet*, the “Black Land”, for the Nilotic aspect of the country: the Nile Valley that stretches along the fertilising river. This black colour comes from the alluvium of the Nile brought by the annual flood, which gave to the river its dark colours and its rich vegetation (Ikram 2010:3). *Tawy* refers as well to *Decheret*, the “Red Land” i.e., the Saharan aspect of the country: the vast deserted and burned plains (Ikram 2010:3). The *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache* (Book V: 126) defines *Kemet* as the antithesis of *Decheret*. Another, designation for Egypt was the “Two Banks”, *Atebui*, referring to both banks of the river, as well as the deserts and the floodplain (Wallis Budge 2003:294). Thus, the terms used to qualify the country were highly related to its natural environment, and symbolised the union of opposites: the sterility of the desert and the fertility of the valley.

At the centre of Egyptian life was the Nile. The Nile is the longest river in the world, and supports tropical forests and many crops. The Nile rises in the mountains of east Africa and travels to the end of its course in the Mediterranean Sea, flowing out through its delta over 6500 km away. In Aswan, the Nile reaches the first cataract, symbolising the southern border of Egypt. From Aswan, the Nile continues its route through Egypt, as a narrow floodplain, before enlarging dramatically at the Qena Bend, to the north of Luxor (Ikram 2010:5-6). At the Nile Delta in the North, the river splits into numerous branches and sub-branches before flowing into the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile flooded annually, rising waters reached the south of Egypt at the end of June, with their peak levels in Egypt between July and September (Ikram 2010:6).

If the Nile was so important to the Egyptian civilisation, why was the Nile not identified as Egypt’s highest divinity? Indeed, “In these deserts the river was life itself. Had it failed to flow, even for one season, then all Egypt perished. Not to know where the stream came from, not to have any sort of guarantee that it would continue — this was to live in a state of insecurity where only fatalism or superstition could reassure the mind” (Moorehead



1960: vii). Thus, one can wonder, if the Ancient Egyptians did not appreciate or realise the value of the Nile as the only artery of life-giving water for the people? Indeed, even if it was not constant, the flood occurred every year, and the river never failed entirely. Every year, the Nile poured out of the desert, rising from the South and flooding the Delta in September. In Egypt, the river ran through the deserts without receiving water from a single tributary and hardly any rain (Moorehead 1960: viii). Egyptian civilisation was entirely dependent on the annual flooding of the Nile. However, the source of the Nile was a mystery to the Egyptians (Said 1993: ix). While the inundation was worshipped, the Nile itself - as a uniform river or phenomenon - was not, and there was no supreme Nile god or goddess. And yet, in 1844 Champollion (1844: vol 1) used the term “Nile god”. The problem is that a number of figures belong to this group, either through their association with the Nile as a river or the inundation as a process (Baines 1985a:112). John Baines argued that the term “Nile god” is inappropriate or misleading. He therefore introduced the term “fecundity figures” instead of “fertility figures” (Baines 1985a:112). The term “fecundity figures” is used for what are usually referred to as “Nile gods”. These figures, such as the god Hapi, are found dating from the IVth Dynasty up until the Roman period.

There is a striking lack of personifications of waterways or stretches of water in the Egyptian pantheon. The so-called “Nile gods”, more recently termed “fecundity figures”, personify general concepts of abundance and its causes, among which the most prominent is the inundation... [but] they can scarcely be termed deities. There is neither a river god of the Nile (there are of course no other rivers in Egypt), nor deities of lakes... The only fecundity figure who takes on an independent existence as a deity is the inundation, Hapi .

Hornung 1982:77-79

In contrast to the Babylonian civilisation, there are no codexes or papyri where Egyptian cosmology was recorded at all. Even if there are collections about magic, medicine, festivals, rituals and stories, there was not a canonical reference book for mythology in Egypt. This is why to understand the Egyptian cosmogony it is necessary to consult a broad spectrum of sources.

For this chapter, I have therefore chosen to focus on the texts of The Book of the Dead (New Kingdom), The Coffin Texts (Middle Kingdom), The Pyramid Texts (Old Kingdom), The Papyrus from Carlsberg (c.a. 2000 B.C.E - c.a. 1st century B.C.E), The Book of Nut (Middle and New Kingdoms) and The Amduat Papyrus (c.a. 1500 B.C.E),

which highlight the role of water in Egyptian cosmology, and at the same time describe in a general way what the Egyptians understood as religion. In this chapter we will see that Egyptian theology and iconography, are linked to a cosmological water symbolism, in creation, life and death. The annual flooding of the Nile was a symbol for rebirth and re-creation, and the river itself was part of the divine landscape.

## **1. Water as Creation: The Cosmological Environment**

### 1.1) Water in the Egyptian Cosmogony: Creation Myths

#### *1.1.1./ The Egyptian Transcendence*

Jan Assmann quotes in his book *The Search For God in Ancient Egypt*, the Greek god Asclepius stating that “Egypt the only land that by the strength of its religion brought the gods down to the earth model of holiness and piety” (Asclepius 25, Assmann 2001:5). Asclepius tells us about the piety of the Egyptians and the importance they attached to the sacred and the close relationship they had with their deities. Indeed, we can distinguish the Egyptian mundane realm and sacred realm from one another. However, on the other hand, these two worlds were connected. The link that I put forward in this chapter is the theology of the natural environment, or more precisely a celestial naturalism, in the sense of nature as a manifestation of the divine, a personification of natural processes, and more specifically of water as a vector between the divine and mortal worlds.

[...] the Egyptians lived in a universe composed not of things, but of beings. Each element is not merely a physical component, but a distinct individual with a unique personality and will. The sky is not an unanimated vault, but a goddess who conceives the sun each night and gives birth to him in the morning. The atmosphere that separates sky from earth is not an empty void, but a god. The Duat is not merely a mysterious region through which the sun passes at night, but the god Osiris. Even the vast and lifeless outer waters have an identity, as the god Nu.

Allen 1988:8

Religion in Egypt was cosmotheistic (Assmann 2005:407), and throughout Egyptian landscape there was the mythologically non-existent, especially so in the desert (Hornung

1982:178), hence, the whole environment and landscape was understood through mythology.

For the Egyptians the entire extent of existence, both in space and time, is embedded in the limitless expanses of the non-existent. The non-existent does not even stop short at the boundaries of the existent, but penetrates all of creation.

Hornung 1982:179

The non-existent was present every day and at all times. It was not only an intellectual abstraction or imaginary concept, but it structured society and religious practice as human responses to divine presence and transcendence (Assmann 2001:7). The state of the non-existent before the Creation contained many negative and hostile elements, but there were also two positive and regenerative elements that constituted the state of non-existence: the limitless water or the primeval flood called Nun, and the complete darkness.

I was born in the Abyss before the sky existed, before the earth existed, before that which was to be made firm existed, before turmoil existed, before that fear which arose on account of the Eye of Horus existed.

Pyramid Texts 486§1040<sup>61</sup>

In the concept of existence, *Maat* refers to the idea of righteousness, cosmic, political and social orders desired by the demiurge. *Maat* is both a concept and a goddess. The goddess personified what needed to be done so that the universe kept existing, which meant both to fight disorder and to not commit any act that could impede the running and organisation of the created world (Bonnamy 2013:249). There is thus an antithesis of *Maat*, called *Isfet*, “evil”, “injustice”, “lying”, “mischief”, “falsehood”, and “disorder” (Bonnamy 2013:79).

Re has placed the king in the land of the living,  
forever and ever,  
judging humankind and satisfying the gods,  
realising *Maat* and destroying *Isfet*.  
He (the king) gives offerings to the gods and mortuary offering to the deceased.

Assmann 1975: no. 20, ll. 31-37

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<sup>61</sup> References to the Pyramid Texts can be found in, Faulkner R. O. (1969). *The Ancient Pyramid Texts*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Isfet, is the world when it loses its notions of existence. It is a symptom that characterises the lack of *Maat* in the world, and the pre-creation when the world was “darkness”. Non-existent and disorder are then at the very foundation of the cosmos.

Chaos is, in Egyptian thought, latent cosmos – hidden in the night and submerged in the inundation waters: it is potential cosmos.

Finnestad 1985:13

However, the forces of chaos and disorder must be controlled and tamed, which is the task of gods and people together. Although *Maat* is personified as a goddess, she represented the pristine state of the world (Hornung 1982:213), formed by the gods of creation even before any of the other gods and goddesses were born.

The Egyptian cosmos was Pharaonic culture, and “it should be emphasised that the cosmos created is not cosmos in the sense of “universe”, nor in the sense of “virgin” nature. The cosmos which was created for Horus is the place that is cultivated by man, the irrigation culture... a place of Egyptian civilisation.

Finnestad 1985:51

The Egyptians had no word for cosmos, but it may have denoted humankind’s world or the place of humankind’s habitation for the Egyptians. Chaos, on the other hand, may have denoted the ontological stage preceding cosmos. The landscape itself was not cosmos but chaos; it was the inundated and uncultivated soil. Chaos was characterised by two factors: it was a dark and aquatic landscape. The presence of water preceded the existence of the Earth and it was through the inundation of the Nile that the Earth became fertilised. Thus, the Egyptians had, at heart, to maintain this active cosmic harmony with *Maat*. First of all, by providing justice and care within their society and then by applying the will of the gods. Accordingly, there is clearly an interaction between the sacred and the profane, but also a division, which maintained the cosmic harmony between society and nature.

### 1.1.2./ *The Nun: As waters of Creation and Threat*

The Ancient Egyptians believed that before the Creation, existed a state-of-no-state supported by two paradoxical and fundamental concepts: the limitless waters of the Nun and the autogenous potential of reproduction of the demiurge. The Egyptian Creation began from nothing: the *nwn* or *nw*, Nun, magma characterising the primeval waters (Bonnamy 2013:311,308).

I am the Great God [Nun], the self-created.

Book of the Dead 17 <sup>62</sup>

The Nun and the demiurge formed an opposed union expressing opposite concepts: Nun was lifeless, inert, dark and everlasting, however the demiurge was life, light and eternal recurrence (Bonnamy 2013:311,308). Nun was thus a constant threat to the establishment of order because it could relapse at any second, as stated by the god Atum in The Book of the Dead.

I will despatch the Elders and destroy all that I made ; the earth shall return to the Abyss [Nun], to the surging flood, as in its original state.

Book of the Dead 175

This contrast between chaos and creation is supported by Maat who keeps the cycle of Ra, the sun god, every day. It is this chaos that has this potential. The Egyptians had therefore to respect and to worship these forces to preserve themselves from annihilation. The Egyptians had many gods, so how the world was created varied depending on the geographical situation of the place of worship which produced or spread these myths. Although different, these myths follow a similar structure. Different places of worship agreed on the moment of the beginning of the Creation. Egyptologists have divided Egyptian myths on the basis of their religious centre, which standardised or produced one or more myths.

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<sup>62</sup> References to the Book of the Dead can be found in, Faulkner R.O. (2010). *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*. London : British Museum Press.

However, each myth attempted to put forward a god in particular or a phase of the creative process. Thus, the Heliopolitan Cosmology put forward the demiurge Atum. The erotic stimulation of Atum created the first divine couple, from which was born the cosmos, embodying the first biological reproductive process.

Atum is he who (once) came into being, who masturbated in  $\bar{O}n$ <sup>63</sup>.

Pyramid Texts 527§1248

The Hermopolitan cosmology puts forward the eight creator gods, including the primordial waters of the Nun. The appearance of the world and chaos are clearly differentiated.

O you eight Chaos-gods whom I created from the efflux of my flesh, whose names Atum made when the abyss was created, on that when Atum spoke in it with Nu in chaos, in darkness and in gloom.

The Coffin Texts 76§8<sup>64</sup>

The Memphite cosmology puts forward the god Ptah, the god of arts and craftsmen, the sculptor and the power of the creative spirit. For the priests of Ptah, all creations came from the spirit of Ptah, which designed and built existence through the mouth of Ptah, the words of the god (Shaw 2014:25).

Hail to thee, Ptah-tanen, great god who concealeth his form ...  
Thou art watching when at rest  
The father of all fathers and of all gods ...  
Watcher, who traverseth the endless ages of eternity.

Hymn to Ptah (Le Page Renouf 2004:222)

The Theban cosmology put forward the demiurge Amon. Amon is a symbol of unification and power. He was the god of Thebes, the religious centre and residence of the Pharaoh during the New Kingdom.

You [Amon] made Your manifestations in Tatenen,  
to accompany the primeval ones in Your first primeval time.  
Your beauty arose as the Bull of His Mother.

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<sup>63</sup> Heliopolis (Tyldesley 2010:Chap. 1)

<sup>64</sup> References to the Coffin Texts can be found in, Faulkner R.O. (1973). *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*. Volume I, II and III. Warminster: Aris and Phillips.

You withdrew as the one in the sky, enduring as Re.  
You returned in fathers, maker of their sons,  
to make an excellent heritage for Your children.

Hymn to Amon from a Leiden Papyrus (Gardiner 1905:80 §1-6)

So what brings together these myths is a cyclic vision of time seen as an eternal new beginning to defy time; a flow and reflux like the floods of the Nile, the days and the nights. For the Egyptians everything had a beginning and an end, like life and death. It was the divine personification of a natural process.

The Egyptians conceived their cosmogonies more as explanations for a universal dynamic than as the search for origins at some given time.

Bonnefoy 1991:93

All these cosmogonies sought to demonstrate the “universal dynamic” by describing the antagonistic mechanism and opposed forces of both creative and destructive potentials. The narratives of the Creation myths differ in the way they reflected the emergence of the material world and its spatio-temporal organisation. However, they agree on a liquid as the element starting Creation.

Nun was the originator of the Creation, described as “The Father of the Gods” (Alford 2004:104). In contrast to the other deities Nun had no place of worship, rituals or priests associated with him. However, the sacred lakes constructed within the precincts of temples represented sacred ground close to the Nun<sup>65</sup>. Nun was regarded by the Egyptian as continuing to exist beyond the limits of the created universe, even after the disappearance of it: Nun represented the hidden abysses.

I was conceived in the Abyss, I was born in the Abyss.

Pyramid Texts 211§132

Thus, the pre-creation was imagined as a limitless, everlasting water, called by different names. The Pyramid Texts invite us therefore to differentiate between Nun “Abyss”, as the impersonal description of the pre-creation which included the whole cosmos:

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<sup>65</sup> The sacred Lake of Karnak was the broadest of Egypt where priests purified daily (Wilkinson 2003:118).

Heaven, Earth and the Underworld (Pyramid Texts 486§1040). In addition, Nun was a personification of a male element. In the Pyramid Texts, the Pharaoh is called to “succeed to the thrones of Nun”.

Cast off your impurity for Atum in Ōn and go down with him. Assign the needs of the Lower Sky and succeed to the thrones of Nun.

Pyramids Texts 222§207

Moreover, Nun can be paired with his female consort Nunet.<sup>66</sup>

*To say the words :*

You have your bread-loaf, O Nun and Nanuet (i.e Nunet)!  
You pair of the gods,  
who joined the gods with their shadow.

You have your bread-loaf, O Amun and Amunet !  
You pair of the gods,  
who joined the gods with their shadow.

You have your bread-loaf, O Atum and Double-Lion !  
Who yourselves created your two gods and their bodies,  
that is Shu and Tefenet, who made the gods,  
who begot the gods and established the gods.

Pyramid Texts 301§446

Nunet, *Ni(i)wt*, can be defined also as “Lower Sky”, meaning the primeval waters which were far below the Earth. These waters were deeply buried in the Underworld which the sun crossed every night (Lurker 2004:133).

[...] thou needest to descend to the lower heaven when thou descendest.

Pyramid Texts 214 §149

Thus, Nun and Nunet, brought Creation. Nun represented the waters that brought the Creation, he was the “Upper Sky”. Then, Nunet represented the “Lower Sky” i.e. the Underworld. Nun and Nunet symbolise the union of the celestial and chthonian realms i.e. life and death, as a symbol of rebirth.

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<sup>66</sup> Nun's female counterpart which embodies the infinite waters in the Ogdoad of Hermopolis (Bonnamy 2013:328).



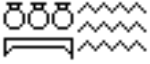






<b>Nun</b>		The Upper Sky, with the determinative for the vault of the sky  and the determinative for water  (Bonnamy 2013:311).
<b>Nunet</b>		The Lower Sky, with the determinative for the reverse vault of the sky  (Bonnamy 2013:308). In other version of the name Nunet, “ <i>n</i> ”  , was used in two words <i>nwt</i> and <i>nwt</i> , meaning “water”, it replaces the determinative  for water (Bonnamy 2013:312).



Figure 6: Detail from the Greenfield Papyrus (The Book of the Dead of Nesitanebtashru), 10th century B.C.E. It depicts the air god Shu, assisted by the ram-headed Heh deities, supporting the sky goddess Nut as the Earth god Geb lies beneath. We can notice a similarity between the representation of the sky goddess Nut, and the hieroglyphic representing the vault of the sky (see above) associated to her. Image courtesy of the British Museum.

The sky was a double wall, protecting all of Creation against the threat of the Nun. The sky above and below was the protection against the inert waters held outside of the world. As a fortification, the sky surrounded the Earth in all directions; as the sky goddess Nut (to whom the realm of the sky is associated), who touched the Earth with her feet and hands. So, we realise that the waters of Creation were above and below the Earth, becoming a vector between the celestial and chthonian realms.

The pre-creation state was therefore both a source of regeneration and a threat of chaos, darkness, death and disorder, as part of the Creation. Nun contained numerous powers and possibilities, without being a demiurge. Nun was then a principle rather than a real divine individuality. In fact, it represented the primordial undifferentiated unity and preceded the Creation of Heaven and Earth. It represented the darkness and eternal conditions of the cosmos, prior to Creation (see Pyramid Texts 486).

### 1.1.3./ *The gods during the Creation of the Cosmos: Water as Kheper “To Become”*

In the Hermopolitan cosmogony, four couples of male frogs and female snakes constituted the primordial beings. Called the “Chaos gods” by Faulkner in his translation of the Coffin Texts, they formed the Ogdoad.

It was I who again begot the Chaos-gods in chaos, the abyss, in Darkness and in gloom.

Coffin Texts 76

They were named “Chaos-gods”, because they embodied the entities present during the pre-creation when “inertness” reigned. Their names were linked in pairs (see Coffin Texts 76), and towards the end of the Middle Kingdom or at the beginning of the New Kingdom the essential female complement (Antelme & Rossini 2007:34) was added as well. Nun and Nunet represented the primeval waters, Kek and Keket embodied darkness, Heh and Hehet were infinite space, Tenemou and Tenemout stood for disappearance. This last couple was later replaced by Amun and Amunet, “that which is hidden”, the unseen, and also more rarely, by Niaou and Niaout who personified nothingness and emptiness, or alternatively replaced by Gereh and Gerhet, the “lack” (Antelme & Rossini 2007:35). It is interesting to note that these four couples embodied principles which are from the same family: “hiddenness”, “infinity”, “darkness”, “inertness”. First of all, “hiddenness” was considered as a becoming, a hidden within the original matrix potential, this potential was the Creation. The god Amun also means “the hidden”, *imn* in Egyptian (Bonnamy 2013:56). “Infinity” is represented by the gods Heh and Hehet. They embodied infinite space and primordial water. Heh, *Hh* in Egyptian (Bonnamy 2013:432) is etymologically related to (*n*) *hh*, the Egyptian translation for eternity (Bonnamy 2013:432). Kek and Keket, embodied the darkness of the pre-existence, the world before the appearance of the sun and life. Etymologically their names are linked to the Egyptian word *kk*, designating obscurity in which the “becoming” originates (Bonnamy 2013:683).

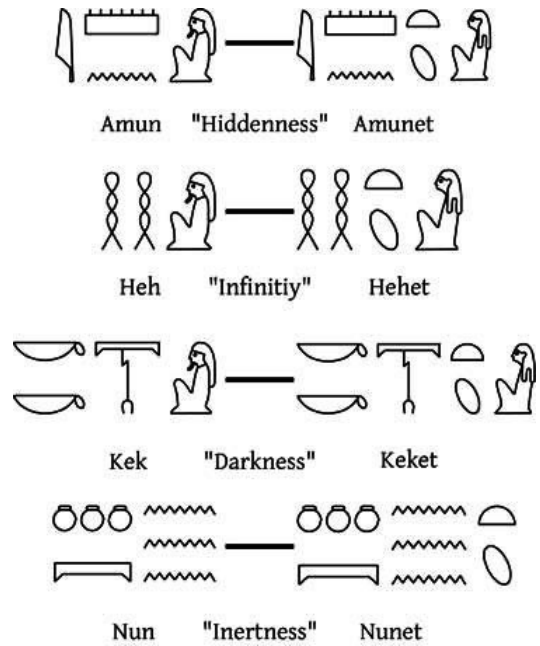


Figure 7: Bas-relief from the ceiling of the temple of Hathor at Dendera representing the Ogdoad of Hermopolis (left).

Figure 8: The Hermopolitan Ogdoad. Oriental Institute Mini-Series on Creation Myths. The Process of Creation according to the Ancient Egyptian Tradition, Foy Scalf, Oriental Institute, Chicago (right).

Thus, the eight gods of the Ogdoad embodied the potential of creation, the “becoming”, and sustainability within an aquatic environment. These gods are consistent with water as a natural element: the element bringing life from the abyss after the flood. The unfathomable depths and dangers still contained the potential for creation and renewal of life.

The male “chaos gods” were represented as frogs. The frog is traditionally linked to its natural environment, water<sup>67</sup>. The female goddesses are represented as snakes. It is interesting that the hieroglyph for goddess, “*ntrt*”, Netcheret, contains a cobra as determinative (Bonnamy 2013:348). If humankind is the culmination of a long genetic effort, we must also, necessarily, place snakes at the origin of this effort: without legs, hair or feathers. The snake also symbolises origins, the pre-creation. Its shape and its ability to moult, embody metamorphosis, the creating potential. It is also interesting to observe that the names of

<sup>67</sup> The frog is also a determinative in the goddess Heqet’s name, *hqt* in Egyptian, goddess of birth (Bonnamy 2013:436). Like serpents, frogs give birth to a great quantity of offsprings, making them a major symbol of fertility.

four goddesses of chaos have an egg as determinative (see figure 8). The egg is considered as containing the germ from which events develop, as is the case in the Hermopolitan Cosmology, in which the primordial egg, called Qerehet (feminine noun in Egyptian) embodying the origin of time and the spirit of the ancestors, gushed from Nun (Bonnamy 2013:664).

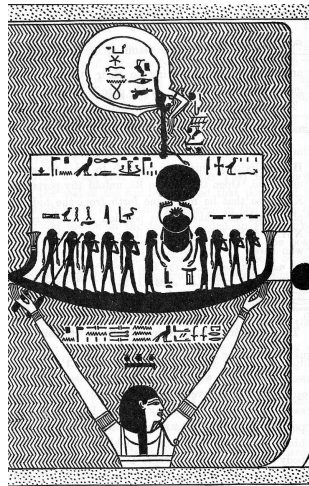


Figure 9: Book of the Gates, sarcophagus of king Sethi I kept at the Sir John Soane's Museum in London, representing the creation of cosmos. Nun is releasing the solar boat which contains the sun in transformation, represented as a scarab, “to become”, *Kheper* (Bonnamy 2013:459), received by Nut which is raised out of the magma by Osiris, still prisoner of the primordial mass. Osiris seems to have his curved body isolated. The divinities accompanying the sun are Isis and Nephthys pushing it towards the top, and four gods, symbolising abstract concepts: Shou, Heka, Hou and Sia, and Gheb the god of the Earth. We can see the representation of the tripartite world: the celestial realm, the Underworld and the primeval waters show in the background formed by zigzag lines, similar to the hieroglyphic for water. The large expanse effectively illustrates the role of the primeval waters as the source of all being. The composition as a whole is surrounded by (dotted) borders, into which the sun sets and out of which it rises again. Thus, the four primordial couples of the Hermopolitan Cosmology embody fertilisation, the appearance of life and the potential of Creation in a state of pre-existence, called the Nun. They embody a divine personification of nature.

As shown in the image above, Khepri/Kheper was the moment when the inertness disappeared to give rise to Creation.

Transformation into Khepri,  
 rising to the horizon,  
 entering the mouth, emerging from the vulva.  
 Shining in the gateway of Light-land in the hour  
 “That Makes the Perfection of Re Shine”,  
 to create the sustenance of humankind,

of cattle and of all the serpents he has created.

Hornung 1984:493

In this excerpt, Khepri is put forward as a part of life. In the representation above he is portrayed by a scarab beetle carrying the sun. The sun being one of the major component of the Egyptian arid environment, it is normal that it occupied a place of choice in the Egyptian mythology and more specifically in their creation myths. The sun was a great cosmic power. It was the manifestation of the divine. Thus, the decisive cosmogonic event was the appearance of the primeval gods from the Nun. This act of regional spontaneous genesis served as the model for every sunrise and every emergence of the land from the annual Nile flood, the actual “*zep tepi*”, “first moment” of Creation of the cosmos as the Egyptian concept of genesis was called (Bonnamy 2013:538). *Zep Tepi* indicated the appearance of the sun and the establishment of the land called the Primordial Hill. In the bas-relief below (Figure 10), the world surrounded by water reminded the Egyptians of the Primordial Hill, whose existence is attested from the first dynasties (Danu et al. 1994:290). It evokes the primeval mound, as the demiurge emerged from the liquid chaos at the dawn of Creation. It is also the petrification of the first ray of the sun and its form inspired the obelisks (Bonnamy 2013:200). We find mentioned the Primordial Hill as a hill in the Pyramid Texts.

Atum beetle! You became high, as the hill: you rose as the benben<sup>68</sup> in the Benben Compound in Heliopolis. You sneezed Shy and spat Tefnut. You put your arms around them as ka-arms so that your ka might be in them.

Pyramid Texts 600 (Allen 2015:265)

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<sup>68</sup> Primordial Hill that emerged from the primordial waters of chaos at the dawn of Creation (Bonnamy 2013:200).



Figure 10: Iher's Pyramidion. Late Period, XXVIth Dynasty, c. 664-525 B.C.E. Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Musée du Louvre (D18-N359). The shape of this pyramidion probably represents the first mound of Creation. One side shows three forms of the sun-god - Re, Atum, and Khepri - seated in a boat. Image courtesy of Musée du Louvre.

The hieroglyphic for Primordial Hill, *h'* in Egyptian, has the shape of a step pyramid (Frankfort 1948:151-153). It is ideographically and phonically very close to the Egyptian hieroglyphic meaning "to appear" and "to rise" like the sun in figure 9, *h' i* (Bonnamy 2013:454). The pyramids were built on the edge of the range of the annual flood. Hence, the land on which the pyramids were built was the first to emerge from the flood when the waters receded, representing the Primeval Hill.

The waters surrounding the Primeval Hill were naturally, the waters of chaos; these personified in the god Nun, were still supposed to surround the earth, and inexhaustible reserve of latent life and fertility. And the subsoil water as well as the Nile, was thought to flow out from Nun. Since the primeval Nile was the place for rebirth and resurrection, the waters of Nun which surrounded it became those waters of death which, in the imagination of many people, separate the world of the living from the world of the dead.

Frankfort 1948:154

The hill or mount is a symbol of life and creation, it symbolises the beginning of the Creation, when the first land emerged from the Nun. The Thebans referred to their city as the place of the apparition of the mount.

Thebes is the model for every city:  
 water and land were [mixed] in it at the beginning.  
 Sand came to measure the fields,  
 to make its soil come into being on the primeval mound,  
 that the land might come into being.

“Water and land”, “sand” are references to the flooding of the Nile. This flood was considered by the ancient Egyptians as a divine manifestation of the cosmic balance. Namely, the flood of the Nile was synonymous with rebirth of nature via the Nile which was considered a cosmic river. Indeed, the rains of the monsoon journeyed down from Ethiopia and Sudan, from the Highlands of East Africa between spring and the end of the summer (Antelme & Rossini 2007:306). The flood brought silt which would fertilise the land to make it “come into being”. So, the flood season was like the rebirth of nature, the Earth returning to “the primeval mount” where the establishment of civilisation began.

