

# The Great Hymn to the Aten in the tomb of Ay

## Testimony of a religious belief

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## 1 The solar theology of the Amarna period

The worship of the sun during the reign of King Akhenaten in the 14th century BC is often portrayed as a theological revolution. Akhenaten is said to have invented monotheism and introduced a new god to Egypt. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that it was primarily religious practice that underwent a reform.<sup>2</sup>

In prehistoric times, different creation myths emerged in various regions of Egypt. According to these myths, a supreme creator god created subordinated deities and the universe from within himself. The subordinated deities were cosmic beings, immanent in matter and natural forces, but the creator god was transcendent, that is, he existed outside the universe.<sup>3</sup> The creator god had regionally different names: Atum in the southeastern

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ref 1, p 111.

<sup>3</sup> For further information see e.g. Ref 2, pp 185–187; Ref 3, pp 88–122.

Delta (Heliopolis),<sup>4</sup> Ptah in Memphis,<sup>5</sup> and Amun in Thebes<sup>6</sup>. The local origin of Ra, the sun god, is unknown. His worship in the areas of Memphis and Heliopolis is attested from the time of the 2nd Dynasty onwards.<sup>7</sup> The royal title, "son of Ra," first appears in reference to King Djedefre of the 4th Dynasty. From then on, each king bore this title alongside his role as the earthly representative or incarnation of the god Horus. The cult of Ra gradually became so popular that, from the late Middle Kingdom onwards, the other creator gods were declared to be specific manifestations of Ra or were merged with him in syncretic forms (Ra-Horakhty<sup>8</sup> and Ra-Atum, the manifestations of Ra at sunrise and sunset, respectively; Amun-Ra, the supreme god in Thebes; and Amun, Ra and Ptah as three aspects of a single supreme god<sup>9</sup>). The other deities were also incorporated into the theology of Ra as his appearances, as can be seen from their names (Ra-Osiris, Ra-Horakhty, Ra-Khepri, Khnum-Ra, Sobek-Ra, and Montu-Ra, to name a few).<sup>10</sup> Female deities such as Ma'at, Hathor, Sekhmet, and Bastet were referred to as daughters of Ra. Thus, a form of monotheism involving multiple divine personifications, rather than henotheism, existed in the New Kingdom long before Akhenaten's accession to power, since all the gods were both creations and manifestations of the one god, Ra or Amun-Ra.<sup>11</sup>

King Akhenaten<sup>12</sup> was a reformer of this religion. From about his second year of reign, he centered the faith entirely on the sun god, doing away with the rampant divine manifestations.<sup>13</sup> He even had the plural word "gods" changed to "god" in some places.<sup>14</sup> Until then, the sun had been regarded as a creation and depicted as an iconographic headdress worn by Ra and derived gods. But now, the sun was Ra himself, his sole form.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ref 2, pp 147–148. Coffin texts let Atum say: „I made my body evolve through my effectiveness. I am the one who made me. I built myself as I wanted, according to my heart“ (CT VI, 344b–d).

<sup>5</sup> Ref 2, pp 176–177. On the Shabaka Stone (BM EA498), it says: “So has Ptah become content after his making everything as well as every divine speech [...]” (Ref 2, p 177).

<sup>6</sup> *Jmn* „the hidden one“ (the hidden cause of all that exists). In the Middle Egyptian region of Khemenu (near modern-day el-Ashmunein), a god called Amun and his consort, Amaunet, were among four pairs of creator gods, none of whom held supremacy (Ref 2, pp 130–131, 185). The Amun of Thebes, who may or may not have been the same god, rose to prominence during the reign of the 11th and 12th dynasties.

<sup>7</sup> Name of King Nebra (or Raneb), meaning „Ra is the Lord.“

<sup>8</sup> Ra-Horakhty, literally „Ra, the Horizon-Horus“(nisba).

<sup>9</sup> Papyrus Leiden I 350, IV, 21–22 (19th Dyn.): 'His name [identity] is hidden as Amun, he is Ra in the visible, his body is Ptah.“

<sup>10</sup> This explains why Osiris or Horus were sometimes referred to as the "greatest god" in New Kingdom texts. Ref 4, pp 181–182.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ref 1, p 115; Ref 2, pp 47, 185–187; Ref 4, pp 4–19; Ref 5, pp 99–110.

<sup>12</sup> The king chose this name for himself; his name at birth was Amenhotep (IV).

<sup>13</sup> In a written speech from this time, which is preserved on a recycled masonry block, the king proclaimed that all gods except the Aten have „ceased their appearances“ (Ref 24, p 15).

<sup>14</sup> Ref 2, p 201; Ref 4, p 31, note 39; Ref 25, p 188.

<sup>15</sup> Ref 23, p 35.