## 1.2) Cosmic geography of the Primeval Waters: The link between the terrestrial, celestial and chthonian worlds

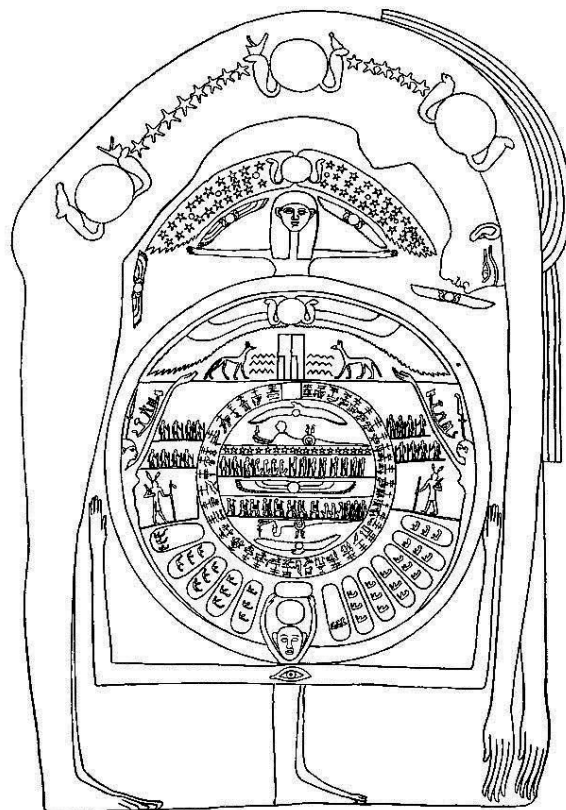


Figure 11: Relief on a sarcophagus cover (diameter: 43.5cm ; height: 88cm), necropolis of Sakkara, XXXth Dynasty (378 - 341 B.C.E) or Ptolemaic Period (after 300 B.C.E). Representing the different

stages of the sun's journey, and the tripartite world. Image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin (May 1914:117).<sup>69</sup>

### *1.2.1./ What lies outside the Cosmos*

This relief provides a concise picture of the understanding of the daily existence of the universe by the ancient Egyptians. From their point of view, the world of humankind was limited by the Earth below and the sky above, separated from each other by the atmosphere. Within its limits, life appeared and followed the rising and setting of the sun. What lies outside the cosmos was unknown. As described in *The Book of Nut* from the Cenotaph of Seti I<sup>70</sup>.

The uniform darkness, fount of the gods, the place from which birds come: this is from her (i.e. Nut) northwestern side up to her northeastern side, open to the Duat that is on her northern side, with her rear in the east and her head in the west [...] The Upper side of this sky exists in uniform darkness, the southern northern, western, and eastern limits of which are unknown, these having been fixed in the Waters, in inertness. There is no light of the Ram there: he does not appear there, (a place) whose south, north, west and east land is unknown by the gods or akhs, there being no brightness there. And as for every place void of sky and void of land, that is the entire Duat.

Allen 1988:1-2

In order to try to understand what lay beyond the limits of the cosmos, Egyptian philosophers resorted to a series of contrasts with the known world. If the world is limited, then what is beyond is unlimited - "the southern, northern, western, and eastern limits of which are unknown". The world is lit by the sun, so what is outside is perpetually in darkness - "there being no brightness there". Moreover, if the world is characterised by the cycle of life, the unknown is motionless - "in inertness".

The quote, "He does not appear there [...] there being no brightness there" (Allen 1988:1), makes clear that the waters lay beyond not just the human world, but that of the sun as well. During the night the Egyptians lost sight of the sun as it travelled to a place that

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<sup>69</sup> In the *Book of the Dead* of Khensumose, 1075-945 B.C.E, the primordial mound is also represented surrounded by water, with as well three orange circles representing the sun at different stages of its rising.




<sup>70</sup> *The Book of Nut* from the Ceiling of the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos, a text of the Egyptian's understanding of the cosmos. There are two other versions in the tomb of Ramses IV in the Valley of the Kings and in the tomb (TT 410) of Mutirdis (Antelme & Rossini 2007:199).



is neither earth nor sky. That third location is the Duat<sup>71</sup>. It is described in quite a negative way - “And as for every place void of sky and void of land, that is the entire Duat”. When the sun sets it “rests from life in(to) the Duat” (Allen 1988:2) and when it rises it “comes forth from the Duat” (Allen 1988:3). The terms used in this text for the outer universe is “uniform darkness”. These very descriptive terms, refer to the primary water of the Nun, which reflected the Egyptian concept of the universe as a limitless ocean of dark and motionless water, in which the world floated: a sphere of light, land and air (see figure 9).

I am Nu, Lord of Darkness

Coffin Texts 1132§VII 475

The association of the Nun with the sky is reflected in the determinative  to which is added the determinative of water to form the name Nun, . The name Nun, or *nw*, could well come from the ancient word for “water” (Bonnamy 2013:311). *Nw* gave the value *n* to the hieroglyphs , and it is the root of such words as *nwí* and *nwyt* “water” (Bonnamy 2013:312). The Coptic vocalisation *noun* indicates a different structure, *nmw* (Allen 1988:4). This is perhaps due to the fact that this term is associated with the verb *n(j)nj* “to be inert” (Bonnamy 2013:328).

I am Nu (i.e. waters).

I am inert (*njn*) when the two lands were complete.

Coffin Texts 444§V 312

I am the child (*nw*) of my mother.

I am a youth, the son of Hathor.

I am an Inert One (*njn*) who was in the Abyss (*nw*).

Coffin Texts 334§IV 182

Then, what is described is an act of coming to one’s self, a transition from a weariness that is incapable of action, into consciousness. “Abyss”, the primary waters are also

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<sup>71</sup> The lower world, the place of residence of the deceased travelled at night by the sun, it has no specific geographic location (Bonnamy 2013:742).

below the Earth. As reflected in the early variant spelling *n(i)wt*<sup>72</sup>. Thus, the primary waters were the source of water in this world, and therefore of the Nile (Allen 1988:4).<sup>73</sup>

O Hunger, do not come for me ; go to the Abyss, depart of the Flood!

Pyramid Texts 338§551

The word “Abyss” in this quote is a reference to Nunet. The “start of the Flood”, from the geographical point of view of the Egyptians, refers to the first cataract of the Nile near Aswan in the south of the country (Ikram 2010:5-6). However, from the point of view of Egyptian mythology, the Nile did not come from terrestrial regions in the south of Egypt, but rather from the Underworld (referred here as “Abyss”), and it communicated in mysterious ways with “the primeval water” surrounding the cosmos that emerged from it. The primeval water takes the form of a celestial ocean, or a circular Nile. Indeed, one can wonder if the celestial ocean represented in Figure 11 could have been an inspiration from the Mediterranean Sea? Or if it is actually the Mediterranean Sea represented in this bas-reliefs? Until the development of seafaring, the Mediterranean Sea acted as a natural border, and the winds, tides and currents of which made crossing difficult. The Egyptians called the Mediterranean, *wadj-wer*, meaning “The Great Green” (Bonnamy 2013:138) or *shen-wen*, translated as the “Great Encircler” (Baines et al. 1991:117).

[...] I made thee to smite the dwellers (in the islands) in the midst of the Great Green with thy roarings [...]

Speech of Amen-Ra to Thothmes III (Wallis Budge 2003:163)

You are complete and great in you name of Bitter Lake  
You are green and great in your name of Sea  
See you are great and round in (your name of) Ocean  
See, you are circular in your name of Ring-That- Encircles-the-Northern-Lands.<sup>74</sup>

Pyramid Texts 366§628-629

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<sup>72</sup> As seen in “Nun: as Waters of Creation and Threat”, above *n(i)wt* is the female version of Nun.

<sup>73</sup> “Fount” in the text, *qbhw* in Egyptian (Allen 1988:74), is used to describe the cataract and fresh water (Bonnamy 2013:659): the source of inundation and of groundwater.

<sup>74</sup> This praise is addressed to the god Osiris, the god of the Underworld. He has a green skin, like in the scene of the Hall of Judgment (see Hunefer's Book of the Dead, Chapter 125, The weighing of the heart, 1300 BC, XIXth Dynasty).

“Bitter Lake”, “Sea” and “Ocean” are clear references to the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, “Bitter Lake” indicates salt water. “Ring-That-Encircles-the-Northern-Lands” is a reference to the large body of water north of Egypt, like the Mediterranean Sea. “The Northern Lands” could be a reference to the Aegean Islands, called *Hau-nebut* by the Egyptians (Bonnamy 2013:314), which they thought of as being surrounded by the “Wall of the Bitter Lake” i.e. the Mediterranean Sea.

Your two sisters Isis and Nephthys come to you that they may make you hale, and you are complete and great in your name of “Wall of the Bitter Lakes”, you are hale and great in your name of “Sea” ; behold, you are great and round in (your name of) “Ocean” ; behold, you are circular and round as the circle which surrounds the *Hau-nebut*.

Pyramid Texts 366§628-629

The term “great” puts forward the extended surface of the aquatic element, and “green” is the colour of the regenerative water, and such, the awakening of the primeval waters and life (Black & Green 1992:1002). The Nile flowing into the Mediterranean Sea is also called “Great Encircler”. Indeed, the Egyptians understood, in their myths, that the Nile was an important river that existed not only on Earth, but also in the heavenly world. “Great Encircler” and “Great Green” are difficult to assign. From my point of view, they may well be both the Nile and the Mediterranean: one single linked celestial ocean. The ocean in which the Nile emptied itself was the Great Circular Nile. The Nile was also understood as coming from the ocean which encircled the world and was part of the heavenly Nile (Doniger 1999:818). Furthermore, “The Great Encircler” seems to have been a prototype for the greek god Okeanos.<sup>75</sup>

“[On the source of the River Nile: ] The Second opinion is less grounded on knowledge than the previous, though it is marvellous to the ear: according to it, the river [i.e. The Nile] effects what it does because it flows from Oceans, which flows around the whole world.”

Herodotus, Histories 2.21.1 (Godley 1920)

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<sup>75</sup> Okeanos or Oceanus was the primeval deity of the great Earth-encircling River, the font of all the Earth's fresh-water: including rivers, wells, springs and rain-clouds. Okeanos was also the god who regulated the rising and setting of the heavenly bodies which were believed to emerge and descend into his watery realm at the ends of the Earth (Smith 1870:2).

In *Geschichte Aegyptens*, by James Henry Breasted, the Greek concept of a freshwater river ocean is also called Oceanus, and it encircled the Earth and was the source of all rivers.<sup>76</sup>

The Nun, as described in the previous paragraphs, surrounds the world, and its primary waters were the source of both the heavenly and underground waters (the Duat and the Nun), and also those on Earth, including the Nile. The ocean that encircled the world on this map is therefore “the primeval waters” from which the Nun and the Nile flowed. The Nile and the Nun were a single entity because they came from the same source: the primeval waters around the world, as indicated in the Pyramid Texts above.

### *1.2.2./ Nut the vault of the sky: The cyclic regeneration*

Nut the sky goddess dominates the bas-relief above in figure 11. She is depicted with her body bent over the circular primary waters. According to the Egyptian iconography, her feet rested on Earth, while her back formed the heavenly dome arching around to where her fingers touched the ground<sup>77</sup>. Her head and her mouth face the western horizon and her womb faces the eastern horizon. The West was the entrance to the realm of the Underworld, the Duat. The sun god, must die in the West each day to after be reborn in the East, the realm of the living. Nut thereby embodies the cycle of death and rebirth. The movements of the sun god can be distinguished in this bas-relief three times, surrounded by two cobras wearing the crowns of upper and lower Egypt<sup>78</sup>. These three suns pass through Nut's body. In addition, the sun is presented twice in its winged form, in the front of both the womb and the mouth of Nut. The sun enters through her mouth and leaves through her womb. This scene is described in The Book of Nut from the Cenotaph of Seti I.

The incarnation of this god enters at her first hour of evening, becoming effective again in the embrace of his father Osiris, and becoming purified therein [...]. When the incarnation

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<sup>76</sup> William Smith noted on the historian Flavius Josephus (1st century A.D) “That the ocean stream which surrounded the Earth was the source from which the four rivers flowed was the opinion of Josephus” (1898:220).

<sup>77</sup> We can find a similar representation of the goddess in the Greenfield Papyrus (Figure 6). The star body of Nut is also represented in a 3000-year-old illustration from the Djedkhonsuiefankh funerary papyrus on display at the Cairo Museum.

<sup>78</sup> Ra the sun god was a demiurge. He was the main deity representing the sun. His worship spread from Heliopolis throughout Egypt in his diverse forms: Khepri at dawn, Horakhty at noon and Atum the evening in a perpetual cycle. These three suns are represented in the body of Nut. They represent the three transformations of the sun (Bonnamy 2013:360).

of this god enters her mouth, inside the Duat, it stays open after her sails inside her, so that these sailing stars may enter after him and come forth after him [...]. The incarnation of this god comes forth from her rear. Then he is on course toward the world, apparent and born. Then he produces himself above. Then he parts the thighs on his mother Nut. Then he goes away to the sky.

Allen 1988:2-3

From the point of view of the Egyptians the sky was an interface between the surface of the waters and the dry atmosphere. The sun sailed through the waters, just as the ancient Egyptians sailed the Nile.

The bark of Re travels in the Abyss, and it is I who take her bow-warp.

Coffin Texts 684§VI 313

In Egypt, where travelling by boat was the easiest and most comfortable means of transportation, it was natural, that the sky was perceived as an ocean, and to envision the sun crossing it in an invisible ship.

Nut embodied the concept of death and rebirth. The concept of renaissance/birth highlights the feminine character of the sky, portrayed by Nut. <sup>79</sup>

[...] because you are Re ; sit on this throne of Re that you may give orders to the gods, because you are Re who came forth from Nut who bears Re daily [...].

Pyramid Texts 606§1688-1689

The first text of this sub-section locates the Duat inside Nut's body. At sunset, the sun "enters her mount, inside the Duat". This is equivalent to the moment of conception, "at her second tour of pregnancy" (Allen 1988:2). During the night, the sun "sails inside her" and "gives direction to the Duat" (Allen 1988:2). At dawn "he parts the thighs of his mother Nut", "as he opens in his splitting and swims in his redness" of "after birth" (Allen 1988:3), and moves into the day sky "apparent and born" (Allen 1988:3). It is apparent, both from the description of the texts and from the accompanying illustrations, that the

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<sup>79</sup> Nut can be compared to the goddess Mehet-Weret, "The Great Swimmer", a cow goddess, floating on the primeval waters of Nun during Creation. In the Pyramid Era Mehet-Weret represents the waterway in the Heavens, called upon by both the sun-god and the king. She is also a manifestation of the primeval waters - consequently being sometimes considered as "the mother of Ra" (Hart 2005:91). She gave birth to the sun and carried it between her horns to the Earth (Bonnamy 2013:279). She is a goddess of the sky in Ancient Egyptian religion. Her name is "Great Flood" (Wilkinson 2003:174) - "They row Horus, they row Horus in the procession of Horus on the Great Flood (i.e. Mehet-Weret)" (Pyramid Texts 510§1131).

entrance to and exit from the Duat are not precisely at the visible horizon, where the sky seems to touch the Earth. This explains why the sky remains light after sunset and becomes light before sunrise: the sun does not appear until “her second hour of pregnancy” and is born some two hours before actual sunrise - “then he is developed and goes away to the sky, in the hour of “She Has Gone to Rest” (Allen 198:3).

Like the sun, many beings were free to travel between the Duat and the world of daylight, such as the migratory birds that flew into Egypt from an unknown place in the North - “the uniform darkness, fount of the gods, the place from which birds come” (Allen 1988:1). The same text seems to describe an interface between the Duat and the “uniform darkness” also lying to the North (Allen 1988:1). The waters, in fact, flow through the Duat, and the sun is pictured travelling on them at night, “resting on his back in the Waters [Nun], in the Duat” (Hornung 1965:I 88/6). This moment is illustrated at the end of the Book of the Gates (Figure 9). The Waters, shown both as water and as a god, lift the bark containing the sun into the waterless space of the world.

The relationship between Nut and the Duat in this scene reflects an ambivalence in the Egyptian conception of the Duat. On one hand, the Duat was thought to lie in the North<sup>80</sup>, and on the other hand it was thought to be inside Nut’s body. This is a concept as old as the Pyramid Texts.

The sky has conceived him,  
the dawn (Duat) has borne him [...].

Pyramid Texts 577§1527

“My heir!” said his father (of) him whom the sky conceived and the dawn-light bore.

Pyramid Texts 442§820

The Gate of the sky are opened before you,  
the gates of the cool celestial water open before you.


Pyramid Texts 422§756


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<sup>80</sup> It is important to notice that Nut in this image is situated in the upper part of the cosmos, in the North, confusing the geographical location of the Duat even more.

What we can understand from the Duat is that it was a part of the world. However, it was inaccessible to the living, outside the realm of normal human experience. Together, sky, land and Duat comprised the world of the Ancient Egyptians - a kind of bubble of air and light within the otherwise unbroken infinity of dark waters. These elements formed the background to the Egyptian understanding of the cycle of life and human destiny, determined by the daily drama of sunset and sunrise. These were also the starting-point for all Egyptian speculation on the origins of the universe.

### *1.2.3./ Waters as a link between the Celestial, Terrestrial and Chthonian Realms*

Between the arms and the legs of Nut in the centre of the image, a disc represents the world, and the world itself is divided into three concentric circles. The whole is surrounded by a thin circle, the ocean, also called “Big Green” by the Egyptians (Löning & Zenger 2000:21). The disk is lifted by two arms below, whose shape suggests the hieroglyphs *Ka* , meaning life-force, energy and creative power (Bonnamy 2013:672). The fact that this sign is represented below the representation of the world and Nut, suggests that it is possibly a metaphor of the Nun. Indeed, the layout of the sign *Ka*, represents a reverse vault, namely Nunet, in opposition to Nut who dominates the scene. The imposing size of the hieroglyphs framing the world amplifies its characteristic of “creative power”. Nunet being the underground abyss and the start of the flood, starting point of the revival of life, and the creation of a new cycle (Pyramid Texts 338§551).

The *Ka*'s supportive power is enlightened by the eye , *iri*, in its centre. This hieroglyph in Egyptian means to create, to do, to generate and to shape (Bonnamy 2013:68). The ancient Egyptians thus expressed the ability of the cosmos to auto-create, and to auto-support itself (as indicated by the two feet below the *Ka*<sup>81</sup>) above the waters of chaos without being swallowed up by them (Book of the Dead 175) (Löning & Zenger 2000:22). This symbol of life is thus assumed to be a theological symbol for the understanding of the world, as an entity maintained by the divine power of the creation of life. Just above the eye is a figure composed of a bent head and arms rising up to the sky beyond the range that surrounds the main circle representing the primeval waters. This image highlights the link between the terrestrial, divine and chthonian worlds generally.

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<sup>81</sup> Indicated as well in figure 9 with Kheper “to become”, “transform” or “transmute”. Indicating the potential to come into existence, the capacity of autogenous creation.


With his arms he supports the central disc, probably the Duat (Keel 1978:39). Furthermore, these two arms appear to surround the solar disc from which the sun is emerging. Because this form emerges from the ocean, it could represent the primordial ocean as a divine figure, whose primary function is to support the worlds and to bind them one to the other (as in Nun in Figure 9).


Between the Earth disc and Nut are two celestial symbols. In the middle lies a female figure emerging from the band of the ocean that surrounds the world, she is the celestial ocean. It is depicted in such a way that the circle of the world represents her belly. She is the creative female element of life. As Nut, she contains the three stages of the sun. At the top of the circle is a winged sun at its zenith, surrounded by stars, which is a metaphor for Nut, whose body is also covered with stars in the scene just above. Moreover, on each side of the female figure two small winged suns are represented, one on the left in the same pattern as the winged sun coming out of the womb of Nut in the East where the sun rises, and to the right is the same winged sun as the one which enters the mouth of Nut geographically on the West, which is the sunset. The two small winged suns and the large winged sun, embody the three phases of the sun namely: sunrise, zenith and sunset. Thus, this scene demonstrates the dependence of the Earth on celestial solar power, bringing light to the world.

In the centre of the relief, is the circular ocean. Presented on its two internal sides are the goddesses of the East (left side of the circle) and the West (right side of the circle) where their bodies cut the circle, which defines their backs. The goddess of the East carries a spear on her head, and the goddess of the West carries a feather on her head. Imentet is the goddess of the western region, personifying the necropolises of the western side of the Nile Valley (Wilkinson 2003:145). The feather  $\beta$  *imnti* symbolises the West (Bonnamy 2013:57). The goddess of the East, called Iabet, is embodied by the hieroglyphic  $\dagger$  *i3bt*, meaning the East (Bonnamy 2013:25). Together they symbolise sunrise and the sunset, represented by a solar boat sailing upon their arms.

We note that the earthly ring itself is composed of three concentric circles, with a line separating the winged sun from the rest of the first circle. This first circle describes the different lands and regions surrounding Egypt composed mainly of hostile deserts (Löning



& Zenger 2000:23). This is suggested by hieroglyphs present in twelve cartouches representing squatting nomads  associated with the term “stranger” (Bonnamy 2013:807) and wild warriors standing on both sides in rows in front of the goddesses (Löning & Zenger 2000:23). Enclosed in the twelve ovals along the circle, the squatting warriors inside hold, upon their knees or in their hands, either a feather or a branch. In battle, the feather was worn in the hair. However, held in the hand or on the knee it signifies submission. This shows that the foreign lands and peoples surrounding Egypt had been subdued (Keel 1978:38). Furthermore, in front of the two goddesses are the representations of two male god figures, one holding a knife and the *Ames* sceptre (figure on the right) and the other a standard sceptre emphasising power (figure on the left). The *Ames* sceptre was a symbol of war and submission, referring thus to the submissive and kneeling warriors and nomads (Bonnamy 2013:14). This two gods characterised the desert: Ha (right) and Sopdu (left), lords of the western and eastern deserts respectively (Keel 1978:37).

Above this circular band, a line separates the first concentric circle. Löning and Zenger suggested that this line is the desert, a hostile place and the door to the realm of the dead (2000:24). This scene is dominated by a winged sun, symbolising the solar dependence of the terrestrial world and the omnipresence of the sun in the desert environment. The door to the kingdom of the dead is identified by two jackal-headed beings<sup>82</sup>. We can also observe the hieroglyphs of water in front of the two jackals. Water in this context represents the waters of chaos, the waters surrounding the world (see figure 9)<sup>83</sup>. Additionally, we have two hieroglyphs representing two funerary chapels or temples  (Bonnamy 2013:404). These two symbols are the lines representing the dessert indicating that they are the gates between the world of the dead and the world of the living, but on the other hand they also lead to the Duat (here represented by a white square in the second circle). In this scene we have a dual meaning: the building and the water are a way to access the Duat, but water also travels to the world of the living from it. In the last circle we can recognise the Duat by

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<sup>82</sup> The jackal and canine creatures are often associated with the jackal-headed god Anubis, the protector of the tomb and the god of mummification. However, we need to keep in mind that not all canines are the god Anubis. Nonetheless, the two canines in figure 11 might be though, as they are represented in a funerary context.

<sup>83</sup> Garry Shaw suggested that this scene with the symbols of the water and the two buildings symbolises the cave from which the Nile originated (2014:112). This cave was thought to be near the First Cataract and the realm of the god of the flood and fertility Hapi. Because the water rose from the Earth at the Cataract, the Egyptians thought the flood began in the Underworld, journeying from the cave of Hapi (see Pyramid Texts 338§551).

the stars and also the three suns: setting in the bottom of the scene to then be reborn at the top of the scene and illuminate the world again, illustrated here by the second circle representing the Egyptian kingdom and the names of the 41 nomes of Egypt (Löning & Zenger, 2000:24). Finally, the sun is at its zenith in the middle of the circle.

So figure 11 aims firstly to show the dependence of the mortal world on the divine world, and to integrate the former into the latter, and to show the threat of chaos that hovered over it at every moment. This image is an Egyptian attempt to give meaning to the behaviour of the world. Exemplified through the cycle of the sun, the continuous struggle between chaos and life forces to maintain the balance of the world and to prevent its destruction. In addition, female images rising from the primeval waters, combine both the creation of life, and yet also of death. Through this scene we can understand the importance of the primeval waters that linked the divine, the terrestrial and the chthonian worlds in a recurring cycle. The waters of the Nile always remain water, though they go through several states and progressive modifications. In the decisive metamorphosis of the flood, cosmos was created out of chaos. Finally, water is transformed from being an element in opposition to the cosmos into an element capable of creating the cosmos.

## **2. Water as Life : Nature and Culture**

### **2.1) Water in Nature and Culture: An Eternal Cycle**

#### *2.1.1./ The Providential Flood*

Egyptian civilisation developed and thrived in one of the largest and driest desert regions of the world thanks to the Nile (Kemp 2006:8). During the Pharaonic period Egyptian civilisation depended on the Nile and the summer floods which bestowed upon them a very rich pastoral economy. The Nubians and the Egyptians shared the Nile River: the Blue Nile and the White Nile which meet in the modern day Sudanese capital Khartoum to form the Nile River, which also absorbs the waters of the Atbara, a tributary river north of the Sudanese capital. The annual flood is the result of the rising waters of the Blue Nile

and the Atbara. The Nile is a unique river because it stretches across the desert without receiving substantial additional inflow of water for 2,700 kilometres (Oestigaard 2011:13).

The three Egyptian seasons were the basis of the Egyptian calendar, which followed the phases of the flood: Akhet (inundation, between July and October), Peret (growing, between November and February), and Shemu (drought/sowing, between March and June) (Bonnamy 2013:16,224,635), which was an ideal natural cycle (Kemp 2006:10). The flow and the level of the Nile constantly changed during the year. When the river flooded over its banks, silt was deposited which accumulated and raised the riverbed, the floodplain could thereby reach a consistent height, and after a few years the river would carve a new path through the floodplain. Thus, the ancient river beds became fertile farmland, where people could settle.

We must imagine the valley, not flat and featureless as it is today, but dotted with hamlets perched on the high banks of former watercourses and surrounded by an ever-changing maze of channels, marsh, and meadow.

Frankfort 1951:41

The level of the flood varied over time. On the basis of measurements dating between 1890 and 1935, the average duration of the flood was 110 days. Within this period, there were 4 years during which the flood lasted less than 75 days. In addition, during 12 years it lasted more than 125 days. The maximum duration of the flood was 162 days (Said 1993:97). If the Nile rose too high, it could result in the total destruction of the irrigation system (Said 1993:128). In addition to high floods that could be disastrous for society and the harvest, low or absent floods could be devastating as well. Unfortunately, it was impossible for Egyptians to predict the extent of the annual flood, as this varied with the amount of water falling across the Ethiopian Highlands. Nonetheless, if their harvest was good, peasants had to pay a tax on it (Popper 1951:81), testifying to the importance of the flood for the Egyptian economy.

During the first three Egyptian dynasties, some of the most important pieces of information recorded were levels of the Nile during heavy flooding (Clagett 1989:48-49). This early recording of data, concerning the waters of the Nile, bears witness to the importance that Egyptians attached to the Nile's water-level in the development of Egyptian civilisation.

People in Egypt knew how to adapt to the variance of the Nile's level. Thus, the adaptation of the Egyptians to their aquatic environment and to seasonal changes in their landscape provides us with understanding of their cultural processes, as well as the rise and constitution of their early civilisation. Climate influenced their civilisation, their culture and their way of life.

Egyptians used an instrument called a "nilometer", which was used to measure water levels. There are different types of nilometers, but in general they consisted of a series of marks on a fixed gauge, or just marks or lines on a stone that ran up through the water, or even stair waterfronts (Oestigaard 2011:17). One of the most important nilometers was located on the island of Elephantine, a place described by Imhotep for King Djoser in the IIIrd dynasty.

There is a site in the middle of the Nile called Elephantine, which is the seat from which Ra despatched life to everyone. It is the source of life, the place from which the Nile leaps forth in its flood to impregnate the land of Egypt.

MacQuitty 1976:127

Thus, this nilometer linked the flood to the primeval waters - "the source of life"-, and to the origins of the cosmos and the beginning of Egyptian civilisation. It was from the primary waters that the flood came each year to maintain the balance of the Maat.

### *2.1.2./ The balance between Culture and Nature*

This fascination with the Nile's waters is also reported to us by classical authors. Indeed, the veneration and worship of the River came from its potent fertilising capacity. Homer named the Nile *Aigyptos*, and from which the name "Egypt" derives (Macfarquhar 1966:108-116) testifying to the central importance the river occupied within the country. The ancient Egyptians simply called the Nile "the river", or "the great river", *iteru* in Egyptian (Bonnamy 2013:85).

The creative powers of the Nile are also described by Thales who is believed to have been taught by Egyptian priests (Kamil 2002:5). According to the philosophy of Thales everything came from water: water was the first element upon which the world was based (Dicks 1959:296). In addition, the Syrian author Heliodorus wrote that the Nile was called

“the giver of life”, “the saviour of all Egypt, both Upper and Lower”, “the father of Egypt”, “the creator of Egypt”, “he who brings new mud each year” (Wild 1981:94). Seneca also wrote about the importance of the silt that the Nile carried over its banks annually: “[...] it renders a two-fold service to the field [...] Egypt owes to the Nile not only the fertility of the land but the very land itself” (Wild 1981:94).

All of Egypt was a creation of the Nile: the silt prepared the Earth and the Nile’s water gave life to it - positive consequences of the annual flood, which created an extremely fertile environment. Theocritus also emphasised that “no land produces as much as Egypt when the Nile floods”, and Themistius proclaimed that the Nile was “the Father of crops” (Wild 1981:93).

Egyptians were cosmotheistic (Assmann 2005:407). The Egyptian landscape and environment were included throughout their mythology. Their personification and symbolism are present in all their creations and structures of society, starting from the sacred history of the pre-creation - the non-existent time. The non-existent state being the matrix of the cosmos, the Egyptians were then facing the essence of non-existence everywhere in the cosmos, especially during the flood. The annual flood carried with it the timeless original non-existence during which, according to a text of the XXVth Dynasty, “the earth is Nun” (Hornung 1982:179).

In the natural cycle of the year the fertile land of the Nile Valley is also submerged in the primeval flood in the form of inundation of the Nile, which “forms that which exists”, bringing to it new strength and fertility.

Hornung 1982:181

The return to the chaos of the origin of the world was brought about by the flood, it was a return to the first instant when all things were created. It invited the Egyptians to restart the cycle before the next flood and to accept the eternal recurrence of creativity. So, the symbolism of water was not only a question of human construction, but the relationship between culture and nature in which water was used as a metaphor that transcended and defined the notion of nature/culture.

## 2.2) The “Nile gods” : the source of the Flood

### 2.2.1./ *Seth and Horus as personifications of the relationship between chaos and cosmos, death and life*

One can wonder why the sun was so important in Egyptian beliefs? Indeed, in this dry and hostile desert environment the sun would naturally be seen as an evil force, while water, by contrast, would be seen as the providential and supreme source of life. However, this was not the case in Egyptian civilisation. Indeed, the sun was seen as the supreme god at the head of the pantheon sharing a complex relationship with the god Seth. Nevertheless, this celestial object was also linked to water power.

The god Seth was usually characterised as the heavenly god of fertility because “he was a god of rain, storm, lightening, thunder, and earthquakes; meteorites and thunderbolts symbolised his strength, his power to open the Earth and to fertilise it, and also his power of destruction”<sup>84</sup> (Meyerowitz 1960:75). Rain itself and the sky from which it fell, were often personified as a god (such as Seth), and the celestial gods were often the most important (Wainwright 1938:1-2). Indeed, the link between Seth and water is shown in the Pyramid Texts when an utterance states that an offering protects Osiris from the water of Seth.

Osiris Pepi Neferkare, accept these your cool waters, that it may be cool for you with Horus, in your identity of the one who comes in the cool waters: accept the outflow that comes from you. Horus has had the gods gather for you where you go; Horus has had Horus's children allotted to you where you have become immersed. Osiris Pepi Neferkare, accept your natron, that you may become divine: Nut has made you a god to your opponent, in your identity of god. Horus shall take account of you year by year, rejuvenated in your identity of the rejuvenated waters.

Pyramid Texts 125 (Pepi II)<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Seth can take the head of a hippopotamus, see Egyptology Museum University of Swansea (W458), red wooden statue of Seth. Seth is shown as a human with a hippopotamus head and wears the shandy kilt. Red was the colour of Seth, it represents *Decheret* “the red land”, synonymous of the barren desert (Bonnamy 2013:679,755). The hippopotamus is also a “chaotic” symbol. In Egypt, it was understood as a manifestation of negative forces, especially during the floods, when the animal was eating and destroying the crops. It was associated with the violence and malevolence of Seth (Carus 1900:15).

<sup>85</sup>Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p255

Moreover, in the lament of Osiris in the papyrus of Bremner-Rhind, it is said of Seth that:

He has inundated the land with his evil designs. He has felled the sky to the ground.<sup>86</sup>

Both “inundated” and “felled the sky” remind us of the hanging celestial waters which were a threat to the cosmos. These celestial waters and the flood are reminders of the manifestation of Seth linked to rain and thunder-storms.<sup>87</sup>

Ho, Neith! You shall emerge with your face that of the Seth-animal, and sit at the fore of those older than you. The sky shall become disheveled because of you, the earth shall shake because of you, and the Imperishable Stars shall be afraid of you.

Pyramid Texts 242 (Queen Neith)<sup>88</sup>

O Nile-god, the Great One of the sky in this your of [...], grant that I may have power over water just as Seth had power over the water in the eye (?) of Osiris on that night the great storm (i.e. the flood).

Coffin Texts IV 352§396

Seth, the god of rain shows a connection between the rain and the sun “the Great One”, with both being necessary for the emergence of life. Thus, Horus as the god of the sky had the role of the sun god, in his relationship with Seth, the god of rain (Oestigaard 2011:29). The river-ideology in Egypt remained celestial instead of terrestrial. Indeed, the god Horus incorporated all the qualities of the river cult ideology in the form of the sun (Oestigaard 2011:29). Indeed, Horus the Elder was originally not just the sun, but encompassed everything: he was Horus the Falcon, the Lord of Heaven, the moon and the earthly king (Anthes 1959:171)<sup>89</sup>. Horus was characterised by ablution and purity. As a reflection of this, before entering a temple the pharaoh was required to wash himself, and after death he was also washed to be cleansed before entering the heavenly kingdom

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<sup>86</sup> Faulkner, *The Bremner Papyrus I*. *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 22, p125-135.

<sup>87</sup> The sign of the nome of Seth, the nome of Oxyrhynchus, consists of two *was*-sceptres, which had headpieces shaped like the god Seth (Wainwright 1934:148). A *was*-sceptre was found in the temple of Seth at Ombos. Also, besides their function as a sceptre, the *was*-sceptre served to hold up the sky (Velde 1967:90). From that, the god Seth had the power to let the sky fall upon the earth. Furthermore, in the Book of the Dead 125, the *was*-sceptre is called “giver of winds”.

<sup>88</sup> Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p324

<sup>89</sup> Horus the falcon god was a major solar divinity and the son of Osiris. At his death he would become an Osiris, hence his bond with water (Bonnamy 2013: 423) (see Book of the Dead 64).

(Oestigaard 2011:35). The sun god was reborn each morning from the womb of the goddess Nut. Thus, water was life-giving and purifying.

This cold water of yours, O Osiris, this cold water of yours, O King, had gone forth to your son, has gone forth to Horus. I have come and I bring to you the Eye of Horus, that heart may be refreshed possessing it.

Pyramid Texts 32§22

“Cold water” represents life, but only through “the Eye”. In fact, the Eye is water. A theme found quite commonly in Egyptian mythology is that the Eye or the solar disk contained the life-giving waters that brought forth the Nile’s inundation<sup>90</sup> (Coffin Texts IV 352§396).

O Osiris the King, take the water which is in the Eye of Horus, do not let go of it. O Osiris the King, take the Eye of Horus, the water in which Thoth has seen *hrs*-scepter, a *db3*-sceptre and a mace.

Pyramid Texts 62§43

Thus, the sun was a giver of life through its water symbolism, but also a symbol of death through its association with Seth, the god of the desert. It embodied the dualism between life and death, the Nile and the desert. However, the relationship between Horus and Seth was cosmic in nature. Egypt (*Kemet*), means “black land”, probably in reference to the black soil of the alluvial plain of the Nile, standing in opposition to the “red land” (*Decheret*) of sand and stones of the desert (Bonnamy 2013:679,755). This dichotomy is reflected in Egyptian mythology when the Earth was split between Horus and Seth. The Black Land was given to Horus and the Red Land was given to Seth (Kemp 2006:21). Originally, Seth was the god of rains and storms - “a god of the blessed yet dangerous storm” (Bell 1971:24). However, as rain became rarer and the desert more sinister and hostile, Seth became the personification of evil (Bell 1971:24).

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<sup>90</sup> In Egypt, the sun is not the only celestial body associated with the Nile. The Nile is also associated with the Moon as well. In Egypt the Moon influenced the germination of seeds as well as the fertility of animals (Frankfort 1948:196) - “your water is in the sky, your thousands are on earth...” (Pyramid texts 379§667), “the waters of life which are in the sky come the waters of life which are in the earth come, the sky is aflame for you, the earth quakes at you before the god's birth” (Pyramid Texts 685§2063). From Ptolemy's description of the origin of the Nile, the Moon was also the source of the Nile, in the same way as the Sun, the body of Osiris and the island of Elephantine, the primeval waters being the source of all the water on Earth, unifying the cosmos.



As the rain grew rarer and the Egyptians came to rely more and more on the Nile, which they were in a process of taming, so Seth slipped from his ancient high estate. He, his rain and fertility rites, became a nuisance and an offence to his people until by the end he had become the personification of all evil, the Devil himself.<sup>91</sup>

Wainwright 1963:19

We understand that there was a cosmological antithetical relationship between the sun god and the rain god from whom water poured out. Seth being himself an antithesis characterised by his role as a rain god and as a desert god. However, despite this ambiguity, he shared the control of water with Horus, the god of the sun, who embodied life, the cycle of rebirth and the fertility of the Earth. Both gods identify the divine waters as a celestial element born from opposites.

### 2.2.2./ *The worshipping of Osiris and kingship*

For the Egyptians, the Nile was the “secret nature” (Kakosy 1982:296). Even if the Nile was not worshiped as a deity, the life brought by the Nile’s waters was of paramount importance, and the annual flood especially so, with its creative and regenerative powers which allowed the regeneration of life in all its forms<sup>92</sup>. This power was derived from Osiris. Indeed, in Osirian hymns, “the waters” are a reference to the annual flooding that generated fertility (Hornblower 1937:155).

Sources on the cult of the god Osiris come from three key sources: Plutarch author of *On Isis and Osiris* from the second century A.D, the Pyramid Texts from the Vth to the VIth dynasties, and illustrations of an Osirian festival in the form of reliefs on the walls of some temples, including Abydos (David 1981:120). In these sources Osiris appears as a

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<sup>91</sup> The quintessence of the god Seth is difficult to describe as his roles seem to be inimical. Scholars, like Wainwright, assume that Seth originally was a benevolent god that changed in a negative way due to a political or climatic change. However, as Velde stated, data showing that Seth was ever adored exclusively as a positive god of rain are lacking (1967:103). Even, if the link between the role of Seth and climate is not certified, we can assume though that rain and water in general were among Seth’s characteristics.

<sup>92</sup> In Egypt water and time were closely associated with the New Year which started at the beginning of the inundation during the summer, and indeed, the Egyptian word for “year” means “the rejuvenated/rejuvenating one”, which designated the inundation (Assmann 2005:359). The flood returned annually which implied that Osiris was killed and rejuvenated every year. Each new king was crowned at the same time at the start of the inundation and before the coronation, the *Mystery Play of Succession* was performed (Frankfort 1948:123-124). It also implied that the fight between Seth and Horus was re-enacted every year. Thus, from the Middle Kingdom onwards, the Osiris mysteries were acted out as a play, on a barque (see the Ikhernofret Stela from Senusret III’s reign in the XIIth Dynasty). The play was a symbol of the renewal of the cosmological cycle, and of the fight between life, creation i.e. the Nile, and death i.e. the desert, barrenness and chaos.

divine power originating from the Nile, and particularly from the waters of the flood. If the level of the Nile was low, it meant the disappearance of the god, who was then mourned, while the arrival of the flood meant the revitalisation and restoration of the god. Osiris was the god of the life-giving inundation which created fertility, thus, it wasn't the water as such which was revered, but its power of rebirth and Creation.

The more wise of the priests call not only the Nile Osiris, and the sea Typhon [Seth]; but [they call] without exception every source and power that moistens Osiris - considering [him] cause of generation and essence of seed, and Typhon everything dry and fiery, and of a drying nature generally and one hostile to moisture.

Plutarch 33:1

The sources for the cult of Osiris are both archaeological and written. The time period of the beginning of the worship of the god Osiris is uncertain, however it seems clear that his worship began to propagate from the Ist dynasty; Abydos seems to have been its first centre (David 1981:120)<sup>93</sup>. However, it was Sneferu's son during the IVth dynasty who accepted the myth of Osiris as royal dogma (Ricke 1950:218ff).

The origin of the god Osiris remains “an insoluble mystery” and Osiris could be described as a “personification of dead kingship” (Gardiner 1960:104). Osiris was a god of fertility and also the god of death. The myth of the death of Osiris recorded these two features of the god. In this myth the god Seth, the brother of Osiris and god of the desert, drowned Osiris in the Nile<sup>94</sup>. This drowning of Osiris is connected to his two roles as a god of the waters of the Nile and the Underworld. Osiris possessed generative powers personified by the rise and fall of the waters of the Nile (Troy 1986:36). Osiris was the first Pharaoh

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<sup>93</sup> Pyramid Texts 610§1716-1717: “Betake yourself to the waterway, fare upstream to the Thinite nome, travel about Abydos in this spirit-form of yours which the god commanded to belong to you; may a stairway to the netherworld be set up for you to the place where Orion is, may the Bull of the sky take your hand, may you eat of the food of the gods”. Abydos was the most fertile area of Egypt, emphasising why the Egyptians worshiped Osiris in particular in this area (Bard 1987:90)

<sup>94</sup> This later tradition comes from the Egyptian beliefs saying that the waters of the Nile were sacred (Griffiths, Osiris in Redford 2001:615-619), it appears in the Pyramid Texts (24d, 615d, 766d, 587b-588c). Another version of the New Kingdom says that Seth dismembered Osiris into 42 parts, which became the nomes of Egypt and subsequently Egypt itself (Oestigaard 2011:59). The myth of the murder of Osiris is found in a broad range of Egyptian literary styles, like the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead. The violence of Seth toward Osiris is well described in the Pyramid Texts (1008, 1033 b-c, 1500 a-b, 1255-1256 a-b, 2144 a-b).

<sup>95</sup> and was the first Pharaoh to die. His transfiguration through the inundation was the key to eternal life. It represented a dying god when the waters of the Nile receded and the seeds planted in the silt, deposited by the Nile, were celebrated as his grave. The Festival of Ploughing the Earth, *Khebs - Ta* (Bonnamy 2013:458), took place after the abatement of the inundation. The ploughing symbolised the tomb of Osiris and the preparations for sowing the seed of the next year's crop. The grain of wheat had to die in the soil before it could be reborn in the Earth in the form of a plant. This renaissance occurred in the Underworld i.e. because the seed was planted underground, it was also the realm of Osiris (Frankfort 1958:146). Thus, Osiris was a dead king in the Underworld with the power to grow seeds and control the rise and fall of the waters of the Nile (Frankfort 1958:145).

[Osiris] was a dying god in so far as the decrease of the water in the Nile, and the sowing of the grain was celebrated as his death or burial. But the realm of death is precisely the sphere of Osiris power, because it does not represent the antithesis of life but a phase through which all natural life passes to emerge reborn. The seed-corn must die in the earth to raise the crops, the Nile must dwindle in its bed to rise in the fertilising flood, the moon must wane even then sink each night in the west to enter the netherworld. It is the netherworld from which life re-emerges, which is Osiris' "realm".

Frankfort 1958:146

In her book *On Dreams and Death*, Marie Louise von Franz commented on the symbolism of vegetation.

Vegetation represents the psychic mystery of death and resurrection. Moreover, one should bear in mind that in reality all vegetation is characterised by the fact that it draws its life directly from so-called dead, inorganic matter, from light, air, earth and water.<sup>96</sup>

This is why in the Osirian mythos it was the dead god who was connected with the symbolism of life. The death of Osiris could suggest that water was a symbol of death and chaos in this context, however this perception has begun changing in favour of one of resurrection and regeneration. For example, it was believed that Osiris was buried in Memphis and that this explained why Memphis was extremely fertile (Frankfort 1948:30,31). Thus,

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<sup>95</sup> During the Pharaonic period, "the period of time when the office of kingship is ruled by the pharaoh as opposed to gods or semi-gods" (Assmann 2002:39), the Egyptian sign for "Government" was Pharaoh holding a flail in his hand. The flail was understood as a symbol for the "regulation of waters" (Weber 1968:16). The Pharaoh was linked to the characteristics of Osiris who was the first Pharaoh to become the regulator of the waters of the Nile. The king could be deified, but he wasn't like the other gods, he was an intermediary between the gods and humankind by maintaining the Maat (Baines 1995:9-10).

<sup>96</sup> Von Franz, *On Dreams and Death: A Jungian Interpretation*, p37.

if the death of Osiris ensured the annual flood, he had to be killed each year by Seth. So Seth continued to play a basic role in life-giving water, even after the loss of his personification as a rain god. Thus, it was from death that life emerged. This Egyptian concept of belief, was of primary importance in the life of an Egyptian and was inevitably linked to the waters of the Nile. According to Plutarch in *On Isis and Osiris*, Egyptians called not only the Nile, but all waters in general, “the discharge of Osiris” or “Osiris’ efflux”.

And they call not only the Nile, but also without distinction all that is moist. Osiris’ efflux, and the water-vase always heads the processions of the priests in honour of the God.

Plutarch 36.1

Thus, the ideas of regeneration and creation of new life from the Underworld are necessary in the understanding of the concepts of cosmological water symbolism in Ancient Egypt.

In the soul (of cosmos), then, Mind and Reason (Logos), the guide and lord of all the best in it, is Osiris; and so in earth and air and water and heaven and stars, that which is ordered and appointed and in health, is the efflux of Osiris, reflected in seasons and temperatures and periods.

Plutarch 49:3

O king, receive this your cold water, for you age coolness with Horus in your name of “Him who issued from cold water”. Receive your natron that you may be divine, for Nut has caused you to be a god in your name of “god”. Receive the efflux which issued from you, for Horus had caused his children to muster for you in the place where you drowned. Harrenpi recognises you, you being youthful in this your name of “Fresh Water” [...].

Pyramid Texts 423§765-767

The Nile, “fresh water” was seen as originating from the first cataract at Aswan.

O King, receive this pure water of yours which issued from Elephantine, your water from Elephantine [...].

Pyramid Texts 459§864

Thus, Osiris can appear as the Nun, the primeval waters. These waters were also under the Earth, and at the origin of everything that existed. Thus, the primeval waters were seen as the source of the waters of the flood. This relationship between Nun and Osiris, led Osiris to be identified as the “father” of the sun since it rose every morning from the

waters of Nun (Frankfort 1948:391). The Nun surrounded the Earth, and since it was associated with Osiris and the flood, it then followed the sun rising from Nun/Osiris each morning, as on the first day of Creation.

[Osiris] was born on the Abyss before the sky existed, before the earth existed, before that which was to be made firm existed, before turmoil existed, before that fear which arose on account of the eye of Horus existed.

Pyramid Texts 486§1040

The Nile was believed to have special life-giving virtues (Aldred 1984:59). The emerging vitality of the Earth, either in the form of plants or waters of the Nile, was seen as a manifestation of Osiris. The green colour of the Nile was due to malachite (a mineral), which evidently contained the “germ of life”, and was used for numerous purposes in the Osirian cult. The green colour of the skin of Osiris was the personification of malachite. The Mediterranean sea was also called the “great green” symbolising creative power. The Egyptians believed that malachite originated from the pools of heaven and vitalised the lower Nile (Mackenzie 1922:160-161). The stars were the sources of the power of malachite<sup>97</sup>.

O you who stride out greatly, strewing green-stone, malachite turquoise of (?) the stars, if you are green, then will the King be green, (even as) a living rush is green.

Pyramid Texts 350§567

The Eye of Horus is also described linked to the “greens” brought by Osiris.

I have come to my waterways which are in the bank of the flood of the Great Inundation, to the place of contentment, green of fields, which is in the horizon. I make green the herbage which is on the banks of the horizon, that I may bring greens to the Eye of the Great One who dwells in the fields. I take my seat which is in the horizon.

Pyramid Texts 317§508-509

The waters of the Nile have several names representing the different types of water and their specific qualities, and in particular the flood waters.

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<sup>97</sup> The sun dived into Nut every night to be reborn the next day. Nut being the sky goddess, her body is travelled by the stars. Nut is thus a source of life who contained the upper waters, the Nun, which surrounded the cosmos.

The Water of inundation which carried the silt was called the “pure water” or the “young water”, and it is water that was thought to be brought by Osiris or to emanate from him or to take his power from him.

Frankfort 1948:190

Horus comes and recognises his father in you, you being young in your name of “fresh water”; Horus has split open your mouth for you.

Pyramid Texts 357§589

“Young water” and “new water” brought forth the revival of the world with each new inundation. Moreover, the earth was purified by the waters of Osiris.

The canals are filled, the waterways are flooded by means of the purification which issued from Osiris.

Pyramid Texts 445§848

Thus, the waters of Osiris not only fertilised, but also purified the arable lands, linking agriculture to religion. These powers of procreation were revered in Egypt, and there was a close link between royalty and nature. The power of the buried king was seen as breaking forth from the Earth where he rested; the waters of the Nile flooded over its banks and plants sprouted out from the Earth. Osiris was buried in the Nile and was thus seen as a personification of the Nile.

If I go down into the water, Osiris will lift me up, the Two Enneads will support me, Re will put his hand on me wherever the god is. If I go down into the earth, Geb will lift me up, the Two Enneads will support me, Re put his hand on me wherever the god is.

Pyramid Texts 486§1044-1045

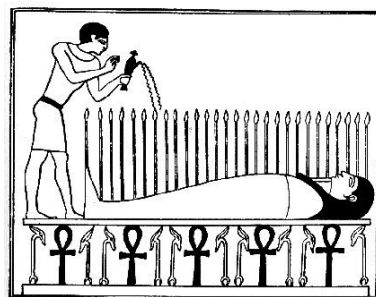


Figure 12: Osiris with wheat growing from his dead body. From a bas-relief at Philae (Wallis Budge 1911:58).

You have your water, you have your flood, the fluid which issued from the god the exudation which issued from Osiris.

Pyramid Texts 436§788

Raise yourself, O spirit of this King! Your water is yours your flood is yours, your efflux which issued from the putrefaction of Osiris is yours.

Pyramid Texts 553§1360

The idea that the doors of the sky contained water was also reported with regard to Nut.

Your water is yours, your flood is yours, your efflux which issued from Osiris is yours. The doors of the sky are opened for you, the doors of Nut are thrown open for you; the doors of the sky are open for you the doors of the firmament are thrown open for you.

Pyramid Texts 536§1291

During lustration in the Old Kingdom, the sacred waters of Elephantine were used during ceremonies (Breasted 1959:103f). Unas, the last Pharaoh of the Vth Dynasty, was associated with the god Osiris.

I have come today from out of the waters of the flood; I am Sobk, green of plume, watchful of face, raised of brow, the raging one who came forth from the shank and tail of the Great One who is on the sunshine. I have come to my waterways which are in the bank of the flood of the Great Inundation, to the place of contentment, green of fields, which is in the horizon.

Pyramid Texts 317§507-508

The Pharaoh was indeed linked to the god Osiris, the king of the Underworld and first Pharaoh. On his death the Pharaoh Osiris was offered a libation of cool fresh water (Delia 1992:182). The purpose of this ceremony was to revitalise the dead Pharaoh.

O King, take this cold water of yours, for you have coolness with Horus in your name of Him who issued from cold water; take the efflux which issued from you. Horus has caused the gods to assemble for you at the place where you have gone, Horus has caused the Children of Horus to muster for you at the place where you drowned. O Osiris the King, take your natron that you may be divine, for Nut has caused you to be a god to our foe in your name of God; Har-renpi recognises you, you being young in your name of Fresh Water.

Pyramid Texts 33§24-25

The fresh water represented the Nile efflux, both the Nile flood and the life-force of Osiris.

O King [Osiris], your cool water is the great flood which issued from you.

Pyramid Texts 460§868

In lustrating the body of the Pharaoh with the waters of the Nile of Osiris, Egyptians gave their Pharaoh the immortality of the god.

O King, you have not departed dead you have departed alive; sit upon the throne of Osiris, your sceptre in your hand, that you may give orders to the living; your lotus-bus sceptre in your hand, that you may give orders to those whose seats are hidden.

Pyramid Texts 213§134

During the Middle Kingdom, according to the Coffin Texts, the deceased was bathed in the fresh or cool water of Osiris, and was identified with him.

Osiris speaks to Horus, for he has removed the evil [which was on the King], his fourth day, he has nullified what was done to him on his eighth [day, and you have come forth] from the Lake of Life, having been cleansed [in the Lake] of Cool Water and having become Wepwewet.

Pyramid Texts 670§1978-1979

I am this great soul of Osiris whom the gods commanded to copulate with him [...] I have remade Osiris from the efflux which was in his flesh from the seed which issued from his phallus at the going out into the day that he might copulate with it. I am the son of Osiris, his heir within his rank, I am the soul within his blood [...].

Coffin Texts 94§II 67-69

During the New Kingdom and the Late Period, Osiris was still identified with the Nile, and with the deceased.

I am the Radiant One, brother of the Radiant Goddess, Osiris the brother of Isis; my son and his mother Isis have served me from my enemies who would harm me. [...] I am Osiris, Lord of persons, alive of breast, strong of hinder-parts, stiff of phallus who is within the boundary of the common folk.

The Book of the Dead, Spell 69



At the temple of Osiris at Abydos there is a scene showing Horus and Thoth pouring water over the deified king Seti I from a libation vessel.

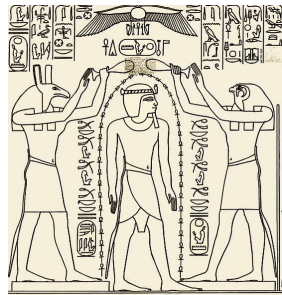


Figure 13: Horus and Seth with the King Seti I (Lepsius Projekt, Marting-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg).

The water is represented as *ankh* and *was* signs, conferring life and divine power to it. Thus, the Egyptians associated the Nile water with life and the lustration ritual with rejuvenation and immortality. The purification rites of Osiris were celebrated perhaps as early as the reign of Ramses III, as argued by Diana Delia in *The Refreshing Water of Osiris* (1992:184). Each year, they were begun during the month of Choiak, when the flood started. These rites were celebrated and performed up until the Roman Period (David 1981:124). If Osiris was the first king and was associated with the Nile, then the Nile was identified with the king and vice versa.

I have inundated the land which came forth from the lake, I have torn out the papyrus-plant, I have satisfied the Two Lands, I have united the Two Lands, I have joined my mother the Great Wild Cow.

Pyramid Texts 271§388

The king was renewed by the river.

The fields are content, the irrigation ditches are flooded for the King today. There has been given to him his power thereby, there has been given to him his might thereby.

Pyramid Texts 457§857

The king maintained the Maat, the right order which allowed nature to function unimpaired for the benefit of people. Hence, the Nile rose during the inundation so that the arable land reached its maximum extent and the people prospered (Frankfort 1948:57).