Consequently, Ra was addressed as  $\text{𓂏𓏏}$  *jtn* (Aten), the Egyptian word for the sun disk, or  $\text{𓂏𓏏} \text{𓂏}$  *jtn* *ꜥnh* („living sun”).<sup>16</sup> Akhenaten shifted the focus to the sun god’s creative activity in the material world. In the Great Hymn to the Aten, it says: „You allow an infinite number of creations<sup>17</sup> to arise from you, the One“ (column 11).<sup>18</sup> The sun’s rays were considered to be the hands of Ra/Aten, through which he distributed light and warmth and executed his beneficent influence on Earth. This is depicted in numerous reliefs from the Amarna period and beyond. Images of the gods in human or animal shape were thus rendered obsolete. The same applies to the myth of the daily adventurous journey of Ra and his entourage in the sun barque, and the teaching about the judgement of the dead before Osiris<sup>19</sup>. Cult statues were officially no longer permitted to be venerated. The incomes of the Theban temples were diverted to the temples in the new royal residence city of Akhet-Aten, which were dedicated exclusively to the cult of Ra/Aten. Their sanctuaries were roofless courtyards,<sup>20</sup> because the venerated cult image was now the sun in the sky.<sup>21</sup> Instead of the previous festive processions in Thebes, during which a cult statue of Amun-Ra was carried from temple to temple, the king now made regular outings and held audiences at the apparition window of his palace. He presented himself as the high priest and the sole intermediary between Ra/Aten and his subjects. No one else could communicate with the sun god.<sup>22</sup>

The worship of Aten in this new and exclusive form (Atenism), had already begun to emerge during the reign of King Akhenaten’s father and predecessor, Amenhotep III.<sup>23</sup> Akhenaten probably established it as the state religion around the fifth year of his reign to curb the increasing political influence and autonomy of the Theban Amun priesthood.<sup>24</sup> The religious reform completely disempowered the incumbent high priest of Amun.

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<sup>16</sup> A distinction was no longer made between the sun disk and the sun god. Both were called *jtn* (Ref 6, vol 1, p 145.2–5; cf. Ref 1, p 111, note 11 [3]; Ref 7, pp 109–110). Some scholars believe that King Akhenaten’s sun god, Aten, was an entirely new supreme deity (Ref 2, pp 200–201). However, hymns from the Amarna period demonstrate that the sun god’s previous names were still in use (Ref 8, pp 210–227).

<sup>17</sup> The noun *hpr.w* (plural) encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings, including creations, beings, forms, manifestations, developments, and transformations (Ref 6, vol 3, pp 265–266).

<sup>18</sup> This statement is typical and occurs in other hymns to the sun god (Ref 8, pp 137 [1–2], 216 [54–55], 228 [20], 230 [29], 250 [7], 282–283 [5–7], 300 [65], 304 [1]).

<sup>19</sup> The location of the Aten at night, and the fate of the dead, as envisioned by King Akhenaten, remained unclear.

<sup>20</sup> Even the lintels of the pylons and passageways had openings.

<sup>21</sup> Open courtyards with sacrificial altars for the worship of Ra were not novel; they also existed in 5th Dynasty sun sanctuaries and New Kingdom temples outside Tell el-Amarna.

<sup>22</sup> In the Great Hymn to the Aten, the king says of himself: „There is no one else, who knows you“ (column 12).

<sup>23</sup> Ref 7, pp 109–119; Ref 9, pp 34–43; Ref 23, p 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ref 25, pp 85–90.

However, Akhenaten also curtailed his own power, because the power of the Egyptian king was based, in part, on his role as the founder of temples dedicated to locally worshipped patron gods throughout the kingdom.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, his subjects did not accept the religious reform. They were unwilling to abandon their familiar deities, cult images, festivals, and practices of personal piety,<sup>26</sup> not to mention the comforting hope of an afterlife as justified persons.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, after Akhenaten's death, a counter-reformation began relatively quickly, driven by the resurgent Amun priesthood and Akhenaten's formerly loyal confidants (such as Ay and Horemheb) in pursuit of their own interests.<sup>28</sup>

## 2 The Great Hymn to the Aten in the tomb of Ay

The Great Hymn to the Aten is inscribed on the west thickness of the entrance hall of the unfinished tomb of Ay in Akhet-Aten (Tell el-Amarna, tomb TA25).<sup>29</sup> It is one of many hymns of the Amarna period, addressing the sun god under various names, such as Ra, Amun-Ra, Ra-Horakhty, or Aten.<sup>30</sup> In the tomb of Ay, the Great Hymn to the Aten is written in monumental hieroglyphs in thirteen columns from right to left (Fig. 1). The scribe placed great importance on the aesthetic arrangement of the hieroglyphs in squares, which often resulted in the incorrect ordering of signs within words. The hymn resembles Old Testament psalms,<sup>31</sup> but its style is inconsistent. The first part of the hymn describes observations of human and animal life during the day and at night. It celebrates the daylight and recounts the night as a time of death-like slumber, because the Aten is temporarily absent. This section at times reads like the text of a children's book. From column 9 onwards, the hymn shifts into a more pompous mode of veneration. Aten is

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<sup>25</sup> Early in his reign, Akhenaten (still under the name Amenhotep) ordered the completion of the construction projects of his father at Karnak and endowed temple extensions at Sesebi (Nubia) and Heliopolis (Ref 1, p 109, note 2).