The king had defeated falsehood and established Maat, and as a consequence there were abundant inundations after which the seasons followed in orderly procession and renewed a world where life comes from death. “Thus, all the lustration and libation formulae, which identify water with putrescence and exudations from the corpse, are Osirian, replacing the older solar formulae” (Blackman 1925:208). Thus in a desert environment where the Nile was the primary source of water and life, these regenerating powers were the axis on which the cosmos was centred.

### 2.2.3./ *The god Hapi: The renewal of the cosmos and the Flood as the bond between Lower and Upper Egypt*

Osiris was not the only one to be considered as the god of the flood, the god Hapi was also primarily identified by the Egyptians as the god of the inundation of the Nile. It is often stated that Hapi was purely the inundation rather than simply the Nile itself, there are some indications of overlap, so it is possible sometimes to characterise the god as representing the divine power of the Nile in general. One of the oldest mention of Hapi is in the text of Unas king of the Vth Dynasty.

Keep watch, O messengers of Qa, keep watch, O ye who have lain down wake up, O ye who are in Kenset, O ye aged ones, thou Great Terror, who comest forth from Hapi, thou *Apu-uat*, who comest forth from the Asert Tree, the mouth of Unas is pure.

Wallis Budge 2010:42

Hapi is connected to Kenset, which is the name of the first nome of Egypt (Bonnamy 2013:681), where the First Cataract<sup>98</sup> and the Island of Philae were located. Thus, it looks like that Hapi and *Apu-uat* “the opener of the ways”, “the messenger” (Bonnamy 2013:148), were already connected in the Vth Dynasty with places which in later times the Nile was thought to rise in.

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<sup>98</sup> The ram-headed god Khnemu was the god of the First Cataract, his name is connected with the root *khnem* “to join, to unit” or “to build” (Bonnamy 2013:492). “To join” and “unit” because the cataract was the source of the two Niles and “to build” because he was the god who created humankind upon a potter’s table (Wallis Budge 2010:50). He is called the “builder of men and the maker of the gods and the Father who was in the beginning, maker of all things which are, creator of things which shall be, the source of things which exist [...]” (Wallis Budge 2010:50). The element used on the potter’s table is clay or mud coming from the Nile. Water is then re-enforced in its role of life-bringer.

The flood was called by the Egyptians “the arrival of Hapi” (Wilkinson 2003:106). Like Osiris, Hapi held the key to the balance of flooding and fertility. Hapi was represented as a swollen-bellied man with long hair, blue skin<sup>99</sup> and female breasts<sup>100</sup>, sometimes bearing offerings. Thus, Hapi was an androgynous god, both male and female, and as both a symbol of great fertility and gender neutrality of the flood.



Figure 14: Throne decoration, colossal statue of Ramses II, Luxor Temple, XIXth Dynasty. Dual depiction of Hapi - representing Upper (lotus) and Lower (papyrus) Egypt - tying the symbolic plants of the two lands together in the *sema-tawy* motif meaning “union” (Bonnamy 2013:547). The flood unifying Lower and Upper Egypt around the worship of fertility. The Nile was the natural element crossing the two parts of the country to bind them together.

As the Egyptians divided their country into two parts, the South and the North, they also divided the river, and this led to the creation of the god of the Nile of the South and the god of the Nile of the North. The Egyptians thought the Nile rose in the First Cataract, in the Qerti (Bonnamy 2013:664) or “Double Cavern” (Wallis Budge 2010:43).<sup>101</sup>

The god of the South Nile had upon his head the lotus plant, while the Northern Nile god had the papyrus plant; the former is called Hap-Reset and the latter Hap-Meht (Wallis

<sup>99</sup> In Ancient Egypt green and blue would generally have been described with the same word (Oestigaard 2012:51). Osiris had a green skin which symbolised the fertility of the Nile, the blue skin of Hapi also symbolised the same. Blue was the colour of the sky, the realms of the primordial waters and Nut, through which the sun traveled and regenerated itself at night.

<sup>100</sup> At the end of the flood, the Nile changed character and became white, muddy and creamy. This White Nile has most likely been seen as milk (Oestigaard 2011:53). The water was seen as flooding from Hapi’s breasts.

<sup>101</sup> An inscription was discovered on a rock on the Island of Sâhal in 1890 by Charles Wilbour. According to it, in the 18th year of rule of the king Tcheser from the IIIrd Dynasty, the region of the South and the Island of Elephantine, as well as the district of Nubia were ruled by the high official Mater. Tcheser sent a messenger to Mater, saying that his people had been suffering 7 years of bad harvests, and that he needed to know where the Nile rose and what god or goddess was its tutelary. Mater told him that the Nile floods from the island of Elephantine where the first city stood (Wallis Budge 2010:54). This spot at Elephantine called “Double Cavern” was in fact the “couch of the Nile” (Wallis Budge 2010:54) and from it the Nile god was waiting until the next inundation.

Budge 2010:43). Together these two figures constitute the god Hapi. In a single figure the god Hapi holds in his hand the two plants, papyrus and lotus, or two vases, from which he was believed to pour out the two Niles.



Figure 15: The Qerti or “Double Cavern” on Elephantine Island, the mythical source of Egypt’s Two Niles Hap-Reset and Hap-Meht. Under a mass of rocks, Hapi pours the two sources of the Nile out of a pair of vases, symbolised by the Nile gods of Upper and Lower Egypt. The serpent ouroboros encircles the god. In greek *ouroboros* means “to eat his tail”, and in Egyptian *sed m ro* “tail in the mouth” (Antelme and Rossini 2010:310). This expressions describe well the image of this primeval snake, mentioned in the Pyramid Texts (393§689<sup>102</sup>). The snake biting its own tail referred to the cycle of time linked to the annual flood, and the regeneration it brought every year.

Because of the importance of the Nile, the god Hapi was perhaps regarded as being as important as the sun god Ra. However, Hapi had a different nature to Ra. Indeed, the movement of the sun god was apparent to humankind, and the sun’s places of rising and setting were known, however the source of the waters of Hapi were unknown. One of the beliefs concerning the source of the flood was that it originated from the body of Osiris, as well as the ground between two mountains<sup>103</sup> near the Island of Philae, but Egyptians did not really know how the Inundation took place (Wallis Budge 2010:44). This mystery inspired profound reverence and adoration which the Egyptian’s paid to the Nile, as expressed in a hymn to the Nile, as found in a papyrus from the XVIIIth or XIXth Dynasty.

Homage to thee, O Hapi, thou appeared in this land, and thou comest in peace to make Egypt in peace to make Egypt to live. Thou art the Hidden One and the guide of the darkness on the day when it is thy pleasure to lead the same. Thou art the Waterer (or Fructifier) of the fields which Ra hath created, thou givest life unto all animals, thou makest all the land to drink unceasingly as thou descendest on thy way from heaven. [...] If thou wert overthrown in the heavens the gods would fall upon their faces, and men would perish. [...] Thou art the bringer of food , thou art the mighty one of meat and drink, thou art the

<sup>102</sup> “[...] Your tail be on your mouth, O ant-snake! [...]”.

<sup>103</sup> Qer-Hapi and Mu-Hapi (Wallis Budge 2010:44). Qer, being the Egyptian root for “cavity”, “cavern” (Bonnamy 2013:664) and *mw* being “water” in ancient Egyptian (Bonnamy 2010:260).

creator of all good things, the lord of divine meat, pleasant and choice. [...] Thou makest the herb to grow for the cattle and thou takes heed unto what is sacrificed unto every god. The choicest incense is that which followeth thee, thou art the lord of the two lands.

Wallis Budge 2010:45

From the Hymn to the Nile, we can distinguish three main characteristics of Hapi. Firstly, he is the symbol of life and the union of Egypt - “you are the Waterer” and “you are the two lands”. Secondly, through the annual flood, Hapi maintained harmony and peace in Egypt, the Flood being the basis of economy and society in Ancient Egypt - “Thou comest in peace to make Egypt in peace to make Egypt to live”. Thus, life in Egypt depended on the stability of the country. Thirdly, he was the god maintaining celestial harmony as well - “if thou wert overthrown in the heavens the gods would fall upon their faces, and men would perish”. Moreover, this indicates also the geographical position of the flood waters, which were believed to originate from the primeval water (as seen in Chapter II: Water as Creation) encircling the Earth, including the sky, the celestial realm of the gods.

Thus, the annual flood was the most important cosmogonic event in Ancient Egypt. Then, as Jan Assmann wrote in *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, “the Egyptians did not view their gods and goddesses as beyond nature, but rather in nature and thus as nature” (2003:64). Water was transformation and the source of life, but it was also a dual element that embodied order and chaos.

### **3. Water as Death: Geographical and Mythological Flood**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the king was intimately linked to the power of both the Nile and Osiris. The king being the link between humankind and the gods, it was his duty to ensure the future of his kingdom, which depended on the annual flood. The

floods could be a blessing for the Egyptians, but they could also turn into a terrible cataclysm. Indeed, the Egyptians had relatively limited control over the flood and they could not prevent an excessive rise in the Nile.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.1) Flood, Famine and divine Kingship

#### 3.1.1./ *Bad floods and Kingship: The Collapse of Egyptian society*

Assuming that the king was connected to the flood, Barbara Bell suggests that this may explain many short reigns which marked the First Intermediate Period, the Pharaohs being replaced when they failed in their mission (Bell 1971).

Ipuwer in *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* (Leiden 334) described Egypt as being affected by natural disasters and accused the king of crises affecting Egypt, however he does not mention what the king had done wrong. The papyrus of “Leiden 334” dates from 1250 B.C.E. (Quirke 2014:167), and the “Admonitions” are normally ascribed to the 18th century B.C.E (Harco 2010:83). Miriam Lichtheim describes this papyrus as a narrative on the theme of “order versus chaos” (Lichtheim 1973:150). Indeed, the king was held responsible for the maintenance of Maat, and so disorder, famine, and a failure of the flood could indicate his failure as a ruler (Bell 1971:21-23). Thus, this papyrus describes violent cataclysms in Egypt, famine, drought, escaped slaves taking wealth from the Egyptians, and death ravaging the country.

Forsooth, the Nile overflows, (yet) no one ploughs him it. Every man says: « We know not what has happened throughout the land ». Forsooth, the women are lacking and no (children) are conceived. Khnum fashions (mankind) no longer because of the condition of the land. [...] Forsooth, (men's) hearts are violent. Plague is throughout the land. Blood is everywhere. Death is not lacking. The mummy cloth speaks, before every one comes near it. Forsooth, many dead men are buried in the river; the stream is a sepulchre and the place of embalmment has become stream. [...] Forsooth, the river is blood, and (yet) men drink of it. Men beings and thirst after water. [...] Forsooth, the Desert is throughout the land. The nomes are laid waste. A foreign tribe from abroad has come to Egypt<sup>105</sup>. [...] Forsooth,

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<sup>104</sup> Their hydraulic knowledge is illustrated in the tomb of Sennedjem in the Valley of Artisans, very rich in Nilotic art. These reliefs reveal the use of the shadoof by the Egyptians (helped to draw water in the nearest irrigation canal to spread it on the field). It was used from the New Kingdom (Braudel et al. 1998:76) as well as networks of irrigation channels set up to canalise the flood, and watered the fields with water and sediments. In addition, the mace-head of the king Scorpio, the last of the Predynastic kings, describes an irrigation work which he oversaw (Saïd 1993:188-189). Irrigation basins were designed to capture the water from the flood to water the fields.

<sup>105</sup> “A foreign tribe from abroad has come to Egypt” - is an interesting point which could denote a historical fact: the collapse of the Old Kingdom followed by the First Intermediate Period. The collapse of the Old

grain has perished on every side. (People) are stripped of clothes, spices and oil. Everybody says: there is none. The storehouse is ruined. [...] Behold, Egypt has come to pour out water. He who poured water on the ground, he has captured the strong man in misery. Behold, the Serpent is taken from its hole. The secrets of the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt are divulged. [...] Behold, those of the land have become rich, and “the possessor of” property has become one who has nothing.<sup>106</sup>

These extracts of *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* unveil the misfortunes which befell the Egyptian society when the flood cycle was disturbed, either by an excessive flood - “The Nile overflows” - or a failure of the flood - “men beings and thirst after water”. We can distinguish four major points in these extracts. Firstly, the order of society, Maat, became disorder, Isfet (Bonnamy 2013:79); the balance of the society reversed, men losing their civility and the river its fertility - “forsooth, the river is blood, and (yet) men drink of it” - resulting in a reversal of the social hierarchy - “behold, those of the land have become rich, and “the possessor of property has become one who has nothing”.

Then, the land loses its fertility and the place of the water of life gives way to the barren desert - “forsooth, the Desert is throughout the land. The nomes are laid waste” - “forsooth, grain has perished on every side. (People) are stripped of clothes, spices and oil. Everybody says: there is none. The storehouse is ruined”. However, the Egyptians being bound to the earth and the water, infertility is then reflected in their society suffering through a famine - “forsooth, the women are lacking and no (children) are conceived”. The Nile was the central element of the Egyptian society, which influenced the development of

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Kingdom civilisation is generally attributed to a repeated failure of the Nile to inundate the flood plain (Bard 1999:44). Indeed, between 2250-1950 B.C.E. low inundations caused the drying of Lake Moeris (Butzer 1976:28). Additionally, a series of poor harvests could lead to several years of famine throughout the country, as all the grain that is grown and set aside to serve as seed stock will instead be consumed as food. This would be a change for power in place. Thus, times of weak central power opened opportunities for foreigners to infiltrate the country in even larger numbers than ordinarily. Moreover, Barbara Bell has argued that during the First Intermediate Period droughts were widespread, they were even more enduring and severe than the ones that occurred in Modern times (Bell 1971). In addition, Carpenter added, “enduring and disastrous destruction of the annual yield as only a drastic climatic change could have occasioned” (Carpenter 1966:18). The severe drought that seem to have occurred between 2200-2000 B.C.E., are divided on two main periods, the first from 2180-2150/2130 B.C.E. and the second around 2000 B.C.E. (Bell 1971:3,8). This study was prepared using climatic proxy data from the Fayum Oasis (Hassan 1981:1997). This scenario was repeated at the Middle and New Kingdoms. Between 1840 - 1770 B.C.E., high inundation weakened the central power of the Middle Kingdom, which was ruled by the Hyksos (Butzer 1976:29). In addition, between 1170-1100 B.C.E., low inundations accompanied the decline of the New Kingdom (Butzer 1976:56). So it is interesting to investigate the dependence of the Egyptian society upon the annual flood of the Nile.

<sup>106</sup> *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* 2§3/4/5/6/7/10, 3§1, 6§3/5, 7§4/5, 8§2 (Gardiner 1969:24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 46, 55, 61).

society, and guaranteed a future for new generations. However, the environment was linked to divine will, the Egyptians saw a bad flood as an abandonment by the gods - “Khnum fashions (mankind) no longer because of the condition of the land”.<sup>107</sup>

Additionally, a failure of the flood is a sign of decadence resulting in death - “forsooth, (men’s) hearts are violent. Plague is throughout the land. Blood is everywhere. Death is not lacking. The mummy cloth speaks, before every one comes near it. Forsooth, many dead men are buried in the river; the stream is a sepulchre and the place of embalmment has become stream”. This passage makes clear that for the Egyptians, the plague resulted in the deaths of many people whose bodies were taken by the Nile and imprisoned in the water, turning the river into blood. The blood caused all the fish to die, worsening the famine. The blood is associated with the colour red (*decheret*), symbol of violence, desert, fire, blood and death (Bonnamy 2013:755). It is the colour of the god Seth, the destroyer, the god of chaos and the desert. The water thus is transformed from an element of life to an element of death.

Finally, there is the failure of the union between the king and the gods - “behold, the Snake is taken from its hole. The secrets of the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt are divulged”. This indicates an instability of the established power, the king is no longer legitimate, partially because of the weakening of his power and his failure with the gods. From my point of view, the “snake” is a reference to the ouroboros serpent that surrounds Hapi in its cave, where the source of the Nile is located. The “snake” is the symbol of the natural cycle that maintained order. It represents the world surrounded by primary water and the link between the divine and human worlds.

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<sup>107</sup> It is important to clarify that for the Egyptians, in times of famine the gods were not present. They were more involved in the running of the cosmic cycle. Indeed, Egyptian disaster literature never indicates that any gods was concerned with, nor responsible for, famines or suffering: “the gods are neither held responsible for the disaster nor prayed for relief” (Bell 1971:14).



Thus, water belongs to the cosmic and terrestrial orders which involve Maat and Isfet. The change in nature of water depending on established harmony testifies to its transcending capacity and the central axis that it occupied in the cosmic cycle of Chaos and Creation, as well as the maintenance of divine kingship.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, the Nile was beyond the realm of the gods, which corresponded to the real and imagined cosmic environment surrounded by the primeval waters (the source of all water) which existed at the very creation of the cosmos in which the Egyptians lived. The gods are also dependent on this ontological reality - “Khnum fashions (humankind) no longer because of the condition of the land” - from which everything emerged and would eventually return to. The gods were dependant on the kings to secure the cosmos. Indeed, it was neither the god who failed in their duty of maintaining and preserving the cosmos nor humans who were not obedient enough, it was the king as the medium linking humans and gods who was at fault. The flood was seen as a disturbance of Maat, and controlling nature was at least one of the major tasks, if not the primary one, of the pharaoh's religious obligation in society and the cosmos. Changes in the water cycle in Egypt as a result of climate change would have caused changes in their religion and mythology.<sup>109</sup> Thus, irregular flooding was not only seen as a failure of the king, but also as a threat to the whole cosmos in allowing chaos to overpower order.

### *3.1.2./ The End of Time: The Flood and the Primordial Waters of Nun*

Although fascinated by the concept of immortality, the Egyptians also considered the end of all things, even of the gods. The authority of the gods was not only limited by their assets or their responsibilities, but also by time. Indeed, like all beings living in creation, the gods had a limited life expectancy<sup>110</sup>. Their existence, however, was regarded as cyclical: the sun might die each day but at some stage during the night it would start the process

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<sup>108</sup> One of the criterion for divine kingship was the capability and power to sustain and maintain cosmos. This capability was demonstrated by procuring the annual flood which enabled prosperity and welfare to the people. A bad flood was an evidence however that the king had no divine qualities, which was measured with the Nile's levels (Oestigaard 2011:64).

<sup>109</sup> Osiris was the first ruler of Egypt and the source of the inundation, he represented the potential of water involving varying from Chaos to Creation. Osiris could then be a metaphor for the powers of pharaoh, inspired by the fluctuations of the flood.

<sup>110</sup> In the same vein there is the myth of the destruction of humanity. This mythological text is the first part of “The Book of the Cow of Heaven”, which is inscribed in five royal tombs of the New Kingdom (the tombs of Tutankhamun, Seti I, Ramesses II, Ramesses III, and Ramses IV) (Lichtheim 2006:197). This myth tells

of rejuvenation to be reborn each morning, as it was for a person going through death to be reborn in the Underworld. This cyclical diversity is a key element of Creation, it is what separated it from the infinite inert and undifferentiated Nun. To remain in existence everything that existed had to be part of this cycle and by extension, everything in existence was therefore limited to the strictures of the cycle. The gods might be powerful beings but they had to follow the same rules as everything else that existed in order to remain in existence.

I possess life, because I am its lord, and my staff will not be taken away. I have passed myriad of years between myself and yonder Inert One, the son of Geb. I will sit with him in the one place, and mounds will be towns and towns will be mounds; mansion will desolate mansion.

Coffin Texts VII 467-468

At the end of the time - "I have passed myriad of years" - in millions of years, for the Egyptians, the primordial waters of Nun would reclaim the world that they created, everything would be reversed and the balance would collapse in an act of destruction initiated by Atum, the demiurge, to bring the world back to its original state (Wilkinson 2003:21). Only Atum and Osiris would remain after this cataclysm, they would still exist in the former inert waters of Nun, now transformed to the waters of Chaos. Atum would embody all of physical creation, and Osiris the force of regeneration (Wilkinson 2003:21-22). They would take the form of serpents, as symbolically representing the unformed chaos (Wilkinson 2003:22).

I will dispatch the Elders and destroy all that I have made; the earth shall return to the Abyss, to the surging flood, as in its original state.

Book of the Dead 175

As seen in *Water as Creation*, for the Egyptians there was a lower sky and an upper sky. The upper sky was believed by the Egyptians to contain the waters of Nun held back by Nut (Shaw 2014:116)<sup>111</sup>. It was the divine responsibility of Nut to ensure that Heaven

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us how the sun god Re planned to destroy the human race because humans were plotting against him and tried to rebel. For this, he sought the "Eye of Re" to destroy humankind.

"Then spoke the majesty of Nun: My son Re, god greater than his maker, more august than his creators, stay on your throne! Great is fear of you when your Eye is on those who scheme against you".

Lichtheim 2006:198

<sup>111</sup> The Primordial Waters surrounded the cosmos as seen in *Water as Creation: The Cosmological Environment*.

was based in its rightful place, Nut's strength being the only thing holding the waters of the Nun back. This explained why the sky was blue, because of the waters of Nun permanently held aloft by the strength of Nut. This ever-present threat was a reminder to the Egyptians, that chaos reigned all around the world since the pre-creation - "like the first state". The flood in Spell 175 of the Book of the Dead is not trivial. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous part (*Bad floods and Kingship: The Collapse of the Egyptian society*), a disastrous flood could prove to be a cataclysm for the Egyptian society, causing chaos; as was the case at the end of the Old Kingdom. Also, as previously seen, any water present during Creation came from the primordial waters of Nun around the world because that was the "first state" from which Creation emerged. So, from my point of view "the flood" in Spell 175 as part of end of the world makes sense, because annually the flood could be disastrous. It is a picture of the environmental determinism in the Egyptian mythology.

### 3.2) The dualism and the complementarity of the Primeval Waters, and the cosmological geography of the Underworld

#### 3.2.1./ *Crossing the Netherworld: The Lower and Upper Waterways*

Every evening the sun sank below the Egyptian horizon to enter the underground space, the Underworld, the Duat. "The Lower World" that qualified the Underworld had no real geographic location as seen in the previous section, it was only accessible by the dead or deities (Shaw, 2014:124). The Underworld existed as part of the cosmos, it was a place that the dead joined after their death. In this location, opposed to the civilised world of the living, the dead walked upside down, consuming their own waste and lived in dirt and filth (Oestigaard 2011:97). However, beyond this location there were two places known as the Fields of Reeds and the Fields of Offerings, together the heavenly paradise ruled by Osiris, a place of eternal life where the transformed deceased became ancestral spirits (Assmann 2005:213).

O Great Power who reveals the sun-disk with Re, who is in charge of the dawn-red, grant that the ferry-boat be ferried across for the spirit, for see, he has come clothed and put together; may he go down to the river-bank as a messenger of the great god; grant that the ferry-boat be ferried across for the spirit, for see, here he is.

Coffin Texts V§202

The body of water between the Underworld is both a space of death and of life, the waters being the link between the spaces of the mortals and of the divine. In order to cross it the deceased must wake the ferryman, who is reluctant to let the dead into the spheres of the living and the divine (Assmann 2005:131-133).

One lands as a praised one in Thebes,  
the nome of truth, the land of silence.  
Those who do evil do not enter you,  
the Place of Truth;  
the ferry that conveys the doers or right,  
the ferry does not convey sinners.  
Happy is he who lands there!  
He will be a divine ba like the Ennead.<sup>112</sup>

The ferryman is called Mahaf or Aken, the “one who looks around” (Bonnamy 2012:247).

Oh Mahaf, as you are provided with life, awaken Aqen for me, for see, I have come.

Book of the Dead 99

[...] O Ferryman of the sky in peace!  
O Ferryman of the Nūt in peace!  
O Ferryman of the gods in peace!

Pyramid Text 270§383

In utterance 270 cited above, the celestial ferryman is given the epithet: the ferryman of Nut, and the ferryman who transports the gods in his boat. In utterance 519 below, the ferryman is linked to the gods again, due to the fact he was the gatekeeper of Osiris.

O *Hr.f-h3.f* (Mahaf), gate-keeper of Osiris, way to Osiris: Let me fetch for the King this boat of yours in which your pure ones are ferried across in order to obtain for you the cold water at the (polar) quarter of the Imperishable Stars, so that I may ferry across in it together with that head-band of green and of red cloth which has been woven from the Eye of Horus in order to bandage therewith that finger of Osiris which has become diseased.

Pyramid Texts 519§1201-1202

Additionally, utterance 359 reveals that the ferryman was aiding the crossing of the dead and the crossing of the sun god Re to the East through the “Winding Waterway”. From the sunset in the West, Mahaf would make the crossing with the god and the dead,

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<sup>112</sup> Papyrus de Leiden I, 350 VI 9-10 (Assmann 2001:21).

not just to the Imperishable Stars, but beyond that to the East, where the sun was reborn each morning. He was the link between the domain of the dead in the West and the divine realm in the East.

O Re, command me to Mahaf, the ferryman of the Winding Waterway, in which he ferries the gods to yonder side of the Waterway to the eastern side of the sky, so that he may ferry me over to yonder of the Winding Waterway, to the eastern side of the sky [...].

The Pyramid Texts 359§599

The West was seen as the gateway to the Underworld, the beginning of the journey for both the sun and the deceased. During the New Kingdom inside Rameses' II tombs, crossing to the West is described as the "Great ferry". For instance, in TT 133 the boat which carried the coffin is apparent with the Great Ferry which the deceased used for the transition from the realm of death to the Underworld (Barthelme 1992:19). Thus, the crossing of a river or any other body of water was interpreted as a passage which was only granted to the righteous.

Fare crosse, Great Ferry of the West.  
Come! Fare in peace a cross to the West.  
I gave bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and clothing to the naked.<sup>113</sup>

The crossing towards the West was seen as a transition or passage into a sage and divine sphere that only the righteous could access, like a procession ritual. Crossing a body of water was the way to access the Underworld, as with crossing the Nile from a city in the East to the shore of the necropolis on the West bank where the sun set and entered the Underworld. Thus, the East became the link between the two spaces, as represented in the inner circle of figure 11, with two hieroglyphs symbolising water in front of the two jackals, all facing two symbols for "grave" or "chapel".<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Barthelme, *Der Übergang ins Jenseits*, p19.

<sup>114</sup> As explained in « 1.2.3./ Waters as a link between the Celestial, Terrestrial and Chthonian Realms ».

### 3.2.2./ *The Sun's Journey in the Waterways of the Netherworld*

At the end of each day, the goddess Nut swallowed the sun in the West, which would become red before disappearing, plunging the world into darkness. The reddish colour of the sun announced the danger and the journey awaiting it in the Underworld. It was at this time that a new world appeared.

Treatise of the hidden region,  
the position of the Ba-souls, the gods,  
the shadow, Akh-spirits (the blessed dead), and what is done.  
The beginning is the horn of the West,  
the gate of the western horizon;  
the end of the Unified Darkness,  
the gate of the western horizon.  
To know the Ba-souls of the Netherworld,  
to know what is done,  
to know their transfiguration for Re,  
to know the secret ba-souls,  
to know what is the hours and their gods,  
to know what he calls to them,  
to know the gates and the ways upon which the great god passes,  
to know the courses of the hours and their gods,  
to know the flourishing and the annihilated.<sup>115</sup>

In the night sky, the Egyptians guessed the road taken by the sun which followed the “Winding Waterway” joining a river, the celestial primeval waters contained by Nut, on which the solar boat sailed at night to be reborn in the East (Shaw 2014:118-119). The Winding Waterway divided the Underworld into two parts: The Fields of Reeds and the Fields of Offerings. It also symbolises the body of water where Mahaf, the celestial ferryman, dwelt.

See I have come, having set down as Re. I cross the Winding Waterway to the north of the sky [...].

Coffin Texts IV§26

The Nurse-canal is opened,  
The Winding Waterway is flooded,  
The Fields of Rushes are filled,  
That I may be ferried over to the eastern wide of the sky,  
To the place where the gods were born,  
And I was born there with them


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<sup>115</sup> Schweizer, *The Sungod's Journey through the Netherworld*, p23.

As Horus, as the horizon-dweller.

Pyramid Texts 265§352

Rolf Krauss in *Astronomische Konzepte* studied the Winding Waterway. He argues that this figure represents a strip of water winding through the sky from the East to the West, and that it reflects the ancient Egyptian's observation of the ecliptic, the path which the sun, the moon and the visible planets follow in their motion across the sky<sup>116</sup>. The Winding Waterway can also explain the division between two skies. According to Krauss the region north of the ecliptic (The Winding Waterway) was called the Fields of Offerings, the home of the Imperishable Stars, while the area south of the ecliptic (The Winding Waterway) was called the Fields of Reeds, and the home of the Unwearying Stars. The aim of the deceased was to cross the Winding Waterway with the ferryman from the South to the North in order to reach the Fields of Offerings (Krauss 1997:14-27).

Krauss argues that the Winding Waterway was written with the sign *mr*  (Krauss 1997:23), which according to Krauss is not straight, but wavy and shifting. Additionally, according to the *Gardiner's Sign List*, “*mr*” is used with words referring to lakes, rivers and canals (Gardiner 1957:N 36). Furthermore, Geßler-Löhr argues that *mr* refers specifically to running water (Geßler-Löhr 1983:21). This would indicate the aquatic, winding and shafting nature of the Winding Waterway. Thus, Krauss argues that the Winding Waterway follows a winding and shifting course in Egypt, like the Nile, as the geographical landscape didn't allow a straight course to exist (Krauss 1997:24 n°58). Krauss concluded that the Winding Waterway ran from the South to the North of the sky, and that it had two banks: the eastern and western banks.

The deceased travelling with Re crossed the Winding Waterway from the southern side of the sky to reach the Imperishable Stars in the northern side of the sky to find righteousness and abundance (Krauss 1997: 21).<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Kees was the first one to argue that the Winding Waterway was in the eastern horizon (1956:110).

<sup>117</sup> Krauss' arguments concerning the geographical situation of the Winding Waterway is interesting in a way that he is suggesting a kind of map or plan of the Winding Waterway from textual sources. However, considering the shifting nature of the Winding Waterway, it is extremely difficult to give any specific location to it. Eltayeb Sayed Abbas argues that the Winding Waterway could indeed follow the seasonal movement of the sun during the different seasons of the year (Abbas 2010:26).

My ropes are knotted, my ferry-boats are made ready for the son of Atum, who is hungry and thirsty and hungry on this southern side of the Winding Waterway. O Thoth, you who are in the region of the shade of your bush, put me on the tip of your wing on yonder northern side of the Winding Waterway.

Pyramid Texts 555§1376-1377

What one can distinguish in the study of the Winding Waterway is that water both in the human world and the Underworld was the primary means of transport in all the cosmos. As the Nile was a major part in the life of the ancient Egyptians, the river<sup>118</sup> of the Underworld was also the path that the deceased and the sun god travelled. Moreover, this strengthened the role of water as the link between the worlds. It acted as an unshaped, divine and neutral link that the underground and mortal worlds had in common, recalling the necessary harmony needed to maintain Creation.

### 3.3) The Fight between Order and Chaos: The twelve hours of the Book of the Amduat: details from the First, Sixth and Seventh hours

The upper and lower waters surrounded the cosmos and could be sailed upon. The sun god Re, the cosmic force responsible for ensuring the sun disc's circuit each day, travelled from the eastern horizon to the western horizon on his boat during day light. During his nightly journey the sun was renewed and transformed in the upper primeval waters of the Nun. The sun, while travelling between the eastern and the western horizons, spent the entire night in the body of Nut following the Winding Waterway where the upper primordial waters were located, gestating in her womb, ready to be reborn rejuvenated in the morning (as shown in figure 11).

We live again anew, after we enter the primeval water, and it had rejuvenated us into one who is young for the first time. The old man is shed, a new one is made.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> The river or body of water in the Underworld is not named. We only know that it is part of the Duat. However, as seen in the previous section, the Nun was surrounding the cosmos and linked the different spaces of the cosmos together. It is possible that the river of the Underworld was part of the Nun.

<sup>119</sup> Papyrus Chester Beatty IV, recto, 11, 8-9 (2005:184).



However, this renewal wasn't guaranteed, as every night the sun god and his followers fought a great battle against the proponents of disorder and chaos, the snake Apophis or Apep (Bonnamy 2013:841)<sup>120</sup>. These events were spread through the twelve hours of the night and are recorded in the Book of the Underworld or Amduat - The Book of the Hidden Chamber.<sup>121</sup>

This god enters through the western gateway of the horizon.  
Seth stands on the riverbank.  
120 miles is the journey through this gateway,  
before the barque reaches those in the netherworld.<sup>122</sup>

Seth, the brother and the murderer of Osiris allied with Re to fight Apophis. Apophis was a primordial serpent, the incarnation of the negative forces of the uncreated, chaos and the enemies of Re, whom Apophis tried relentlessly to prevent the reappearance of. Thus, two concepts are opposed here: on one side the preservation and continuation of the renewal of Creation by Re, and on the other side the threat of inaction and death.

Get back! Crawl away! Get away from me, you snake!  
Go, be drowned in the Lake of the Abyss, at the place where your father commanded that the slaying of you should be carried out.

Book of the Dead 39

Apophis was closely related to the primeval waters. He was referred to as being born in the water in the Neith cosmogony of Esna. Thus, water being the primordial element, Apophis is seen as a necessary evil, present since the beginning of time and part of the cycle maintaining harmony in the cosmos. Apophis embodied the fear of the unknown manifested for the Egyptians.

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<sup>120</sup> Snakes living and crawling on the ground are close to the Duat. They were a specific symbol referring to the Underworld. They were connected to the spirit of the earth. In spell 87 of the Book of the Dead, the deceased wants to be transformed into a "son of the earth", that is, into a snake. He hopes to share the regenerative power of the snake god.

I am the « son of the earth »,  
I am the snake which is within the limits of the earth;  
I pass the night and am reborn,  
renewed and rejuvenated every day. (Hornung 1979:177)

<sup>121</sup> The Book of the Netherworld was found at the Valley of the King in KV34, at the end of the tomb of Tuthmosis III (New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty), his burial chamber where the king once rested, surrounding by the Amaduat decorating the walls (Schweizer 2010:23).

<sup>122</sup> Schweizer, *The Sun god's journey through the netherworld*, p33.

Now she (i.e. Neith) removed the umbilical cord of her son whom she had given birth to in the water, and it became a serpent of 120 cubits. It was called Apophis.<sup>123</sup>

For the ancient Egyptians, this was one reminder of the traditional struggle between order and chaos that maintained cosmic balance in Creation during the mythical age of the cosmos, beyond which there was only chaos and darkness.

Figure 16: Book of the Amduat - Middle Register, Upper Part. Scene from the first hour of the sun god's



journey into the Underworld. The barge of Re and deities following two representations of Maat, the personified order of the world who extended beyond death and guided the sun god through the Underworld. She was symbolised by the two feathers on her head, symbolising totality. Next comes Osiris, then a goddess with lion's head, a ram-headed god, four human stelae, an anonymous erect serpent on its tail and a god carrying a magic wand (Warburton et al. 2007:25).

In this figure, Maat the daughter of Re, reflects social justice and the wisdom of Creation to which the Underworld belonged as well. She recalls the return of the fight between the forces of chaos and order, maintaining and renewing Creation.

During the sixth hour in the depths of the Underworld, at the time when the sun god reached the limits of the primeval waters where Apophis was threatening Creation, the sun god is found in its encircled Khepri form, a huge ouroboric<sup>124</sup> and multi-headed serpent with many faces. This symbolised the renewal of light in the depths of the Underworld, as well as the life-giving and creative powers of Nun.

This is the corpse of Khepri as his own flesh,  
 « Many-faced » guards him.  
 He is like this:  
 His tail is in his mouth.  
 What he has to do: He is stretched out beneath this image.  
 The entire West comes to him,  
 While he cannot go to any other place of the Netherworld.  
 The Voice of Re is what comes (to) the image which is in him. <sup>125</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Joachim F. Quack, *Die Nabelschnur des Re*, p378.

<sup>124</sup> The ouroboros is a snake that bites its own tail. It comes from the greek word οὐροβόρος ὄφις « tail - devouring snake ». In the Underworld, the ouroboros symbolises the serpent Mehen, the protector of Re during his crossing of the Underworld (Antelme & Rossini 2007:335).

<sup>125</sup> Warburton et al, *The Egyptian Amduat*, p200.

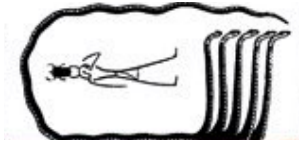


Figure 17: The Book of the Amduat - Middle Register. At the end of the register a multi headed serpent encircles the lying corpse of the Sun god, with scarab over his head (Khepri) (Warburton et al. 2007:200).

This symbol of protection of Re, comes from just before the seventh hour at the time when Apophis tries to stop the sun god by obstructing the boat navigating on the primeval waters, in an attempt to put an end to the order of the cosmos.

The name of the hour of the night guiding this great god is repelling the « Evil one » and beheading « Horrible of face » (ie. Apophis).<sup>126</sup>

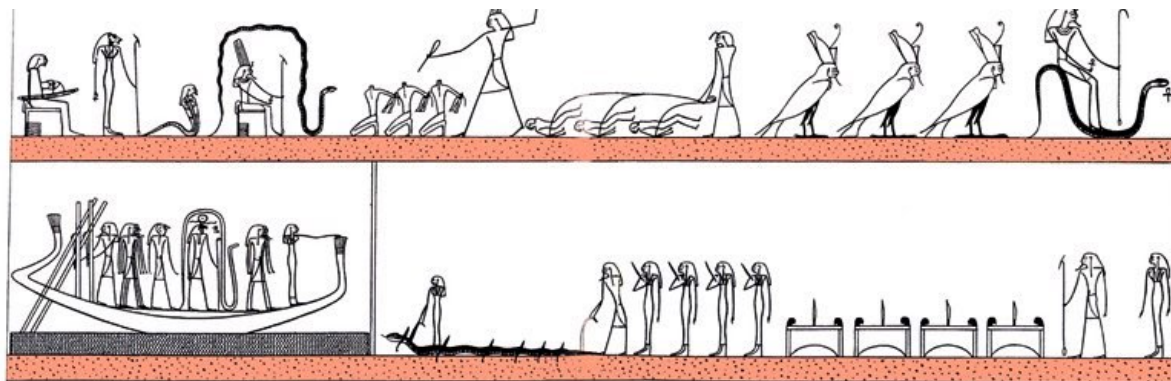


Figure 18: Seventh Hour, Upper and Middle Registers. The central subject of this hour is the triumph over all hostile forces represented by Apophis, and by the enemies threatening Osiris (Warburton et al. 2007:214-215).

In the upper register Osiris can be seen seated on a throne in his function as judge of the dead. He is surrounded and protected by the Mehen serpent, while three of his enemies are decapitated before him. In this scene the serpent Mehen is a symbol of regenerative energy, it embodies the spirit of nature and vegetation linked to Osiris, who was known as a vegetal god linked to the annual flood. In the middle register, before the boat of Re, separated by a wall, stands Apophis. The sun god is protected by Mehen. In this scene

<sup>126</sup> Ibid p218.

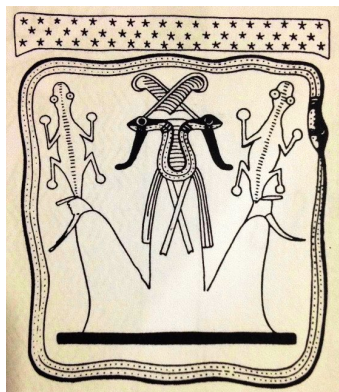
Apophis and his sandbank “bringing water”, on which he is lying after swallowing up the waterway of Re’s barge. The evil snake knows that water is the path guiding the rejuvenation of the sun.

Mysterious way of the West, upon which the great god passes in his protected bark.  
He proceeds on this way, which is without any water, without (the possibility) of towing.<sup>127</sup>

The Book of the Amduat describes the serpent Apophis in this scene (Figure 18) of the middle register. Insisting on the monstrosity and deformity of Apophis, whose measurements are disproportionate.

He is like this at his sandbank which is in the Netherworld.  
« Bringing water » is the name of this sandbank,  
it is 440 cubits in length and 440 cubits in breadth.<sup>128</sup>

As described in the previous section, the Old Kingdom ended in turmoil, mostly because of bad floods and prolonged periods of widespread famine to Egypt. Then, “sandbank” was a metaphor for famine, as it represents the low Nile when the sandbank was not covered by water (Assmann & Jenkins 2003:10). Then, by swallowing water, Apophis became the symbol of a natural disaster and embodied the collapse of society.<sup>129</sup>



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<sup>127</sup> Ibid p218.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid p231-232.

<sup>129</sup> As seen above, the serpent Apophis is a malevolent demon. However, he has been represented as a serpent biting its own tail (figure 19, Keel 1978:42), like the ouroboros serpent Mehen protecting Re from Apophis (figure 17). The ouroboros may be destructive like Apophis or protective as Mehen. The serpent that bites its own tail has the same dual meaning as water. It is both a propitious and a cataclysmic symbol.

Figure 19: Ouroboros serpent Apophis represents the edge of the world, like the cosmological ocean surrounding humankind's world. The sky is represented above as a vault containing stars. The double figure with the serpents head represents Geb, the Earth god and Osiris holding the hieroglyph for "much, numerous" (lizards). The double-body represents the hieroglyph "mountain", which represents the earth, like the primeval mount of Creation appearing from Nun. This is a representation of the tripartite world (Heaven, Earth and Sea), in which the sea represents a delimitation for the Earth (Keel 1997:42).<sup>130</sup>

However, Apophis, despite his enormous size as described in *The Book of the Amduat*, is in difficulty in this bas-relief (figure 18), his body is being pierced with knives to free the water that he swallowed<sup>131</sup>. Two deities at each end of his body are holding him for slaughter. At the left of this scene four goddesses are standing ready to put an end to the threat: "She-who-binds-together", "She-who-cuts", "She-who-punishes", and "She-who-annihilates" (Schweizer 2010:138).



Then the flesh (of Re) swallows his eye in the earth till he passes Apophis.  
 Then, "She who lets the throat breathe" (Selkis) throws the lasso at the head,  
 while "He above his knives" places the punishing rope at his feet,  
 after Isis and the Eldest Magician have taken his strength by their magic.  
 He who knows it upon earth is one whose water "Horrible of face" cannot drink.  
 She who binds together, She who cuts, She who punishes, She who annihilates.  
 There are the goddesses who punish Apopis in the Netherworld  
 and repel the assault of the enemies of Re.  
 They are like this, carrying their punishing knives,  
 to punish Apopis in the Netherworld, day after day.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Apophis in the figure above is represented as the end of the mainland and the cosmological sea surrounding the Creation. What is disturbing in this figure is the dual identity of Apophis through two concepts: the unknown and harmony. He embodies the unknown to the Egyptians, a different place where the rules of Egyptian society do not apply such as Re closing his eye when he passes in front of Apophis, his light has no authority in the field of the demon - "Then the flesh (of Re) swallows his eye in the earth till he passes Apophis". In his function of the incarnation of the unknown, Apophis becomes the primordial ocean of the Nun. The Nun around the world, is also his boundary. Then, Apophis is also a symbol of harmony as he contains in his centre the Creation: the Earth and the Underworld, represented by Osiris and Geb. He is therefore a major part in the maintenance of the tripartite harmony. Apophis therefore symbolically embodies the Nun in which he lives, and which he tries to swallow during the passage of Re. Moreover, in the cosmogony of Esna, Apophis was born into the water. Apophis then is a very close link with the primeval waters which he shares the benevolent and malevolent aspects.

<sup>131</sup> As spell in the Book of Overthrowing Apep describes his murder:

Seize! Seize! O butcher.  
 Fell the enemy of Re with your knife!  
 Seize! Seize! O butcher.  
 Fell the enemy of <Pharaoh> with your knife.  
 These are your heads, O rebels,  
 This is that head of yours, O Apep,  
 Which the warrior has cut up with his knife.

[...] (Faulkner, Papyrus of Bremner-Rhind, 45, lines 21-22-23, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 23 (1937), 168)

<sup>132</sup> Ibid p238-239.

“He who knows it upon earth is one whose water Horrible of face cannot drink”, is a reference to the primeval waters or the water of life from which Creation’s waters come. These waters will not cease to flow, and can’t be drunk by Apophis because he is being destroyed.

Seth will project a lance of iron against him and will make him vomit up all that he has swallowed.

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However, his success would result in the collapse of the Creation process and a complete relapse into the unshaped and unconsciousness of the first time of the cosmos. Also, “then the flesh (of Re) swallows his eye in the Earth till he passes Apophis”, indicates that the sun god closed his eye, the light of the sun, to protect it from the darkness.

Hail Ra, thou art radiant in thy radiance,  
While there is darkness in the eyes of Apophis!  
Hail Ra, good is thy goodness,  
While Apophis is bad in its badness!<sup>133</sup>

“While there is darkness in the eyes of Apophis” opposed to the brightness of the eye of Re, the “darkness” could represent the night, during which the sun god must fight to be reborn, or it could be a reference to the darkness of the primeval waters of the Nun. Apophis dwelt in the Underworld and drank the water of the Nun, making him an embodiment of the primeval water that the sun god had to cross to reach rejuvenation. As stated before, chaos cannot be eliminated because it was a part of the order of the cosmos. Thus, Creation entails destruction and rejuvenation through water.

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<sup>133</sup> Brugsch, *Religion und mythologie der alten Aegypter*, p767

## 4. Conclusion

In this chapter dedicated to the symbolism of water in the Egyptian cosmological, the same primary themes, mythological and environmental, emerged as were found in the Babylonian cosmological cycle.

Firstly, the four main cosmologies studied in this chapter (Hermopolitan, Heliopolitan, Memphite and Theban) emphasise the importance of the blend between profane and sacred as the basis of the essence of non-existence (i.e. the Nun), but also of celestial naturalism in the sense of nature as a manifestation of the divine. This can be seen in the personification of geography through the gods embodying the natural world, for example in the characterisations of Nut, Hapi and Osiris. Water brought together these cosmogonies as a vector of the tripartite world, in a cyclic vision of time following the bio-cosmic rhythm. Like the Babylonians, all these cosmogonies sought to demonstrate the universal dynamic by describing the antagonistic mechanism and opposed forces of both creative and destructive potentials. Thus, it shows the emergence of a pattern, testifying to their desire to describe their environment through their mythology.

Secondly, water represented as a natural element through the symbolism it embodies in the Egyptian creation corpus testifies to the knowledge the Egyptians possessed of their own natural environment, for example the reference to the Winding Waterway as an image of the ecliptic and as moving water, but also the Primordial Hill as an image of the mounds of mud carried and deposited by the Nile during the flood. So, water symbolism was not only a question of human mythological corpora, but also the relationship between nature and culture in which water was used as a metaphor to transcend and define the Egyptian civilisation.

In chapter three devoted to a comparative study between Babylonian and Egyptian water symbolism in the cosmological cycle, I will examine and review the arguments made in the first two chapters, to highlight the common aqueous cosmographical factors shared by these two civilisations, in order to emphasise water as a hierophany and its cosmographical and ceremonial roles in the tripartite Babylonian and Egyptian cosmoses.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Babylonian and Egyptian Water Symbolism in the Cosmological Cycle: Comparative Study**



The Egyptian and Babylonian accounts of the cosmos are based on the idea of primordial chaos, darkness and the initial absence of heaven and earth i.e. the cosmological cycle. These accounts are mythological narratives: the Enûma Eliš, the Memphite, Theban, Heliopolitan and Hermopolitan Egyptian cosmogonies are presented and compared in this dissertation. In this chapter I aim to highlight the common themes of water symbolism in Babylon and Egypt cosmological cycles discussed in Chapters One and Two, under the influence of their natural environments and the human psychological response to similar environments. Nevertheless, the main difficulty in this attempt to compare these myths is the conflicting views between the multiple Egyptian liturgical creation myths and the single entrenched Babylonian canonical epic.

## **1. Water as Creation: Pre-Creation and Creation stages in Babylonian and Egyptian Creation Myths**

Myths	Texts
Enûma Eliš I	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When the heavens above were yet unnamed,</li> <li>2. And the name of the earth beneath had not been recorded,</li> <li>3. Apsu, the oldest of beings, their progenitor,</li> <li>4. “Mummu” Tiâmat, who bare each and all of them--</li> <li>5. Their waters were merged into a single mass.</li> <li>6. A field had not been measured, a marsh had not been searched out,</li> <li>7. When of the gods none was shining,</li> <li>8. A name had not been recorded, a fate had not been fixed</li> </ol>
The “Bilingual” Version of the Legend of Creation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The holy house, the house of the gods in the holy place had not yet been made.</li> <li>2. No reed had sprung up, no tree had been made.</li> <li>3. No brick had been laid, no structure of brick had been erected.</li> <li>4. No house had been made, no city had been built.</li> <li>5. No city had been made, no creature had been constituted.</li> <li>[...]</li> <li>10. All the lands were sea</li> </ol>
Hermopolitan (Book of the Dead 17)	I am the Great God [Nun], the self-created.

Heliopolitan (Pyramid Text 486§1040)	Greetings, what that Shu fetched and He of the Trickle bore, in whom Geb cleaned his limbs when min were pervaded with fear and hearts were pervaded with ferocity, who were born in Nu when the sky h not yet come into being, when the earth had no yet come into being, when the establishment (of the wor had not yet come into being, when disturbance had not yet come into being, when the fear that came ir being because of Horus's eye had not yet come into being.
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Myths relating to the beginning of the cosmos are the most prominent feature in Babylonian and Egyptian mythologies. They constitute the very beginning of “the sacred history” (Eliade 1967:23), looking for a universal dynamic through water.

Despite their narrative differences, these two creation corpora share numerous characteristics and archetypes, starting with the pre-creation state which they share, describing water symbology as an unformed universe composed of a large surface of water.

### 1.1) The Potential of Water: The primordial deities

In the table above, from their descriptions of the pre-creation state, we can observe that the Babylonians and the Egyptians shared a dualistic vision of the universe; everything negative had a positive alter-ego. By representing contrasting concepts, both civilisations were demonstrating their knowledge of the known world. The major forces in opposition during the pre-creation state were: chaos opposing creation, or disorder versus order. This point emphasised the civility of the cosmos after its creation, compared to the pre-creation state. Words like “fear”, “ferocity” and “unnamed” denote a lack of creativity and wildness. However, words like “fields”, “gods”, “house”, “self-created” and “born”, remind life and civilisation. Both civilisations’ myths were based on nothingness, however as seen, nothingness was not an absolute and it could evolve into a becoming, as indicated by “their waters were merged into a single mass” (Enûma Eliš I:5). Both corpora then were based on a concept of complementary dualism which represented reciprocal interaction throughout nature, relating to a cycle, where opposing forces do not clash in opposition but instead exchange reciprocally to promote stabilisation. Within every independent entity lies a part of

its opposite. All opposites were manifestations of water and the power of creation, not independent of one another, but rather a variation of the same unifying force throughout all of nature. In order to give sense to their environmental phenomena, both civilisations anthropomorphised natural events. The potential of water was personified by primordial deities.

Gods and Goddesses	Myths	Texts
Aspu and Tiamat	Enûma Eliš I	<p>9. The gods came into being in the midst of them.            10. The god Lakhmu and the goddess Lakhamu were made to shine, they were named.            11. [Together] they increased in stature, they grew tall.            12. Anshar and Kishar came into being, and others besides them.            13. Long were the days, the years increased.            14. The god Anu, their son, the equal of his fathers, [was created].            15. The god Anshar made his eldest son Anu in his own image.            16. And the god Anu begat Nudimmud (Ea) the image of himself.</p>
Nun and Nunet Amun and Amunet Heh and Hehet Kek and Keket	Hermopolitan (Pyramid Texts 301§446)	<p><i>To say the words :</i>            You have your bread-loaf, O Nun and Nanuet!            You pair of the gods,            who joined the gods with their shadow.            You have your bread-loaf, O Amun and Amunet !            You pair of the gods,            who joined the gods with their shadow.            You have your bread-loaf, O Atum and Double-Lion !            Who yourselves created your two gods and their bodies,            that is Shu and Tefenet, who made the gods,            who begot the gods and established the gods.</p>

<b>Gods</b>	<b>Myths</b>	<b>Texts</b>
Apsu	Enûma Eliš I	61. He (Ea) designed and implemented a comprehensive plan. 62. He skilfully prepared it, his outstanding holy spell. 63. He recited it, made it rest on the water. 64. He poured sleep over him (Apsu) while he was resting peacefully. 65. When he put Apsu to sleep, pouring out slumber, 66. Mummu, the advisor, through lack of sleep was in a stupor. 67. He (Ea) untied his (Apsu's) bands and then removed his tiara. 68. Then he took his aura and he himself put it on. 69. After he defeated and slew Apsu, 70. He fettered Mummu putting a stop to him. 71. He erected his home on Apsu, 72. grasped Mummu holding his leash. 73. After Ea defeated and vanquished his enemies, 74. had established his victory over his foes, 75. He rested peacefully inside his cella. 76. He named it Apsu, whose shrines he appointed. 77. There he established his bed-chamber. 78. Ea and Damkina, his spouse, there dwelt in splendour
Marduk	Enûma Eliš IV	144. He founded E-Sharra, a place like unto it, 145. The abode E-Sharra, which he made to be heaven.
	Enûma Eliš V	2. He set in heaven the Stars of the Zodiac which are their likenesses.
	Enûma Eliš VI	107. [On] men whom he hath formed, the created things fashioned by his fingers.
	The “Bilingual” Version of the Legend of Creation	13. The E-sagil where in the midst of the Deep the god Lugal-dul-azaga dwelleth, 14. Babylon was made, E-sagil was completed. 15. The gods the Anunnaki he created at one time. 16. They proclaimed supreme the holy city, the dwelling of their heart's happiness. 17. Marduk laid a rush mat upon the face of the waters, 18. He mixed up earth and moulded it upon the rush mat, 19. To enable the gods to dwell in the place where they fain would be. 20. He fashioned man. [...] 22. "He created the beasts of the field and [all] the living things in the field. 23. He created the River Idiglat (Tigris) and the River Purattu (Euphrates), and he set them in their places, 24. He proclaimed their names rightly.
Nun	Hermopolitan (Pyramid Texts 211§132)	I was conceived in the Abyss, I was born in the Abyss.

Gods	Myths	Texts
Amun	Theban The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re	Hail to you — by all flocks, Jubilation to you — by all foreign lands, To the heights of heaven, to the breadth of the earth, To the depths of the ocean, The gods bowing to Your Majesty, Exalting the might of Him who created them, Rejoicing at the ap- proach of Him who begot them, Saying to you: “Come in peace, Father of the fathers of all the gods, Who suspended heaven, who laid down the ground.”

The male primeval gods dominate in both corpora. However, they have females alter-ego. These primordial couples were at the origin of the cosmos. We can see here three major archetypes<sup>134</sup> appearing: The Father, the Mother and the Children, all resulting from the potential of the primordial state. Could this be a display of a natural process of human sexuality? Possibly. Tiamat and Apsu “mixing their waters” and the four primordial Egyptian couples, embody the potential of the cosmos before its creation. Both corpora are a divination of natural processes, the archetype of the Primordial Waters is an image of the Flood and of the unstoppable and shapeless aspects of water. The main difference between these two corpora lies in the state of creation. Indeed, as shown in the table above, in the *Enûma Eliš* the cosmos was already starting to be established, beginning with the celestial realm. However, in the Hermopolitan myth the primordial gods embody the pre-creation state, waiting to start the cosmos. We have then the contrast between these two myths in the order of action of the appearance of the cosmos: the potential of the pre-creation state dwelling in the primeval waters, and then the realisation of this potential at its emergence from the waters. Thus, they both bring forward the theology of the natural environment, or more precisely a celestial naturalism, in the sense of nature as a manifestation of the divine, a personification of natural processes, and more specifically of water as a vector of evolution.