<sup>26</sup> Large quantities of molds and faience amulets in the form of deities, such as Hathor, Mut, Bes, Taweret, and Heqet, and divine symbols, such as the cobra and the eye of Horus, were excavated in the poorer residential areas of Tell el-Amarna (SMB ÄM 20484; SMB ÄM 22272; Ref 25, pp 187–194).

<sup>27</sup> Later steles recall the Amarna period as a time when the land was experiencing a „sickness,“ in the course of which youths quarreled and raged, sanctuaries and cemeteries were neglected, and the gods turned away and no longer answered prayers. Ref 10, pp 365–366 (2027); Ref 11, pp 18, 36–38.

<sup>28</sup> Akhenaten's son, Tutankhaten, was sent to Memphis for reeducation and was renamed Tutankhamun around the third year of his reign. Later, a stela and Ramesside texts celebrated the young king for restoring the old order (Ref 10, pp 365–368 [2025–2032]; Ref 11, p 38; Ref 23, pp 37–40). However, the king list in the temple of Seti I in Abydos jumps from Amenhotep III directly to Horemhab.

<sup>29</sup> Ref 12, pp 29–31, pls 27, 41 (more conveniently to read in Refs 13 and 17). Ay also owned the royal tomb WV23 in the Western Valley of the Kings, where he was presumably buried after his brief reign.

<sup>30</sup> Ref 8, pp 113–118, 128–260.

<sup>31</sup> Some scholars believe that the Great Hymn to the Aten influenced the Psalm 104, which was composed between the sixth and second centuries BC. Ref 14, pp 287–288, note 3.

praised as the sole god, with particular emphasis placed on his control over individual lifespans, the cycle of the seasons, and the life-giving Nile flood. The hymn may have been composed from two different sources. It is questionable whether King Akhenaten was involved as author, but it is not impossible.<sup>32</sup> Apparently, the hymn was supposed to be recited at dawn.

My following translation of the Great Hymn to the Aten is based on the hieroglyphic text copied by Norman de Garis Davies (Fig. 1).<sup>33</sup> It differs in some respects from previous translations.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it should be considered this article's hypothesis. The translation is structured purely according to content. Rather than translating the text into poetic or everyday language, I tried to stick to the Egyptian verb forms.<sup>35</sup> Occasionally, the meaning of a sentence becomes clear only by assuming that a typo or an omission occurred.<sup>36</sup> This leaves room for subjective interpretation.

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<sup>32</sup> Ref 25, pp 129, 133.

<sup>33</sup> Ref 12, plts 27, 41.

<sup>34</sup> For comparison, I selected the translation by N. de Garis Davies (Ref 12, pp 29–31) and five more recent translations (Ref 8; Refs 15–18).

<sup>35</sup> Egyptian verb forms are flexible in tense. It is more important whether the action is completed or not. However, English grammar may force us to disregard this principle (cf. Ref 2, p 210).

<sup>36</sup> Errors and omissions may have occurred during the copying process, whether by the Egyptian scribe or modern-day scholars. This is understandable, given the unfavorable viewing angle of a high tomb wall. The tomb's condition has deteriorated further since it was opened in the 19th century.

Fig. 1: Hieroglyphic text of the Great Hymn to the Aten<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ref 12, plt 27 (after Ref 26, plt 16).