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<sup>134</sup> The psychological approach to comparative mythology was introduced by Adolf Bastian who influenced the work of Carl Jung on the study of the unconscious (Bastian 1881:177). Jung assumed that similarities found in myths are due to the homogeneity of the human psyche, the universal features of the human mind that forever produce the same images or archetypes as Jung called them. Archetypes “are those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration” (Jung 1959:5). These archetypes or patterns are present in the unconscious levels, and “water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious” said Jung (1969:18).

In the third table above, I emphasise the autogenous potential of water portrayed by male primordial deities, all being masters of the primordial waters. They embody creative potential, while primordial female deities play a more ambiguous part in the Creation story. The male deities settled the tripartite world with the primordial power of water: the Earth, the Cosmos and the Underworld, like a king directing his kingdom. In my opinion Apsu concretises and announces the tripartite world: Earth, Heaven and the Underworld. Firstly, he is life because he is the god of fresh water, like the Euphrates on Earth, secondly he is death because he was killed by Ea, i.e. the Underworld, and thirdly he is “reborn” as the residence of Ea, i.e. the divine realm. Apsu characterises the cycle of life through water symbolism. Similarly, Marduk arranged the division of the cosmos into “worlds”: Heaven and Earth. The border between the sacred and the profane is blurred, being separate but both of divine origin as well. The celestial realm was the first to be created, to show the superiority of the gods as being the first inhabitants of the cosmos. In the “Bilingual Version of the Legend of Creation”, water is explicitly used as a creative element. Water being the primordial element, the Earth as to be “added” to it or laid upon it. This is indicated as well in the Map of the World, where the Earth is surrounded by water. Finally, the two sacred rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates are part of the divine creation, emphasising water as being a hierophany. Equally, the autogenous potential of reproduction of the demiurge Nun is displayed in the Hermopolitan cosmogony. Abyss is the impersonal description of the pre-creation which included the whole cosmos: Heaven, Earth and the Underworld. Finally, we have the description of the Upper (Heaven), Middle (Earth) and Lower (“depths of the ocean”/“down to the ground”) worlds in the Theban cosmology. Amun-Ra is the god of Thebes, and one of the eight deities in the Hermopolitan cosmogony.

The patriarchal system set up in the Creation story could be the reflection of the development of strong kingships in Egypt and Babylonia. In Babylonia, the god Marduk was the titular god of the city of Babylon. According to Leonard William King, the prominence of Marduk in the legend of the Creation was due to the political importance of the city of Babylon (King 1902:4). Indeed, Babylon became the preeminent power in Mesopotamia (around 2300 B.C.E, during the First dynasty of Babylon), Enlil’s role was usurped by Marduk (King 1902:4). This may have been due to the desire to give Babylon, the new capital, a tutelary deity with the same royal aura as the previous capital, Nippur, which was

associated with Enlil. In Egypt, the Theban god Amun-Ra serves as another example of this behaviour. This god was attested with his spouse Amunet. Amun-Ra became one of the most important deities in the Egyptian pantheon through the New-Kingdom (with the exception of the heresy of Akhenaten). During the New-Kingdom period he held the position of self-created and creator deity (Brennan 1999:184) after the victory of Ahmose I, who drove out the Hyksos from Egypt. Ahmose I then unified Egypt under its new capital and titular god, Thebes and Amon respectively. Thebes remained a capital during most of the 18th Dynasty (Tyldesley 2001:18,19). Thus, water in table three could be associated with the strong and dominant powers incarnated by male deities, as personifications of changes due to political events in Egyptian and Babylonian societies.

In the table below, complementary dualism is illustrated in the transformation and the evolution of Tiamat and Nunet through water, where both embody chaos and order. Male deities like Marduk, Seth and Re who appropriated the bodies of the primordial goddesses for themselves, to transform the goddesses' power from chaos to order, to create the cosmos.

<b>Goddesses</b>	<b>Myths</b>	<b>Texts</b>
Tiamat	Enûma Eliš I	4. "Mummu" Tiâmat, who bare each and all of them-- 23. Her belly was stirred up to its uttermost depths. [...] 126. Thus she caused eleven [monsters] of this kind to come into being
	Enûma Eliš V	55. Then he [Marduk] opened the Euphrates and Tigris in her eyes.
	Enûma Eliš IV	135. The Lord [Marduk] paused, he examined Tiâmat's carcass. 136. He separated flesh [from] hair, he worked cunningly. 137. He slit Tiâmat open like a flat (?) fish [cut into] two pieces, 138. The one half he raised up and shaded the heavens therewith, 139. He pulled the bolt, he posted a guard, 140. He ordered them not to let her water escape.
Nunet	Coffin Text 684§VI 313	The Bark of Re travels in the Abyss [Naunet], and it is I who take her bow-warp.

Tiamat was the dualistic goddess, like water, she embodied chaos and order. Order because she was the primordial goddess, the mother-goddess who created the gods and the cosmos, as well as being the source of the Euphrates and the Tigris. She also embodied chaos because she was the bitter waters and chief of the rebellion against her children, the gods. In *Enûma Eliš* V, we can see that Marduk is the “bringer” of life, in a way he reveals Tiamat’s creative potential again, transforming her body from a creator of monsters to the protective membrane that prevented her heavenly primeval waters from escaping. This shows her evolution from bitter water to the source of the fresh water of the Euphrates and Tigris. Similarly, The Lower Waters and the Abyss (*n(i)wt* - Nunet) were the realm of the primordial waters as well as the realm of the snake Apophis. The sun set every evening below the horizon, during its time of disappearance the ancient Egyptians thought the sun was sailing upon the primeval waters (figure 11 Chapter Two) and fighting Apophis in order to be rejuvenated the following morning. Thus, Nunet was a symbol of rejuvenation and disappearance, but it was also the realm of Apophis the evil snake.

## 1.2) Water Cosmography

Both the Map of the World and the Sarcophagus Relief of Sakkara represent a tripartite world.

	<b>The Map of the World</b>	<b>Sarcophagus Relief</b>
Tripartite world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Euphrates and cities as life and earthly realms.</li> <li>- <i>Marratu</i> “Bitter River” “celestial ocean”, is the divine realm.</li> <li>- The <i>nagu</i>, the “unknown regions”, the mountain as the gate to the Underworld, are the beyond.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Egypt itself represented as a circle with the 41 nomes of Egypt. The Upper Waters as life as well, because the sun was renewed every night in it.</li> <li>- Circular celestial waters as the divine realm.</li> <li>- The wild regions outside the nomes of Egypt with the submitted foreign warriors, and the inner small circle, represent the Underworld.</li> </ul>

However, significant differences are noticeable. Firstly, in their representation: the Babylonian map indeed shows a tripartite world, however the three different worlds constituting the cosmos are distinctly separated, especially the *nagu*, which are located outside the celestial ocean. The Egyptian map includes these three realms within the celestial ocean. Nonetheless, even if the Underworld is at the centre of this representation, it is also depicted



above in the image of the goddess Nut swallowing the sun during its nightly journey. Secondly, the Map of the World is the description of the Babylonian world on an international scale. It seems to have more a “geographical” purpose than the Egyptian bas-relief, by including Babylonian cities and also foreign lands. However, even if the Egyptian map seems to be more cosmological in its focus, it is still clearly referencing geographical knowledge by including the 41 nomes of Egypt, even if in a more general sense. Then, the goal of both maps was to distinguish their cosmographical place within their own natural environment.

### 1.2.1./ *The Upper and Lower Waters*

<b>Cosmography</b>	<b>Myths</b>	<b>Texts</b>
Upper Waters	Enûma Eliš IV	135. The Lord [Marduk] paused, he examined Tiâmat's carcass. 136. He separated flesh [from] hair, he worked cunningly. 137. He slit Tiâmat open like a flat (?) fish [cut into] two pieces, 138. The one half he raised up and shaded the heavens therewith, 139. He pulled the bolt, he posted a guard, 140. He ordered them not to let her water escape.
	Enûma Eliš V	53. He set up her head, headed up dirt. 54. Then he opened up the spring, it became saturated with water. 55. Then he opened the Euphrates and Tigris in her eyes. 56. He plugged her nostrils, left... behind. 57. He heaped up the “distant” mountains on her breast. 58. Then he drilled a water hole to carry the catch water.
	Heliopolis (Book of the Dead 175)	I will dispatch the Elders and destroy all that I made ; the Earth shall return to the Abyss [Nun], to the surging flood, as in its original state.
	Pyramid Texts 62§43	O Osiris the King, take the water which is in the Eye of Horus, do not let go of it. O Osiris the King, take the Eye of Horus, the water in which Thoth has seen <i>hrs</i> -scepter, a <i>db3</i> -sceptre and a mace.
	Pyramid Texts 536§1291	Your water is yours, your flood is yours, your efflux which issued from Osiris is yours. The doors of the sky are opened for you, the doors of Nut are thrown open for you; the doors of the sky are open for you the doors of the firmament are thrown open for you.

Concerning the Upper Waters, we can distinguish three main points in the table above. Firstly, the sky is the realm of the Upper Waters, or more accurately the celestial waters are held back above the sky. This location makes them a threat to the Earth, as they might fall and destroy the mortal world underneath. These primeval waters are contained by the goddesses Nut (see figure 11 in Chapter Two) and Tiamat, who are the roofs of the cosmos. This cosmographical location of the Upper Waters can detail the various layers of the cosmos starting from the top, as well as a specific thought concerning the sky: if because of its blue colour and its formlessness, the sky may have influenced the Egyptian and Babylonian in their belief of the location of the celestial waters. Secondly, the celestial waters came from the primeval gods Tiamat and Nun respectively, each were at the origin of the cosmos in their own way: it was by passing through the primordial waters that the sun regenerated itself, moreover it was from the primordial waters that the annual flood had its origins. Which leads to my third point, the use of the “eye” in both civilisations as a celestial aquatic element bringing order to the cosmos. Indeed, “eye” and “water” are symbolically opposed in the manner that water embodied the unknown, the unconscious, the unshaped, and the eye symbolised conscious awareness and reality. In Egypt, the symbol of “eye” (*ir.t*) meant “to do”, “to make”. We could as well extend our reflection on the eye as the organic body part, indeed the pupil of an eye has a round shape like the sun, mimicked in the “Eye of Horus” or “Eye of Ra”. We know that the green Eye of Horus was linked to the Winding Waterway, from which Horus brought green malachite, giving the green colour to the Nile, and he was also linked to the Nile’s fertility (Pyramid Texts 317§508-509). In Babylonian mythology, the two rivers appeared from the eyes of Tiamat (in Akkadian *īnu* meant both “eye” and “source”, in Jacobsen 1976:179). Tiamat being “Mummu” Tiamat, “the maker”, she herself held the potential of creation. Marduk using her eyes as the sources for the Euphrates and the Tigris, restored her to her former position as “Mummu” Tiamat<sup>135</sup>. However we can wonder if like the Egyptians, the Babylonians could associate the eyes of Tiamat to a round form like the sun. Indeed, Shamash, the sun god, rose in the East after crossing the underground world. He was the only one able to navigate over the “*nagu*” and the celestial oceans, to access to the gates of the Underworld (The Epic of Gilgamesh X; 78-82). The sun could then take the form of an eye sailing into the primeval water.

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<sup>135</sup> “9. [The one who lets] dew fall from the udders of the heavens” (Hymn to Marduk). “The udders of the heavens” suggest the part of the body of Tiamat that Marduk placed in the Heavens, and from which water is escaping.

Cosmography	Myths	Texts
Lower Waters	Pyramid Texts 265§352	The Nurse-canal is opened, The Winding Waterway is flooded, The Fields of Rushes are filled, That I may be ferried over to the eastern wide of the sky, To the place where the gods were born, And I was born there with them As Horus, as the horizon-dweller.
	Book of the Dead 99	Oh Mahaf, as you are provided with life, awaken Aqen for me, for see, I have come.
	Pyramid Text 270§383	[...] O Ferryman of the sky in peace! O Ferryman of the Nūt in peace! O Ferryman of the gods in peace!
	A Vision of the Nether- world	“Remove Hastily” , the boatman of the nether world (had) the head (of the) Zu-bird; his fours hands (and) feet [...].
	The Epic of Gilgamesh XI	32. I (Utnapishtim) understood, and spoke to Ea, my master.
	Innana's Descent to the Netherworld	Our fathers gave in, traveled the road of death. “They crossed the River Hubur” as the old saying goes.

The Lower Waters in Egypt were believed to be a stream in the Underworld called the Winding Waterway, which Krauss and Geßler-Löhr qualify as shifting water and running water respectively<sup>136</sup>. However, it is difficult to assign a location to the Winding Waterway, as it describes a path of water within the primeval waters. However the primeval waters surrounded the cosmos (as seen in figure 11 in Chapter Two), meaning the Winding Waterway could be either the Upper or the Lower waters. In Babylonia, the River Hubur qualified by George as “stream of water”, “river” or “underground”, was the river of the underground on which the ferry man Utnapishtim or “Remove Hastily” (Humut-tabal) travelled. In Egypt, the ferryman Mahaf was the analogous character sailing upon the

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<sup>136</sup> “The Abyss” was also a term that qualifies the Lower Waters in Egypt: “O Hunger, do not come for me; go to the Abyss, depart of the Flood!” (Pyramid Texts 338§551). “The Abyss” qualifies Nunet who represents the “lower sky” (see Chapter Two, The Nun: As waters of Creation and Threat). Her name is written with the determinative for water and the reverse fault of the sky. Her waters were below the earth, in the Abyss. The start of the flood from the geographical point of view of the Egyptian, refers to the first cataract of the Nile.

Winding Waterway. Both of them answered to a god, Utnapishtim was the servant of Ea and Mahaf the servant of Nut. The god Ea dwelt in the primeval waters of the Apsu and the goddess Nut contained the Upper Waters and rejuvenated the sun inside herself, then both gods were linked to the primeval waters. The use of a barge as a divine means of transportation could be seen during the Akitu festival in Babylon and the Mystery Play of Succession during the celebration of the New Year in Egypt in association with the Osirian cult<sup>137</sup>. The barge was the primary means of transport used to navigate upon the primeval waters, it was also the primary means of transport upon the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates.

### 1.2.2./ *The Source of the Rivers*

The source of the Rivers	Myths	Texts
Babylonian	Enûma Eliš V	55. Then he [Marduk] opened the Euphrates and Tigris in her eyes.
	Map of the World	Great Wall 6 league between where the Sun is not seen.
Egyptian	Pyramid Texts 459§864	O King, receive this pure water of yours which issued from Elephantine, your water from Elephantine [...] .

The Enûma Eliš does not specifically state that Tiamat is a dragon or a snake, only that she gave birth to dragons and serpents among a more general group of monsters including “scorpion men” (Enûma Eliš I; 114-117)<sup>138</sup>. Some scholars thought however that Tiamat could be described as a sea serpent or a dragon, like Joseph Fontenrose who believed “that Tiamat sometimes, not necessarily always, [was] conceived as a dragoness” (Fontenrose 1980:153). Indeed, the representation of a dragon next to Marduk on a cylinder seal (Heidel 1951: fig 1) and the poison carried by Tiamat (Enûma Eliš I;116), might

<sup>137</sup> See Chapter One “Whims and Justice of the gods: the Akitu festival” and Chapter Two “The worshipping of Osiris and kingship”.

<sup>138</sup> Alexander Heidel disagreed with this identification and argued that “dragon form cannot be ascribed to Tiamat with certainty” (Fontenrose 1980:153).

argue in favour of Fontenrose. The possibility of the depiction of Tiamat as a serpent/dragon, opens a new link between the Egyptian and the Babylonian water sources. From the ancient Egyptians point of view, the Nile originated from the “Double Cavern” at Elephantine in the south of the country, where the flood god Hapi and the serpent ouroboros dwelt<sup>139</sup>. In both civilisations, serpents were the source of the Nile, Euphrates and Tigris rivers. From my point of view, in both cases the snake/dragon embodies a natural hierophany of “time” and “cycle” linked to the annual flood and as well to the start and the end of time, the facets of the primordial waters respectively.

The “headwater” in the inscription of Shalmaneser III and represented on the “Map of the World” as the source of the Euphrates, and the first cataract at Aswan thought to be, by the Egyptians, one of the sources of the Nile, have their rocky aspect in common. Both sources were situated in the “upper part” of their countries. The first cataract in situated in Upper Egypt and the “headwater” in the north of Mesopotamia. In my opinion, this geographical situation aims to show the symbolical unification of both kingdoms through water coming from the “head” of the country, under the concepts of “life” and “creation”.<sup>140</sup>

### 1.2.3./ *The Place of Creation*

The place of Creation	Myths	Texts
Babylonian	Enûma Eliš VI	47. In the second year [the shrine was as high as] a hill, and the summit of E-Sagila reached the [celestial] Ocean. 48. They made the ziggurat [to reach] the celestial Ocean; unto Marduk, Enlil, Ea [shrines] they appointed, [...].

<sup>139</sup> During the Akitu, Marduk was imprisoned under the Mountain of Creation (James 1958:56). We can link his situation the Hapi dwelling underground at the “Double Cavern”. The Mountain would be then a source of the rivers coming from the primordial waters (Apsu had his abode in *Kur*, which means “mountain” in akkadian, in Fontenrose 1980:154).

<sup>140</sup> Tiamat’s head was used by Marduk to produce the Tigris and Euphrates and in Egypt the god Khnemu (from *khnem* “to join” or “build”) of the first cataract, created humankind with clay (like Aruru in Epic of Gilgamesh I; 101-104) and unified the two Niles, Hap-Reset and Hap-Meht. Both then are taking part into the creation of the cosmos.

The place of Creation	Myths	Texts
Egyptian	Heliopolitan (Pyramid Texts 600)	Atum beetle! You became high, as the hill: you rose as the benben in the Benben Compound in Heliopolis. You sneezed Shy and spat Tefnut. You put your arms around them as ka-arms so that your ka might be in them.
	Theban (Papyrus Leiden I 350)	Thebes is the model for every city: water and land were [mixed] in it at the beginning. Sand came to measure the fields, to make its soil come into being on the primeval mound, that the land might come into being.

In the *Enûma Eliš*, Theban and Heliopolitan cosmologies, the primeval mound or hill is mentioned frequently. In the *Enûma Eliš*, “hill”, “summit” and “ziggurat”<sup>141</sup> are quoted. In the Heliopolitan cosmology: “hill” and “benben”<sup>142</sup>, and finally, in the Theban cosmology: “mound”. In all three, “the primordial hill” was linked to the primordial waters of Creation. Babylon was the place of Creation because the city was close to the “celestial ocean”<sup>143</sup>. In the Heliopolitan cosmology, the “benben” emerged from the primordial waters of chaos, and in the Theban cosmology, Thebes was the place of Creation where the primordial hill appeared; it was also the location where the largest sacred lake was worshipped in the temple of Karnak. This link between the primordial waters and the primordial mound is intriguing in that it indicates it might denote a natural phenomenon: the annual flooding of the lands. Indeed, on both maps the Earth is seen as surrounded by water, making it an island inside the primeval waters. Nonetheless, during the flood, water revived the earth, by bringing silt, like the primeval mound emerging from the primeval waters. The luxurious growth of reeds and plants on the banks of the rivers gave the impression of life emerging from the water. For these two cities, Thebes and Babylon, the unification of these two words “water” and “hill” in their descriptions was a way to testify to their cultic richness, the fertility of their lands and their proximity to the divine. Of course, this praise might have had a political background, especially when we know that

<sup>141</sup> Ziggurats are examples of representation of “cosmic mountain” (Eliade 1957:40).

<sup>142</sup> A primordial risen mound that the demiurge made appeared from the primeval waters of chaos at the dawn of Creation (Bonnamy 2013:200). The Iher’s pyramidion is an example (Louvre D18N359).

<sup>143</sup> “E-Sagila” in the *Enûma Eliš* (IV:47) was a temple situated in Babylon.

Thebes was the prominent power in Egypt during the New Kingdom (period of the Papyrus of Leiden I, in Smith 2002:51). Moreover, Babylon became a preeminent power in Mesopotamia (about 2300 B.C.E, during the First dynasty of Babylon) and pushed forward its tutelary god, Marduk, to eventually replace Enlil in the Enûma Eliš.<sup>144</sup>

## 2. Water as Life : The course of life

### 2.1) Watercourse deities

There were not specific gods in Babylonia or Egypt for the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers. The Egyptians and the Babylonians seemed to worship the flood more than the rivers themselves, as the flood was the event during which the land was revived. In this dissertation we discussed of three main gods in Babylonia and Egypt who were related to the flood: Marduk, Osiris and Hapi.

Gods	Myths	Texts
Marduk	Enûma Eliš VII;1-2	O Asari [Marduk], Bestower of planting, [Founder of sowing], Creator of grain and plants, who caused [the green herb to spring up].
	Hymn to Marduk	5. The one who puts rivers in order in the midst of the mountains, 6. The one who opens spring-wells in the mountain region. 7. The one who pours out the seasonal flood [mīlu-flood] of abundance for the entire world. 8. [The o]ne not who supplies... of the wide land, grain. 9. [The one who lets] dew fall from the udders of the heavens, 10. [The one who send]s (?) winds and heavy rains over the field. 11. [The one who brings (?)] the abundant produce to the cultivated field of barley, the meadow. 12. [The one who brings about (?)] wealth and profusion of produce.
Osiris	Plutarch <i>On Isis and Osiris</i>	And they call not only the Nile, but also without distinction all that is moist. Osiris' efflux, and the water-vase always heads the processions of the priests in honour of the God.

<sup>144</sup> The version used in this dissertation is the one from Nineveh found in the Palace of Asuhurbanipal (668-626 B.C.E.).

<b>Gods</b>	<b>Myths</b>	<b>Texts</b>
	Pyramid Texts 486§1040	[Osiris] was born on the Abyss before the sky existed, before the earth existed, before that which was to be made firm existed, before turmoil existed, before that fear which arose on account of the eye of Horus existed.
	Pyramid Texts 445§848	The canals are filled, the waterways are flooded by means of the purification which issued from Osiris.
	Pyramid Texts 436§788	You have your water, you have your flood, the fluid which issued from the god the exudation which issued from Osiris.
	Pyramid Texts 350§567	O you who stride out greatly, strewing green-stone, malachite turquoise of (?) the stars, if you are green, then will the King be green, (even as) a living rush is green.
Hapi	Hymn to Hapi	Homage to thee, O Hapi, thou appeared in this land, and thou comest in peace to make Egypt in peace to make Egypt to live. Thou art the Hidden One and the guide of the darkness on the day when it is thy pleasure to lead the same. Thou art the Waterer (or Fructifier) of the fields which Ra hath created, thou givest life unto all animals, thou makest all the land to drink unceasingly as thou descendest on thy way from heaven. [...] If thou wert overthrown in the heavens the gods would fall upon their faces, and men would perish. [...] Thou art the bringer of food, thou art the mighty one of meat and drink, thou art the creator of all good things, the lord of divine meat, pleasant and choice [...] Thou makest the herb to grow for the cattle and thou takes heed unto what is sacrificed unto every god. The choicest incense is that which followeth thee, thou art the lord of the two lands.

The table below lists the keywords qualifying these three gods under their agrarian and aqueous characteristics available from the texts above.

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Marduk</b>	<b>Osiris</b>	<b>Hapi</b>
Agrarian	“grain”, “plants”, “field”, “barley”, “meadow”, “wealth and profusion”	“green”, “malachite”.	“fields”, “animals”, “food”, “meat”, “herb”.
Watery	“rivers”, “spring”, “flood”, “heavy rain”, “winds”, “dew from the udders of the heavens”.	“Nile”, “moist”, “Abyss”, “canals”, “waterways”, “flood”.	“Waterer” (or fructifier), “making the land doing unceasingly” (i.e. the flood).



Marduk, Osiris and Hapi were seen as life-bringing agrarian gods. However, behind their life-bringing and life-giving characteristics, they represented a much more dangerous reality concerning the flood: its destructive power. Indeed, the flood might have been worshipped by the Babylonians and the Egyptians for its power of fertility, but also for the fear and the reverence it inspired. This is why Marduk, Osiris and Hapi are affiliated with the end of the cosmos through water associated with the Heavens. Marduk was the one for whom “dew falls from the udders of heavens”, the Heavens being the realm where he trapped the upper waters of Tiamat. Osiris with his green skin was linked to malachite and was also analogous to the Heavens. Additionally, malachite came from the stars, giving Osiris a celestial facet. In the Book of the Dead, it was said that the cosmos would return to the “surging flood” (Book of the Dead 175). Osiris being like Hapi, a god of the flood, he was therefore linked to the destructive powers of the flood<sup>145</sup>. Furthermore, it is pointed out that Osiris would remain after the end of the cosmos (Coffin Texts VII 467-468), as he was the incarnation of the potential of life<sup>146</sup>. Finally, if Hapi was overthrown in the Heavens “the gods would fall upon their faces and men would perish”. “Overthrown” suggests that Hapi was the one unifying realities through the power of the flood (hence his title as “Lord of the two lands”), from which men and the gods maintained harmony. This final point of harmony, adds a new aspect joining Osiris and Marduk. Indeed, like Hapi, they were unifiers and maintainers of the balance between creation and destruction, harmonising the divine and mortal worlds under the sign of water.

The return of the flood was a good omen, in a sense it was returning the cosmos to its former pre-existing state and to its potentiality. The Babylonian and Egyptian New-Year celebrations took place at the time of the start of the flooding of the Euphrates and the Nile, during the month of Nisan (Babylonia) and Akhet (Egypt). Both were symbols of renewal of the cosmological cycle and of the complementary dualism of chaos and creation. During the Akitu (“to begin”, “head of the year”) in Babylon, on the fifth day the *Enûma Eliš* was recited in the E-sagila to re-enact the struggle between Marduk and Tiamat, mimed by two groups of actors (Eliade 1959:56). During the “Ouper Renpet Neferet”<sup>147</sup> (“Opening of the

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<sup>145</sup> As it is his murder and rejuvenescence that were linked to the flood, as it is presented by *The Mystery Play of Succession* performed during the Egyptian New-Year (Frankfort 1948: 123-124).

<sup>146</sup> See figure 12 Chapter Two, the bond between Osiris and vegetation.

<sup>147</sup> The Egyptian word “year” also means “the rejuvenated/rejuvenating one”, which designated the flood personified by Osiris (Assmann 2005:359). The flood returned annually and implied that Osiris was killed and rejuvenated every year.

good year”) in Egypt, *The Mystery Play of Succession* (or *Osirian Mysteries*) was performed at the start of the inundation, before the coronation of a new king (Frankfort 1948: 123-124). It also implied that the fight between Seth and Horus was re-enacted every year. Also, from the Middle Kingdom onwards, the Osiris mysteries were acted out as a play on a barge (see the Ikhnofret Stela from Senusret III’s reign during the XIIth dynasty). This last point is reminiscent of an event during the Akitu when the king “grasping the hands of the great lord Marduk”, led a procession through Babylon to reach the Euphrates where they boarded ships to reach the House of the Akitu outside of Babylon. The king and Marduk were accompanied by other gods also carried there by boat (Pedersén 2014:114). This procession might have re-enacted the army of the gods marching against Tiamat (Zimmern 1926:18). It can then be seen that water is important in both civilisation demonstrated water as a hierophany linking and balancing the divine and mortal worlds in the cosmos.

In both civilisations, the king is associated respectively with Marduk (as seen above)<sup>148</sup>, and also with Hapi and Osiris. In Egypt, during the lustration ceremonies<sup>149</sup> in the Old Kingdom, the sacred waters of Elephantine (the realm of Hapi) were used (Breasted 1959:103f). Unas the last pharaoh of the Vth Dynasty was related to “the waters of the flood’ coming from Hapi and Osiris, and “to the place of contentment, green of fields, which is on the horizon” (Pyramid Texts 317§507-508), probably as a reference to the Fields of Offerings and the Fields of Reeds beyond the Winding Waterway, and also linked to the greenness of Osiris who ruled the beyond. Then, kings and the three gods, Marduk, Osiris and Hapi were bound to the fertility of the rivers and to the bio-cosmic rhythm. From my point of view, the New-Year’s ceremonies indeed had a mythological function, however knowing that the Akitu existed long before the *Enûma Eliš*<sup>150</sup> (Sommer 2000:82), we are entitled to ask if the function of the New-Year’s ceremonies could be based on environmental worship rather than mythological worship. The re-enactment of the primeval fight between chaos and creation could be a late answer to the strengthening of both kingdoms as major powers.

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<sup>148</sup> “The god Bel [will listen to] your prayer . . . he will magnify your worship . . . he will exalt your kingship” (Pritchard 1969:334); as part of the Akitu ceremony.

<sup>149</sup> In Babylon, during the Akitu ceremony: “They shall bring water (for washing) the king’s hand and then shall accompany him [to the temple Esag]il” (Pritchard 1969:334).

<sup>150</sup> *The Mystery Play of Succession* was part of the New-Year ceremony in Egypt, happening at the same time as the start of the Flood. *The Mystery Play of Succession* was linked to *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* (myth that is bond to the establishment of royalty in Egypt), and the coronation of a new pharaoh. However, the Egyptian New-Year was first and foremost linked to the start of the flood (Assmann 2005:359), thus to a natural event.

## 2.2) The Rejuvenation of the Sun

The Sun's Journey	Myths	Texts
Babylonian	Epic of Gilgamesh X	78. Said the tavern-keeper to him, to Gilgamesh: 79. Gilgamesh, there never has been a way across, 80. nor since olden days can anyone cross the ocean. 81. Only Shamash the hero crosses the ocean: 82. Apart from the Sun God, who crosses the ocean
	The Inanna's Descent to The Nether-world	80. I am Inanna of the place where the sun rises. 81. If thou art Inannu of the place where the sun rises, 82. Why pray hast thou come to the land of no return? 83. On the road whose traveller returns not, how hath thy heart led thee? 84. So besides, Gilgamesh once you have crossed the ocean, 85. When you reach the Waters of Death, what will you do then?
Egyptian	The Pyramid Texts 359§599	O Re, command me to Mahaf, the ferryman of the Winding Waterway, in which he ferries the gods to yonder side of the Winding Waterway to the eastern side of the sky, so that he may ferry me over to yonder of the Winding Waterway, to the eastern side of the sky [...].
	Ramess' II Tomb TT 133	Fare crosse, Great Ferry of the West. Come! Fare in peace a cross to the West. I gave bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and clothing to the naked.

In the Babylonian accounts the sun crosses the *nagu* before flying into the Apsu (Epic of Gilgamesh X;81). The *nagu* on the Map of the World are represented in the shape of triangles, which represented either islands or mountains, however in previous sections we saw that the mountain or mound, the “headwater”, was the source of the rivers in both Babylonia and Egypt. The primeval waters being at the origin of the water in the cosmos, we can wonder if the sources of the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris, were gates to the Underworld as well. In the extracts presented above (The Inanna's Descent to the Nether-world, the Pyramid Texts and TT 133), we can observe a major difference in the location of the gate of the Underworld. Indeed, for the Babylonians the East was a gate to the Underworld, while the West was for the Egyptians<sup>151</sup>. However, in these two civilisations there

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<sup>151</sup> In Egypt the West bank of the Nile was the realm of the dead, where necropolis were located (such as the Valley of the King), and where the sun set.

was a link between the sun and the primeval waters. Indeed, in table IX of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the sun god Shamash<sup>152</sup> dwelt where the sun rose at the “twin mountains”, the gate of the Underworld.

38. To Mashu’s twin mountains he came,
39. which daily guard the raising [sun]
40. whose tops [support] the fabric of heaven,
41. whose base reaches down to the Netherworld.
42. There were scorpion-men guarding its gate,
43. whose terror was dread, whose glance was death,
44. whose radiance was fearful, overwhelming the mountains,
45. as sunrise and sunset they guarded the sun.<sup>153</sup>

As we have seen in previous sections, the mountains in Babylonia are geographically linked to the source of the rivers. Moreover, mythologically, the rivers issued from Tiamat’s eyes (Enûma Eliš V:55). In tablet IX, the mention of the “scorpion-men”, could be a reference to Tiamat, as “scorpion-men” were one of her creatures<sup>154</sup>. We know that a part of the primeval waters of Tiamat were placed into the Heavens by Marduk (Enûma Eliš IV:138), linking the sun as a celestial element to the Upper Waters of Tiamat. Furthermore, in tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh dives into the Apsu to reach the plant of immortality (IX:271,299). It was from the “twin mountains”, in tablet IX that Gilgamesh reached the garden of jewels beyond which lay the Apsu. Then, “scorpion-men” could be a reference to the location of the lower waters of Tiamat as these creatures lived where the sun set and rose.

In Egypt, the Eye of Horus was linked to the “green” brought by Osiris (Pyramid Texts 317§508-509). The green came from the colours of the Nile due to the presence of malachite. The Egyptians thought that the stars, which were celestial elements like the sun (Pyramid Texts 350§567), were the source of malachite. The pattern of stars is found in the representation of the goddess Nut (see figure 11 in Chapter Two), who was said to contain the primordial waters (the Nun) which the sun crossed every night in the Underworld. In the Underworld, the sun fought Apophis who swallowed the primordial waters to prevent

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<sup>152</sup> Epic of Gilgamesh X:81, “Only Shamash the hero crosses the ocean”, can be linked to the *nagu*. He was the only one to be able to fly over these “nagu”, the unexplored regions, to access the gates of the Underworld (Apsu).

<sup>153</sup> George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: a New Translation*, IX.

<sup>154</sup> Horowitz, *The Babylonian Map of the World*, p23, on the reverse of the Map of the World.

the sun from rising again (Book of the Dead 108). By fighting and killing the beast, the sun liberated the primeval waters from chaos. By travelling into the Underworld, the sun would bring forth the Nile's inundation<sup>155</sup> (Pyramid texts 62§43), as Shamash was also doing at the sources of the rivers, the origin of the flood.

So, in Egypt and Babylonia we can consider the sun as an element with similar characteristics to water, as if it was water itself. Its celestial aspect was linked to the Upper waters, and its link to the Underworld linked it to the Lower Waters<sup>156</sup>. Thus, like water the sun was an element in which dualistic principles led to a positive potential.

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<sup>155</sup> As the flood's water came from the primeval waters, the source of the water in the cosmos.

<sup>156</sup> As Shamash dwelt at the gate of the Underworld, and the Eye of Horus is given "the green" by the god of the Underworld, Osiris.

### 3. Water as Death: The Relapse of the Cosmos

#### 3.1) The Flood

The Flood	Myths	Texts
Egyptian	The Admonitions of Ipuwer Leiden 334	Forsooth, the Nile overflows, (yet) no one ploughs him it. Every man says: « We know not what has happened throughout the land ». Forsooth, the women are lacking and no (children) are conceived. Khnum fashions (mankind) no longer because of the condition of the land. [...] Forsooth, (men's) hearts are violent. Plague is throughout the land. Blood is everywhere. Death is not lacking. The mummy cloth speaks, before every one comes near it. Forsooth, many dead men are buried in the river; the stream is a sepulchre and the place of embalment has become stream. [...] Forsooth, the river is blood, and (yet) men drink of it. Men beings and thirst after water. [...] Forsooth, the Desert is throughout the land. The nomes are laid waste. A foreign tribe from abroad has come to Egypt [...] Forsooth, grain has perished on every side. (People) are stripped of clothes, spices and oil. Everybody says: there is non. The storehouse is ruined. [...] Behold, Egypt has come to pour out water. He who poured water on the ground, he has captured the strong man in misery. Behold, the Serpent is taken from its hole. The secrets of the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt are divulged. [...] Behold, those of the land have become rich, and 'the possessor of' property has become one who has nothing.

	Pyramid Texts 254	N has saved himself from those who do this [against him], Who would take his food from him when it is Present Who would take his supper from him when it is present, Who would take the air from [his nose], Who would take bring his days of life to a standstill. N is stronger than them, risen on his shores. Their hearts fall to his fingers. Their innards are for those who belong to the sky. Their blood for those who belong to the earth. Their heirs are for poverty. Their house to conflagration. Their courts for the High Nile.
Babylonian	The Epic of Gilgamesh XI	11. The town of Shuruppak, a city will known to you, 12. which stands on the banks of the River Euphrates: 13. this city was old - the gods once were in it 14. when the great gods decided to send down the Deluge. 15. Their father Anu swore on oath, 16. and their counsellor, the hero Enlil, 17. Their chamberlain, the god Ninurta, 18. and their sheriff, the god Ennugi.

		<p>106. The stillness of the Storm God passed over the sky  107. and all that was then turned into darkness bright.  108. [He] charged the land like a bull [on the rampage,]  109. he smashed [it] in parts [like a vessel of clay].  110. for a day the gale [winds flattened the country]  111. quickly they blew, and [then cam] the [flood]  112. Like a battle [the cataclysm] passed over the people.  113. One man could not discern another,  114. nor could people be recognised amid the destruction.</p> <p>127. for six days and [seven] nights,  128. there blew the wind, the downpour,  129. the gale, the Deluge, it flattened the land.</p>
	The Epic of Gilgamesh IX	<p>132. I looked at the weather; stillness had set in,  133. And all of mankind had returned to clay.</p>
	Enûma Eliš IV	<p>49. The Lord [Marduk] raised up the wind storm [flood], his mighty weapon</p>

In both civilisations the Flood embodied the fear of destruction<sup>157</sup> and the hope of rebirth. In Egypt when the river started rising, it became red as blood, and was seen as the “Red Nile” (Oestigaard 2011:51). The Red Nile was seen as the blood of the slain Osiris (Mackenzie 1922:156-157). The red hue, which is due to the oxide sediments carried during the inundation, has up to today been compared with blood (Mojsov 2005:7). The Red Nile was also believed to purify the land.

The canals are filled, the waterways are flooded by means of the purification which issued from Osiris.

Pyramid Texts 445§848

This focus on the reddish colour of the Nile sends us back to the “blood” mentioned in the Admonitions of Ipuwer. Indeed, the reddish colour of the Nile could be a reference to the blood of Osiris in a positive and fertile perspective, however “blood” as mentioned

<sup>157</sup> As seen in spell 254 of the Pyramid Texts and the Enûma Eliš IV:49, the flood was envisaged as a weapon as well. Pyramid Text 254 shows also how aggressive the high flood could be. In this spell, the pharaoh Unas is envisaged as a bull of the sky who defeats his enemies. The power of the High Nile is envisaged as a destructive weapons against the enemies of the king.

in the Admonitions of Ipuwer could also be a reference to the god Seth and his dualistic characteristics. The colour red, *decheret*, was the colour of Seth (Bonnamy 2013:755). He was characterised as both a god of chaos and deserts, as well as a heavenly god of fertility, rain, storms and lightening (Coffin Texts IV 396 a-b). He was also the murderer of Osiris, the body of whom he threw into the Nile (Pyramid Texts 24d, 615d, 766d, 587b-588c). The murder of Osiris and his storm god characteristic linked Seth to the flood and its fertility aspects. However, the terrible powers of Seth could be also a sign of “death” as mentioned in the Admonitions of Ipuwer, as his power could “overflow” the Nile and cause a disastrous flood<sup>158</sup> (“great storm”, in Coffin Texts IV 396 a-b, “inundated the land with his evil designs” in Allen 2015:255).

The three Egyptian seasons were the basis of the Egyptian calendar which followed the phases of the flood: Akhet (Inundation, between July and October), Peret (growing, between November and February), and Shemu (drought/sowing, between March and June) (Bonnamy 2013:16, 224, 635). It would have been a disaster if the flood would have occurred in March/June during sowing time. Hence, that could be a reference to the events in the Admonitions of Ipuwer: “no one ploughs”, “many men are buried in the river”, “grain has perished” and “plagues”, signifying the failure of the harvest season and announcing difficult times. The same set of events can be found also in Babylonia. The *mīlu*-flood was the annual flood. In Babylon it could occur after heavy rain, and it was normally related to the wellsprings of the mountain regions by the Babylonians (where the source of the rivers were). The *mīlu*-flood occurring during the month of Tashritu was a sign of successful harvest. The month of Tashritu occurred during September/October at the same time as Akhet (Oshima 2014:254).

73. If a *mīlu*-flood comes in the month of Tashritu there will be a fertility in the land.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> We can find similarities in Babylonian myths, when Marduk placed the upper waters of Tiamat above the firmament (Enûma Eliš IV 138-140). Linking her to the “dew fall” mentioned in the “udders of heavens” (Hymn to Marduk 9), additionally her eyes were the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates (Enûma Eliš V:55).

<sup>159</sup> Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious sufferers*, p254.



However, it seems that the Babylonians perceived the mīlu-flood has being a negative omen during the Nisannu month (March/April). It was a sign of plague, as the colour of the mīlu-flood indicated.

1. If a mīlu-flood comes in the month of Nisannu and the river is like dark-red blood, there will be an epidemic in the land [...].<sup>160</sup>

We can then find some similarities between the events of the Admonitions of Ipuwer and the events during a mīlu-flood in the course of the Nisannu month. Both mentioned “blood”, “epidemic”, “plague” as consequences of a failure of the flood, emphasising their dependance on the flood and their similar understanding of the biological year. They both stress the dualistic views of the flood as an element of life and as an element of death leading to the relapse of humankind and society: “The secrets of the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt are divulged. [...] Behold, those of the land have become rich, and ‘the possessor of property has become one who has nothing” (Admonitions of Ipuwer), “And all of mankind had returned to clay” (Epic of Gilgamesh IX).

### 3.2 The Monsters: Tiamat and Apophis

Monsters	Myths	Texts
Tiamat	Enûma Eliš I	113. [Ummu-Hubu]r, who formed all things, 114. [Made in addition] weapons invincible, she spawned monster-serpents, 115. [Sharp of] tooth, and merciless of fang; 116. [With poison instead of] blood she filled [their] bodies. 117. Fierce [monster-vipers] she clothed with terror, 118. [With splendour] she decked them, [she made them] of lofty stature. 119. [Whoever beheld] them, terror overcame him, 120. Their bodies reared up and none could withstand [their attack]. 121. [She set] up vipers, and dragons, and the (monster) [Lahamu], 122. [And hurricanes], and raging hounds, and scorpion-men, 123. And mighty [tempests], and fish-men, and[rams];
	The Chaldean Account of Genesis Sixth Fragment	6. He made the sword to silence the dragon of the sea [...].

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

Monsters	Myths	Texts
	Enûma Eliš IV	101. He seized the spear and burst her belly, 102. He severed her inward parts, he pierced (her) heart. 103. He overcame her and cut off her life;
Apophis	Book of the Dead 39	Get back! Crawl away! Get away from me, you snake! Go, be drowned in the Lake of the Abyss, at the place where your father commanded that the slaying of you should be carried out.
	Cosmogony of Esna	Now she (i.e. Neith) removed the umbilical cord of her son whom she had given birth to in the water, and it became a serpent of 120 cubits. It was called Apophis.
	The Book of the Hidden Chamber Seventh Hour, Middle Register	The name of the hour of the night guiding this great god is repelling the « Evil one » and beheading « Horrible of face » (ie. Apophis).  Mysterious way of the West, upon which the great god passes in his protected bark. He proceeds on this way, which is without any water, without (the possibility) of towing.  He is like this at his sandbank which is in the Netherworld. « Bringing water » is the name of this sandbank, it is 440 cubits in length and 440 cubits in breadth.
	Book of the Dead 108	Seth will project a lance of iron against him and will make him vomit up all that he has swallowed.

Like Tiamat, Apophis was linked to the primeval waters. Indeed, they were the place of birth and death of Apophis (based on the hypothesis that the primordial waters were the source of all waters in the Cosmos) as specified by the Cosmogony of Esna and spell 39 of the Book of the Dead.

The table below lists the keywords qualifying these two gods under their reptilian and aqueous, and physical characteristics available from the texts above.

Aspects	Tiamat	Apophis
The Snake/Dragon	“Monster-Serpents”, “Vipers”, “Dragons”, “Dragon of the Sea”	“Snake”, “Serpent”
The Abyss	“Who formed all things”	“The Lake of the Abyss”

Aspects	Tiamat	Apophis
The Belly	“He seized the spear and burst her belly”	“Seth will project a lance of iron against him and will make him vomit up all that he has swallowed”

Tiamat was the primeval bitter water as part of the Creation with Apsu. Her modern name is a derivative of the greek word *Thalattē/Thalassa* meaning “sea” (Burket 1993:92f) and *Tehom* in Hebrew, meaning “the depth”, “the Abyss” (Tsumura 1989:159). Her belly was also used by Marduk to contain the Upper primeval waters (Enûma Eliš I:4). Thus, both Tiamat and Apophis were at their “birth” and their “death” in contact with the primeval waters. This union with the primeval waters is eventually linked to their appearance, described as reptilian<sup>161</sup>. First, the serpent by itself symbolises deformity, shapelessness, living close to the Earth, with a special bond with the Underworld (Black and Green 1992:867). The “monstrosity”, “deformity” and “abnormality” are characteristics of both Apophis and Tiamat. Apophis is the “Evil one”, “Horrible face” in the Book of the Dead, and he is a “serpent of 120 cubits” in the Cosmogony of Esna. Tiamat “spawned monster-serpents” and with “blood she filled [their] bodies” in the Enûma Eliš. However, the serpent is itself linked to potential and fertility. Indeed, the serpent is masculine because of its phallic sharpe, and feminine because of its engulfing belly. This last image describes the belly of Apophis and Tiamat. The belly of Apophis is linked to the “sandbank”<sup>162</sup> coming from the water “he has swallowed”, and “without any water, without (the possibility) of towing”, as he is through this act preventing the sun god from rejuvenating himself. By swallowing the water inside of himself, Apophis becomes a counter-creative power. This is the case for Tiamat as well, as she is by herself the goddess of the bitter water, i.e. the sea, a non-fertile element as indicated in her name and by her desire to destroy her children. Both Apophis and Tiamat are killed by a spear piercing their bodies, and more specifically their bellies<sup>163</sup>.

<sup>161</sup> As described in the above section “The source of the river”, the reptilian version of Tiamat is debated. Scholars like Joseph Fontenrose argue in favour of Tiamat as a krakenish creature (1980:153). However, another scholar, Alexandre Heidel argued the contrary (Fontenrose 1980:153), due to the lack of sources on Tiamat as a dragon/serpent.

<sup>162</sup> The metaphor of the famine as it represents the low Nile when the sandbank was not covered by water (Assmann and Jenkins 2003:10).

<sup>163</sup> In figure 18 in Chapter Two -, the Seventh Hour of the Book of the Hidden Chamber, Middle Register. The body of Apophis is represented pierced with knives.

In the example shown in Chapter Two, Apophis is killed by Seth or the Four slaughterers, who are simultaneously liberating the primeval waters that Apophis swallowed. We have then a difference between the Egyptian and the Babylonian myths. In the Egyptian myth of the death of Apophis, the water is liberated to allow the sun god to continue his journey. However, in the *Enûma Eliš*, the belly of Tiamat is used to contain the upper primeval waters. Nonetheless, in both myths, the bellies and the bodies are used as containers, to enable the two major creative deities Re and Marduk to pursue their divine creation.

Apophis in the *Book of the Hidden chamber* is described as a malevolent monster, however, he has been described as an ouroboros as well<sup>164</sup> (figure 19 Chapter Two, Kell 1978:42). The ouroboros was a symbol of the cosmic biological rhythm and a symbol of protection (like the Mehen serpent in figure 18 in Chapter Two). When he swallowed the waters in spell 108 of the *Book of the Dead*, he became the source of the river as well as the danger to the sun god's ability to continue his journey. By killing him, Apophis changes from an allegory of the sandbank into the bringer of the water of life. The same concept is found with Tiamat (as seen in Chapter One "Tiamat from goddess to monster"), who evolves from a benevolent into a malevolent entity to then return to a benevolent entity again as a part of the cosmos: her eyes being the sources of the Euphrates and the Tigris and her belly being used to contain the primeval Upper Waters. Her belly containing the waters can be compared to Apophis swallowing the waters, both are a sign of imminent danger for the cosmos because of the disappearance and the sudden re-appearance of waters<sup>165</sup> they embody. However, they maintained the cosmos by being part of it. We could then qualify them as necessary benevolent and malevolent forces, two allegories of complementary dualism like water.

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<sup>164</sup> The ouroboros serpent was said to dwell also at Qerti on Elephantine, where Hapi and the source of the Nile dwelt.

<sup>165</sup> Phenomena largely observed by the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians during the floods of the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris.

## 4. Tripartite World and New Year Rituals

As stated previously, these two civilisations have the tripartite world in common. Then, it might be possible, in my opinion, to link the tripartite world to the New-Year rituals, the Akitu and the “Opening of the Year”, occurring in Babylonia and Egypt respectively.

### 4.1) Babylonian Tripartite World and the Akitu

The Akitu festival in Babylon, during the month of Nisan, was an agrarian purification and renewal ceremony, leading to the restoration of the cosmic, theological and political order. It was the celebration of the origin of the world and the rise of Marduk who symbolically created the tripartite world in the Enûma Eliš.

Enûma Eliš IV	121. Marduk took from him the Tablet Of Destinies, which should never have been his, 122. He sealed it with a seal and fastened it on his breast	<b>Chaos, Underworld and Pre-Creation state</b>
	128. He turned back to Tiâmat whom he had defeated, 129. The Lord [Marduk] trampled on the rump of Tiâmat, 130. With his unsparing club he clave her skull. 131. He slit open the channels ( <i>i.e.</i> , arteries) of her blood. 132. He caused the North Wind to carry it away to a place underground. 133. His fathers ( <i>i.e.</i> , the gods) looked on, they rejoiced, they were glad.	
	135. The Lord [Marduk] paused, he examined Tiâmat's carcass. 136. He separated flesh [from] hair, he worked cunningly. 137. He slit Tiâmat open like a flat (?) fish [cut into] two pieces, 138. The one half he raised up and shaded the heavens therewith, 139. He pulled the bolt, he posted a guard, 140. He ordered them not to let her water escape.	
	143. The Lord Marduk measured the dimensions of the Deep, 144. He founded E-Sharra, a place like unto it, 145. The abode E-Sharra, which he made to be heaven. 146. He made the-gods Anu, Bel and Ea to inhabit their [own] cities.	<b>The Celestial Realm</b>

Firstly, Marduk became the holder of the Tablet of Destinies, showing his involvement in and responsibilities as the maintainer of the cosmic order. Then, having gained legitimacy and sufficient power, Marduk established the “edges” of the cosmos, i.e. the unknown, what we could qualify as the Underworld (IV 132). Using Tiamat’s body he created these heavenly and chthonian edges (IV 138, 145), linking the origin of the universe directly with the involvement of watery chaos in the creation of the cosmos. In tablet V of the Enûma Eliš, Marduk continued his heavenly creation by establishing the stars, and thus the calendar in the sky, based on which the Akitu was initiated (V 1-26).

After creating the limits of the cosmos, the Heaven and the Underworld, Marduk created, in tablets VI and VII of the Enûma Eliš, an earthly realm.

<p>Enûma Eliš VI</p>	<p>1. On hearing the words of the gods, the heart of Marduk moved him to carry out the works of a craftsman.  2. He opened his mouth, he spake to Ea that which he had planned in his heart, he gave counsel [saying]:  3. "I will solidify blood, I will form bone.  4. "I will set up man, 'Man' [shall be] his name.  5. "I will create the man 'Man.'  6. "The service of the gods shall be established, and I will set them (<i>i.e.</i>, the gods) free.  7. "I will make twofold the ways of the gods, and I will beautify [them].  8. "They are [now] grouped together in one place, but they shall be partitioned in two."    31. He made twofold the ways on the earth [and in the heavens?]    117. "King of the gods of heaven and of earth, whose name our company hath proclaimed,</p>	<p><b>The Earthly Realm</b></p>
<p>Enûma Eliš VII</p>	<p>1. O Asari,--giver of plantations, appointer of sowing time,  2. Who dost make grain and fibrous plants, who makest garden herbs to spring up.    6. Who makest straight the direction of Anu, Bel, [and Ea].    115. Because he made the [heavenly] places and moulded the stable [earth].</p>	

He ordered the creation of humankind (VI 1-8) as part of the cosmic order, and also the creation of the earth (VII 115). Moreover, he put himself in the position of a life-giver and god of nature (VII 1-2). This last point is fundamentally important, as it is a vital part of Marduk’s identity during the Akitu ceremony. It is possible indeed, to find a re-creation

of the tripartite world during the Akitu ceremony in the same order as it is stated in the Enûma Eliš. Marduk being the god of the Babylon, it was his creative deeds that were celebrated during the Akitu.

<b>Days</b>	<b>Events</b>	<b>Tripartite World</b>
<b>1 to 4</b>	On the second day a sheep/ram was beheaded and his carcass was used by an exorcist to purify the temple of Nabu. After the ritual the head of the animal was thrown into the Euphrates.	<b>Chaos, Underworld and Pre-Creation state</b>
<b>1 to 6</b>	Marduk was imprisoned “under the mountain” i.e. the Underworld since the beginning of the Akitu. During the 6th day, the statue joined his father’s in the E-Sagila temple, to deliver his father from the Underworld.	
<b>5</b>	The Enûma Eliš was recited in the E-Sagila temple.	<b>The Celestial Realm</b>
<b>8</b>	The statues of Nabu and his father Marduk were shown to the public, and gathered in the Chamber of Destinies. After this, the king and the gods boarded ships on the Euphrates to the House of Akitu outside of Babylon.	
<b>11</b>	“Sacred marriage” ceremony held on the 11th day. The king played Marduk and a priestess embodied Šarpānītu.	<b>The Earthly Realm</b>
<b>12</b>	The gods gathered in the Chamber of Destinies and ratified the decree regarding the date of the community for the coming year.	

Days one to four announced the purification of the city. Symbolically it represented the action of Marduk in tablet IV (128-133) of the Enûma Eliš, when he used Tiamat’s body to create the cosmos. The sheep/ram is used as a creative chaos representing Tiamat, in order to bring purification to the cosmos represented by the city of Babylon. The blood mixed with the Euphrates reminded citizens of the blending needed between disorder and order to create the cosmos. The blood in the river can also be seen as a reminder of a mīluflood occurring during the month of Nisan (as seen previously), perceived as a negative omen reminding the Babylonians, through the dualism of the Euphrates River, of the fragile cosmic balance and the omnipresence of the threat of Chaos.

Days one to six showed the cycle of nature. During Marduk’s captivity the land was desolate, as the Akitu took place at the end of the winter when the arable lands were still dry and unproductive. However, his deliverance announced the resurrection of nature and the creation of the celestial realm which followed. Marduk’s deliverance followed the recitation,

during the fifth day, of the *Enûma Eliš* in the E-Sagila temple. These rituals could be the re-enactment of the fight between chaos and order, i.e. of Tiamat and Marduk, which led to the victory of Marduk and the establishment of the cosmos. The eighth day completed the celebration of the celestial realm, by reminding the citizens of the Tablet of Destinies (*Enûma Eliš* IV 121-122) through the “Chamber of Destinies”, as it was following the acquisition of the Tablet of Destinies that Marduk created the “limits” of the cosmos, i.e. the Underworld and Heaven.

Finally, the eleventh and twelfth days were the establishment of the biological cosmic rhythm of the year. The union of the king and a priestess recalled the celebration of the fertility of nature embodied as well by Marduk (*Enûma Eliš* VII 1-2), and the earthly realm.

The tripartite world can also be found contained in the Map of the World as seen previously. The Euphrates and the cities represented were symbols of life and the earthly realm (the Euphrates having a dual meaning could also simultaneously be part of the two other realms as it was a bridge between the three realms of the cosmos). The *marratu* “Bitter River” was the celestial realm, and the *nagu* the “unknown regions”, as well as the mountains (gates to the underworld, but also the source location of the Euphrates and the Tigris).

#### 4.2) Egyptian Tripartite World and the “Opening of the Year”

The Egyptian New-Year, “The Opening of the Year” took place during Akhet “Inundation” (July-October). Like the Akitu, this ceremony was linked to the agricultural cycle and was anchored in the journey of the earth around the sun.

The evidence for this festival is uneven; there are more inscriptions recording funerary and royal festivals, and far more evidence from Thebes than from the rest of Egypt. One of the most important sources is the hieroglyphic inscription recording a great festival list in the temple for Ramsesses III at Medinet Habu, where the New-Year festival is mentioned<sup>166</sup>. Even if abundant evidence is lacking, some artefacts related to this festival have been found.

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<sup>166</sup> Noted by Siegfried Schott in his study of festival dates in *Altägyptische Festdaten*. Wiesbaden: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz in Kommission bei Franz Steiner, 1950. “The Opening of the Year” is as well mentioned in the UC32191 papyrus, a fragmented accountancy table from Lahun.



Two green faience water flasks were found at the town site of Natahut (modern Tell et Yahidiya), and are from 550 B.C.E. They were made as New-Year presents from maid-servants to their masters. They are inscribed with invocations to the deities to open a good year. On the first one “Tahuti (Thoth) open a good year for her Lord”, “Horus the good give life for her Lord”, and on the second flask “Amun open a good year for her Lord”, “Ptah and Sekhet” open a good year for her Lord” (Petrie 1906:19 pl. 21). Each of the five gods mentioned above embodied one of the three realms that constitute the tripartite world.

<p><b>Amun the “Hidden one” Theban Cosmology</b></p>	<p><i>Solar god:</i> in the 18th dynasty hymn to Amun preserved on the Amenhotep III stela in Luxor Temple, he is referred to Horakhty (rising sun), directly fusing the hidden one with the visible sun.</p> <p><i>Fertility god:</i> From the 12th dynasty, Amun Kamutef “bull of his mother” was represented especially in the Luxor Temple (Bonnamy 2013:680). It conveys the sexual energy of the bull as a symbol of fertility.</p>	<p><b>Celestial Realm</b></p>
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As “Bull of this Mother”, Amun can be linked to the goddess Mehet-Weret, who, in the pyramidal era (Old Kingdom), represented the waterway in the Heavens. She was also a manifestation of the primeval waters. She gave birth to the sun and carried it between her horns to the Earth (Bonnamy 2013:279). She was a goddess of the sky in Ancient Egypt. Her name could also be “Great Flood” (Wilkinson 2003:174). Amun is thus linked to the primeval celestial waters.

Iconographically, Amun can be represented with twin feathers upon his head, as it reflects an aspect of the basic dualism which prevailed in Egyptian symbolism and especially water symbolism. Anthropomorphic images of Amun are found in two forms, with red and blue skins<sup>167</sup>. Red can be, as with Seth, a symbol for *decheret*, and also the colour for unlucky days, and the names of hostile beings (Wilkinson 1994:106). The Nile goose was also a symbol of Amun, probably because of its association with the creation of the primeval world. Gengen-Wer was the primeval goose who manifested the power of Creation through

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<sup>167</sup> In red at Thebes in the Karnak Temple, bas-relief, Hypostyle Hall. In blue at Karnak, bas-relief of the god Amun making the gift of life (ankh) to the pharaoh Thuthmoses IV.

his honking call or through carrying the egg from which life emerged (Wilkinson 2003:213). According to some texts it was the honking wall that “awoke” the Creation (Papyrus Leiden I 350, Chapter 90). Like water, Amun was a hierophany. He was universal in nature, he personified all that existed from the sky to the cosmos, he was the essence of the cosmos.

<p><b>Ptah Memphite Cosmogony</b></p>	<p><i>Creator god:</i> identify with craftsmanship, he is known as the sculptor of the earth, whom like the ram god Khnum was believed to form everything on his potter’s wheel.</p>	<p><b>Earthly Realm</b></p>
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First and foremost, Ptah was regarded as a craftsman, a creator god. In him dwelt the hierophany principle. Indeed, in his person were united both the masculine primeval deity Nun and his feminine counterpart, Naunet, so that Ptah was seen as the primordial deity whose creative power was manifested everywhere in the cosmos (Wilkinson 2003:124). He was also linked to the earth god Tatenen<sup>168</sup>, under the name Ptah-Tatenen. As Ptah-Tatenen he was represented with a blue or green skin<sup>169</sup>. Blue and green can firstly be related to the creative state and to fertility/vegetation (see Chapter Two: The “Nile gods” : the source of the Flood). Moreover, greenness is associated with the chthonian world, as seen previously. It was the skin colour of the god Osiris, the ruler of the Underworld. Then, as Amun, Ptah embodied the dualism of Egyptian symbolism and the hierophany aspect of water.

<p><b>Sekhmet</b></p>	<p><i>Destructive goddess:</i> she was regarded as the daughter of Re and she became one of the most important manifestations of the “Eye” of the sun god. She was also directly associated with the plague.</p>	<p><b>Chaos Death</b></p>
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Sekhmet embodied the danger that the sun represented, as the “Eye” of Re, as a hot and barren element in a desert environment. As seen previously, the plague was one of the elements showing the barren and destructive aspect of the Nile. A passage in the Middle Kingdom story of Sinuhe links Sekhmet to the Flood.

Then he said to me  
How will that land be now, without that effective god

<sup>168</sup> Memphite divine form, representing the primordial earth and personifying the realm that the sun god crossed at night (Bonnamy 2013:701).

<sup>169</sup> Both can be found in the Valley of the Queens in Tomb QV55.

Whose fear permeated the hill-lands like Sekhmet in a year of plague.

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Furthermore, we know that the plague could be linked to the colour red as seen in the Admonitions of Ipuwer, and the red colour was known to be linked to Sekhmet. Firstly, one of her epithets was “mistress of red linen” (Wilkinson 2003:199), and secondly, Sekhmet made the Nile red with blood when she tried to destroyed humankind (Lichtheim 2006:197-199).

<b>Horus</b>	<p><i>Sky god:</i> Mythologically the god was imagined as a celestial falcon whose right eye was the sun and left eye the moon.</p> <p><i>Sun god:</i> As Horakhty, Horus was the god of the rising and setting sun, especially the eastern sunrise, as it is said in the pyramid texts that the deceased king is reborn in the eastern sky as Horakhty (6§4).</p>	<b>Celestial Realm</b>
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The “Eye of Horus” was often linked to the flood and the greenness of it, as seen previously. Horus, as a celestial god, was in constant contact with the celestial waters and stars.

<b>Thoth</b>	<p>God of knowledge and writing, he was depicted as an ibis and as a baboon, though both were lunar related, the image of the ibis was primary.</p> <p><i>Celestial god:</i> he is one of the companion of Re during his heavenly journey across the sky (Pyramid Texts 210§128). Also the gods were said to travel on the “wing” of Thoth across the “winding waterway” or river of the heavens (Pyramid texts 359§594-596). He also appears in an ancient purification ritual accompanying Horus, Seth and the falcon god Dunanwi who together personify the four cardinal points (Pyramid texts 35§27).</p> <p><i>Chthonian god:</i> he assists Osiris in the Hall of Judgments. He was the recorder of the judgement of the deceased (see Book of the Dead of Iahtesnkh from Herakleopolis Magna).</p>	<b>Celestial Divine Realm</b>
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Thoth was focused towards the celestial realm especially. His focus was mainly the “renewal” concept, as with Horus. Horus though was more involved in the natural cycle, natural elements and the rhythm of nature. Thoth aimed his deeds more towards the divine.

These three realms were linked to the ceremony of the “Opening of the Year”. Amun, Ptah, Sekhmet, Horus and Thoth were all linked to this festival due to their attributes which joined them to the tripartite world concept. Like for the Akitu, the Egyptian New-Year was linked to the timing of the flood. Water was then an unconditional element of the tripartite world. Moreover, it was the element that linked the three realms, as it was present in all three of them.

<b>Mystery Play of Succession</b>	The murder of Osiris by his brother Seth and his resurrection by his wife Isis was re-enacted	<b>Chaos Death</b>
	The fight between Seth, Osiris and Horus was re-enacted	<b>Creation</b>
<b>Ceremony</b>	Each new king was crowned at the same time as the start of the inundation and after the <i>Mystery Play of Succession</i> .	<b>Earthly realm</b>

It was following the second death of Osiris, after Isis had resurrected him, that he became the ruler of the Underworld, establishing the chthonian realm. The mighty fight between Horus and Seth was re-enacted as it was upon this fight that the destiny of the creation of a righteous kingdom depended. This mirrors the fight between Tiamat and Marduk that decided of the creation of the earthly realm. The establishment of Horus as rightful king, against the usurper Seth, would be the start of an earthly and righteous royalty in ancient Egypt. The coronation of the king at the end of the play, was the celebration of Horus’ victory over the forces of chaos. It legitimised the king and the kingdom of humankind under divine approval.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Like for the Map of the World, the tripartite world can be found in the Sarcophagus Relief. Egypt, represented as a circle with the 41 nomes of Egypt, is the earthly realm, the celestial waters as the celestial realm, and finally the wild regions outside the nomes of Egypt and the inner small circle are the unknown and the Underworld.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter we exposed the similarities of the tripartite world in each civilisation and illustrated the role of the primeval waters as the source of all being. However, one main difference between the Egyptian and Babylonian water symbology in their Creation Myths is the distinction between the cosmic phenomena themselves and the powers which were manifested in them. In Babylonia, this distinction was stronger than in Egypt. This is evident in iconography, like the Sarcophagus reliefs and the Map of the World. The gods in these reliefs are represented as twisted or with strange forms (like the goddess Nut or the gods Hapi and Osiris) to match the shape of what they represent. However, when cosmic powers appear as people in Babylonian iconography, their posture and appearance generally bears no resemblance with the parts of the cosmos they embodied. They were envisioned as free agents.

Nonetheless, the similarities in water symbolism in Babylonia and Egypt are found throughout the tripartite world, as a divine, natural and biological realm. These similarities are the result of archetypes and similar natural, biological and social environments that the Babylonians and Egyptians shared. The natural environment is the most striking shared feature. Indeed, through many natural hierophanies/features, such as hills, mountains and rivers, I have aimed to present similar sources from both cultures forming a cognate “background”, which would have been at the origin of homologous story lines in the Babylonian and Egyptian Creation Myths.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to present a concise survey and comparison of the sources on water symbolism in the Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological cycles. The principal contribution of this work has been the collection, presentation and systematic comparison and analysis of these sources, as well as displaying the current state of research in this area. It is my conclusion that the previous scholarly treatment of water symbolism has been extremely limited, and has thus not sufficiently or systematically dealt with the social aspect of water symbolism in the tripartite world and its link to the mythological and natural realms. In my research, I struggled at first to find references to water symbolism. Indeed, water symbolism as such is rare in both primary and secondary sources. Nowadays, major scholars, such as Leick (1999, 2003) and Willcocks (1917) referenced in Chapter One, and Ikram (2010) and Silverman (2003) in Chapter Two, tend to focus more on the hydraulic functions of water and its affect on the landscape rather than its cosmological and cosmographical values for ancient civilisations. Thus, in my research I attempted to close this gap, by first studying the theories of Oestigaard (2011) and Abbas Sayed (2010) on water as a divine symbol of fertility and as an element of death and resurrection. Consequently, I established a link between the commonality of water symbolism within the Babylonian and Egyptian civilisations, by highlighting the desire these civilisations had to describe their environment through their mythology. I questioned the importance of water in Babylonian and Egyptian myths as a natural, religious, and social symbol forming the tripartite world. I then identified the different opposed archetypes that populated Babylonian and Egyptian myths, and I organised them under three categories dividing each chapter of this thesis between the topics of Water as Creation, Water as life and Water as Death. I brought together a set of textual primary sources: primarily the *Enûma Eliš*, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Hermopolitan, the Heliopolitan, the Theban and the Memphite cosmogonies, and material primary sources: mainly The Map of the World and the Egyptian Sarcophagus Reliefs of Sakkara.

Chapter One begins with an in-depth analysis and survey of water symbolism in the Babylonian cosmological cycle. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the plurality of water as a hierophany and as a complementary dualistic element within the tripartite world. It identifies the environmental and mythological aspects of water symbolism through a set of primary textual sources, such as the Atrahasis, with a strong emphasis on the *Enûma Eliš* and the Epic of Gilgamesh, and also through artefacts and rituals, for example the Map

of the World and the Akitu festival. Furthermore, these sources serve to demonstrate the knowledge the Babylonians possessed about their own natural and social environments. Firstly, through the natural and social status of the ill-tempered goddess Tiamat in the *Enûma Eliš*. Her natural status is described in Chapter One “Complementary Dualism: Tiamat the monster, Apsu and Marduk the anthropomorphic gods” (p29), and “Complementary dualism of life and death: Tiamat and Apsu” (p32), in which she was the infertile element, the Bitter Water, in accordance to Babylonians knowledge of the infertility of salt water. Additionally, her social status is detailed in “The primeval goddess Tiamat” (p55), in which she embodies the evolution of the status of women in Babylonian society. Thus, gender in the Babylonians’ Creation corpora reveals the social correctness of Babylonian society: the male deities are creators and the female deities submit to the will of the male gods. Through the *Enûma Eliš*, the Babylonians were demonstrating and describing their social codes and environment.

Secondly, the link established between the power of the rivers, kingship and Marduk in the *Atrahasis*, the Prayer to Marduk and during the Akitu ceremony testifies to the desire of the Babylonians to describe their social and natural environments through their mythology. Indeed, in the second section of Chapter One (p 45), I examined the potential and repression of life embodied by Marduk and Tiamat respectively. In “Whims and Justice of the gods: the Akitu festival” (p46), I show how Marduk was an integral part, during the twelve days of the Akitu, of the strengthening of kingship and the bio-cosmic cycle in Babylonia. During the Akitu, the king was both revered and feared as a representative of Marduk. On the eighth day, the king “grasping the hands of the great Lord Marduk” (James 1958:57), with the statues of the other gods, travelled in a procession through the city passing under the Istar gate to reach the Euphrates where they boarded ships to join the House of Akitu outside of Babylon. The procession might have recreated the army of the gods marching against Tiamat. Thus, this shows us that the king personified the victory against the forces of chaos as Marduk after his victory against Tiamat. Moreover, the Akitu being linked to the floods of the Euphrates and the Tigris, was also a symbol of divine and royal natural power. As shown in “Marduk the master of the watercourses” (p51), Marduk was celebrated as the deity controlling the floods and creating civilisation and fertility in the cosmos. Therefore, Marduk’s powers were celebrated at the Akitu each spring at the time when nature was reborn each year. The Akitu was then the time of the disappearance and



reappearance of nature based on the observation of the bio-cosmic rhythm. This rhythm needed to be regenerated each year with the floods. Due to the Babylonians' dependence on the floods, and the importance of it, this natural event heavily influenced the Babylonians' mythology. Their mythology justified and emphasised the role of the king, giving us an idea of the extent of the powers and status of the king. Additionally, as seen in their Creation myth corpora such as the *Enûma Eliš*, water is a common thread between the chaos of the pre-Creation state (*Enûma Eliš* I:5) and the order of Creation (*Enûma Eliš* IV:135-140). The Babylonians' floods represent the complementary dualism: historically chaotic and destructive (as seen in "Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh: The Flood story", p64), but also fertilising and successful (such as in "Whims and Justice of the gods: the Akitu festival", p46, and "Marduk the master of the watercourses", p51). Thus, with Marduk and the Akitu, the Babylonians showed their desire to represent their social and natural environments through their mythology. They also emphasised the blurred boundary between profane (Earthly/mortal realm) and sacred (Heavenly/divine realm), nature (floods) and culture (Akitu), through water symbolism. The influence of water can be highlighted as environmental determinism, as seen in "The influence of the Environment on humans' beliefs: Environmental determinism" (p67), which shows how the Babylonian physical environment, especially the flooding of the Euphrates and the Tigris, influenced and predisposed the Babylonian Creation corpus and society towards religious beliefs built on water symbolism.

In this chapter, I also highlight the character of water itself as neutral through the dualistic symbolism it embodies in the Map of the World and the *Enûma Eliš*. This corpus illustrates the cyclic renewal of the cosmos through the duality of existence present within it, life and death, chaos and creation, male and female, and how each of these pairs complement and complete each other while linked by water to create order, harmony and the tripartite world. For example, as seen in "The *Enûma Eliš*: mythological and real complementary dualism" (p28), at the beginning of the *Enûma Eliš* (I:3-4), there was a single male and female principle (Apsu and Tiamat) which was at the origin of life. In my opinion water was neutral, and indeed water was a perfect example of the union between male and female. It was male with the sweet waters from the Apsu, but also female with the salted water of the goddess Tiamat. Additionally, as seen in the Map of the World, water was the element linking the three realms of the cosmos (Earth, Underworld, Heaven)

through the *marratu* the “cosmic ocean” and the Euphrates “cosmic river”. There was no differentiation in the tripartite world, water was used as a neutral bridge regardless of the agent or the cosmographical location.

In Chapter Two, devoted to Egyptian water symbolism within the cosmological cycle, I reviewed water symbolism as an element of creation, life and death, as in Chapter One, I also described the cosmographical environment through water and the personification of water via deities.

The four main cosmologies studied in this chapter (Hermopolitan, Heliopolitan, Memphite and Theban) emphasise the importance of the fusion between profane and sacred as the basis of the essence of non-existence. In the Hermopolitan cosmogony non-existence is characterised by the potential of the “Nun”, as seen in “The Nun: As waters of Creation and Threat” (p78). Nonetheless, all four cosmogonies start with an act of auto-creation, or hierophany, thanks to a demiurge (Ptah in Memphis, Amon in Thebes, Atum in Heliopolis), to create the tripartite world from chaos. Humankind (profane) and the divine (sacred) thus had a common origin based on the autogenous power of the non-existence. Everything has sacredness contained within itself. For example, from “The Egyptian Transcendence” (p76) and the Sarcophagus Reliefs of Sakkara in “Cosmic geography of the Primeval Waters: The link between the terrestrial, celestial and chthonian worlds” (p88), I identified that the Egyptians’ universe was composed of beings, every natural feature of Egyptian society was linked to the divine: the vault of the sky was the goddess Nut, the sun was the god Re, the desert was the god Seth, the floods were the god Hapi. I characterised this aspect of the Egyptians’ beliefs as divine naturalism in the sense of nature as a manifestation of the divine, a personification of natural elements through the gods embodying their natural features physically and morally; for example, as seen in “The Nile gods: The sources of the Flood” (p101), the red god Seth is an allegory for the appearance, toughness, bareness and maleficence of the desert.

Water brings the tripartite world to a cyclic vision of time following the bio-cosmic rhythm, the flood, established during the *Oupèr renpèt néferèt*, as seen in “The Providential Flood” (p98). As in Babylonia, floods embodied the universal dynamic by bringing forward antagonistic mechanisms and opposed forces of both creative and

destructive potential. These mechanisms were emphasised during the Oupèr renpèt néferèt, during which new kings were crowned at the same time as the start of the annual inundation and before the coronation the Mystery Play of Succession was performed. This play was the re-enactment of the fight between Seth and Horus, and also the killing of Osiris and his rejuvenation. In “The Nile gods: The sources of the Flood” (p101), and “The worshipping of Osiris and kingship” (p104), the creative/life-giving forces represented by Horus and Osiris opposed the evilness of Seth. The greenness of the Eye of Horus and the skin of Osiris are symbols of fertility, water and vegetation, as opposed to the red Seth symbolising the desert and storms. Osiris, killed and rejuvenated every year, was an allegory to the renewal of the bio-cosmic rhythm through flooding. Thus, these antagonistic agents show the emergence of a pattern, testifying to the desire of these civilisations to describe their environment through their mythology.

Additionally, water was represented as a natural element through the symbolism it embodied in the Egyptian creation corpus which testifies to the knowledge the Egyptians possessed of their own natural environment, for example the reference to the Winding Waterway, as seen in “Crossing the Netherworld: The Lower and Upper Waterways” (p121), is an image of the ecliptic, which due to its stellar variation combined with the appearance of a linear flow was imagined as moving water. Moreover, the Primordial Hill, as seen in “The gods during the Creation of the Cosmos: Water as Kheper “To Become”” (p83), was an image of the mounds of mud carried and deposited by the Nile during the flood. Thus, Egyptian water symbolism was based on the relationship between nature and culture, in which water was used as a metaphor to transcend and define Egyptian civilisation.

In Chapter Three, devoted to a comparative study between Babylonian and Egyptian water symbolism in the cosmological cycle, I examined and reviewed the arguments made in the first two chapters, to highlight the common aqueous cosmographical factors shared by these two civilisations. I emphasised water as a hierophany in “The Source of the River” (p145), and “The place of Creation” (p146), and as a divine manifestation at the origin of the development of society and the mythical landscape. For example, the primordial waters, i.e. the floods, are at the root of the bio-cosmic cycle, originating from the “Double Cavern” at the First Cataract in Egypt,

mentioned in the Pyramid Texts, and the celestial “summit” or “mountain” illustrated in The Map of the World and mentioned in the Enûma Eliš.

Furthermore, I compared water symbolism’s social aspect through its cosmographical and ceremonial/social roles in the tripartite Babylonian and Egyptian cosmoses. Cosmographically, the tripartite world in Chapter One is displayed through the Map of the World, and in the Sarcophagus Reliefs of Saqqara in Chapter Two, as explain in “Water Cosmography” (p141). Each of these two artefacts display three realms: the Earth, the Underworld and the Heavens (or divine realm). The Babylonians and the Egyptian then displayed the geographical location of their mythical environments. Ceremonially/socially, the tripartite world was displayed in Babylonia during the Akitu and during the Oupèr renpèt néferèt in Egypt, as seen in “Tripartite World and New Year Rituals” (p160). Both festivals are shown as linked to the mythological and environmental aspects of water symbolism. Indeed, the flood was celebrated during these rituals and its consequences on the landscape were used as mythological features in the Creation myths re-enacted during these ritual celebrations. In Egypt, as mentioned in the Papyrus of Leiden I and the Pyramid Texts, the silt brought by the flood and accumulated on the banks during the flood was the mythological Primeval Hill. Furthermore, in Babylonia the destruction brought by high floods, is mentioned as a weapon of Marduk in the Enûma Eliš (V:49), and as threat linked to the waters of Tiamat (Hymn to Marduk 9).

However, in this chapter some differences and challenges are noted between Egyptian and Babylonian water symbology in their Creation Myths; for example in the distinction between the cosmic phenomena themselves and the powers which were manifested through them. By examining the Map of the World and the Sarcophagus Reliefs of Sakkara, I highlight that the distinction existing between phenomena and cosmic powers manifested through divine figures is stronger in Babylonia than it is in Egypt. In Egypt, this distinction is ambiguous as the gods in Egyptian reliefs are represented as twisted or with strange forms (like the goddess Nut or the gods Hapi and Osiris) to match the shape of what they represent, and usually to match natural features (see Nut in figure 11). In contrast, when cosmic powers are depicted as people in Babylonian iconography, the gods are envisioned as free agents as their posture and appearance generally bears no resemblance to the parts of the cosmos they embodied. This lead me to believe the Egyptians as being

more attuned with their natural environment. Indeed, Egypt depended upon the Nile only, while Babylonia depended on the Tigris, the Euphrates and their secondary tributaries. Even if the Euphrates was the main river (it crossed through the city of Babylon) on which Babylon depended highly, it did not bear the same importance and value as the Nile did in Egypt. Thus, in my opinion the lack of reference to the Euphrates itself as a river in Babylonian Creation corpora compared to the Nile in Egyptian Creation corpora is due to the difference of the aqueous environment in Babylonia and Egypt.

Nonetheless, this chapter also emphasises commonalities in water symbolism in Babylonia and Egypt throughout the tripartite world. I believe these similarities are the result of common archetypes and similar natural (the rivers, floods) and social (New Year's rituals) environments that the Babylonians and Egyptians shared. This chapter highlights these environments through their most striking shared feature by presenting similar sources from both cultures forming a parallel "backdrop" which would have been at the origin of the shared story lines in the Babylonian and Egyptian Creation Myths.

The extensive topical frameworks of the present work have been governed by three main problems presented in the introduction:

Firstly, the environmental aspect of water symbolism, as water is shown as a bio-cosmic element and as a hierophany in myths and literature. Primary sources such as the *Enûma Eliš*, the Hermopolitan, the Heliopolitan, the Theban and the Memphite cosmogonies, as well as artefacts like the Map of the World or the Sarcophagus Reliefs of Sakkara described previously, and rituals alike the Akitu or the *Oupèr renpèt néferèt*, serve to demonstrate the Babylonian and Egyptian geographical and biological knowledge of their own natural and social environments, and the influence these had on their own mythology. Indeed, these cultures demonstrate an environmental determinism through water symbolism, by displaying geographical features in their myths as being essential parts of their landscape: rivers, oceans, hills, mountains, the sun, and the sky. The reverence for rivers and mountains had a cosmological significance, as both provided sustenance to the land.

Secondly, the mythological aspect of water as the divine, dualistic and balanced element it embodies in the creation corpora. Water is indeed used to illustrate cyclic renewal, as well as the potential of the forces of the cosmos by describing choices between antagonistic mechanisms and opposed forces which nevertheless completed each other.

These antagonistic mechanisms and opposed forces were linked through water to achieve order and harmony in the cosmos. Good wins out and evil is only present as a challenger in order to inspire righteousness, as seen, for example, with Tiamat and Marduk, Osiris and Seth, Re and Apophis. Water is thus an element of conservation. Therefore, it shows the emergence of a pattern of complementary dualism, testifying to the existence of the tripartite world which both opposed and completed itself in the natural and mythological environments.

Thirdly, the social aspect of water symbolism in myths reflects power and renewal, and it has a strong, clear link with kingship. The king had to ensure his kingdom respected the will and justice of the gods. The king was presented as a medium between the divine and earthly realms during New Years' rituals (*Akitu* and *Oupèr renpèt néferèt*). His power was re-enforced by the watercourse gods such as Osiris, Hapi and Marduk, who could choose to bless him with a providential flood, or send him a cataclysm threatening the core of society, as seen in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Atrahasis*, and the *Admonition of Ipuwer*. From this, I think it can be understood that water, as well as being an element of divine and natural power, was an element reflecting social power and status as well.

Cosmographically, the lines between profane and sacred are blurred, emphasising the importance of the blend between them as the essence of non-existence, but also of celestial naturalism in the sense of nature as a manifestation of divine beings personifying natural elements through their natural features. Water brought together these cosmogonies as a vector of the tripartite world, in a cyclic vision of time following the bio-cosmic rhythm: from the emptiness at the beginning of time, until the regeneration of the world through a return to its origin. Indeed, water symbolism is not only a question of human mythological corpora, but also of the relationship between nature and culture in which water was used as a metaphor to transcend and define the Babylonian and Egyptian civilisations' cores.

Therefore, this thesis demonstrates the deficiency of ideas extant on water symbolism. Indeed, this study confirms and justifies the environmental and mythological aspects of water symbolism and the link it embodied between the two. However, as stated previously, this dissertation also emphasises the absence in previous studies of discussions on a link between the environmental and mythological aspects of water symbolism and its social aspect. This last point is discussed in Chapter Three regarding the idea of a link

between these three realms. However, only the Akitu and Oupèr renpèt néferèt ceremonies are used as case studies in this dissertation. Thus, it is necessary to generate further research on water symbolism, with regard to the diversification of the field, to investigate additional case studies on the social aspects of water symbolism on national or international scales, and to allow additional assessments of the dimensions of the subject.

Water symbolism in the Babylonian and Egyptian cosmological cycles shed light on the aqueous cultures present in both civilisations' corpora, and emphasises their cosmological similarities due to their connection with their dominant kindred aqueous landscapes. The social aspect studied through the symbolically similar Akitu and Oupèr renpèt néferèt ceremonies, referencing the Euphrates, the Tigris and the Nile as the common primary features of the Babylonian and Egyptian landscapes. Thus, the social facet water embodied was the result of an analogous response to similar environments and cosmographical structures in Babylonia and Egypt. This result is visible through the mythological, environmental and cultural tripartite worlds, in which water represented the axis mundi.

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