Translation		Comments
<p>① (Hymn of) praise: The (Long live Ra-Horakhty, who rejoices on the horizon at his naming as the light that comes from the sun)),<sup>(a)</sup> may he live forever and ever, the great living sun in the festival,<sup>(b)</sup> the Lord of all that the sun circuits, the Lord of Heaven, the Lord of Earth, and the Lord of the sun temple in Akhet-Aten<sup>(c)</sup>.</p>		<p><sup>(a)</sup> This is the older, doctrinal name of the Aten, written in cartouches.<sup>38</sup> My translation (“<u>at</u> his naming”<sup>39</sup> instead of „in his name”<sup>40</sup>) reflects the new theological understanding in the Amarna period – the sun god is pleased that humanity has finally come to identify him directly with the sun and its light.<sup>41</sup></p> <p><sup>(b)</sup> This seems to be a solar festival, since Ra-Horakhty is addressed. The festival of the pre-Amarna sun god, Amun-Ra, was held during the first month of the dry season.</p> <p><sup>(c)</sup> The construction of the residential city of Akhet-Aten was a deliberate move away from Thebes and the powerful Amun-Ra priesthood. According to stela texts, Akhenaten justified it by claiming to have been guided by the Aten.<sup>42</sup></p>
<p>The King of Upper and Lower Egypt, who lives in Ma'at, the Lord of the Two Lands, (Beautiful are the appearances of Ra; He, the only one of Ra)), son of Ra, who lives in Ma'at,<sup>(d)</sup> the Lord of the Crowns, (Beneficial to the Aten)),<sup>(e)</sup> who is great in his lifetime, and his Great Royal Wife, whom he loves, the Lady of the Two Lands</p>		<p><sup>(d)</sup> There is no modern translation of „Ma'at“ that would do justice to this broad concept of cosmic order, rightness, and proper behavior.<sup>44</sup></p> <p><sup>(e)</sup> This is the meaning of the name „Akh-en-aten.“ The name could just as well be translated as “Glorious one of the Aten.”<sup>45</sup></p>

<sup>38</sup> In this article, cartouche text is enclosed between crescents. Enclosing Ra-Horakhty's name in cartouches like a royal name probably served to underscore the notion that the sun god held supreme authority over Egypt (cf. Ref 1, p 119; Ref 2, p 200).

<sup>39</sup> *hꜥj m* „to rejoice at something“ (Ref 6, vol 3, p 40.9–14).


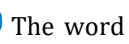

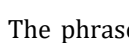


<sup>40</sup> Ref 1, p 117. The word *šw* (𓂏𓂐𓂏) *šw*, “light, sunlight” (Ref 19, p 875 [32407]), is sometimes erroneously translated as “Shu” (son of Atum).

<sup>41</sup> The word *nm*, which is usually translated as “name,” has a broader meaning, more akin to “identity” (Ref 2, pp 83, 200).

<sup>42</sup> Ref 23, p 35.

<sup>44</sup> Ref 2, pp 119–121.

<sup>45</sup> See the range of meanings of *ꜥh* (*akh*) in Ref 6, vol 1, pp 13–14.

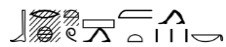
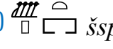


Translation		Comments
(The most beautiful one of the Aten; The beautiful one has come), <sup>(f)</sup> may she live forever and ever, be healthy and young, <sup>(2)</sup> he [the king <sup>43</sup> ] says:		<sup>(f)</sup> „The beautiful one has come“ is the meaning of the name „Nefert-iity“ (Nefertiti).
May you appear perfect on the horizon of the sky, you <sup>(g)</sup> living sun, so that life may begin.		<sup>(g)</sup>  <i>p3 jtn nḥ</i> literally says „the living sun.“ In my opinion, when someone is addressed in the second person, the article <i>p3</i> may be translated as "you" (or "O living sun").
As soon as you have risen on the eastern horizon, you have filled all the land with your beauty/benefaction <sup>(h)</sup> .		<sup>(h)</sup> The word  <i>nfr.w</i> may mean „beauty“ or „benefaction.“ When spelled  , it means „radiance of the sun.“ <sup>46</sup> It is a deliberate play on words.
You are beautiful, great, radiant, and high above all the land. Your rays encompass the lands to the borders <sup>(i)</sup> and all what you made. <sup>(3)</sup> You are Ra. By reaching them [the lands] to the borders, you subdue <sup>(j)</sup> them for the son, whom you love.		<sup>(i)</sup> The phrase „to the borders“ is written  <i>r r-c</i> (also in the next sentence). It is considered a play on words with <i>R'</i> (Ra). <sup>47</sup> <sup>(j)</sup> In this paragraph, the sun god is addressed one last time as „Ra.“ The verb  <i>wcf</i> , „to bend“ or „to subdue,“ probably expresses the sun god's rule over the land, which he exercises together with his son, the king.
You are far away, yet your rays are on the land. You were perceived by them [the inhabitants] <sup>(k)</sup> even (at times) when your course was		<sup>(k)</sup>  <i>tw=k m-hr=sn</i> lit., „You were in their faces.“ Being in someone's face was a paraphrase of being in front of or perceived by

<sup>43</sup> N. de Garis Davies thought that Ay is the speaker of the hymn, because his image is placed at the end of the first column (Ref 12, p 29 [right col]). However, it is the king who speaks; otherwise the sentence about the king and queen would have no predicate.

<sup>46</sup> Ref 6, vol 2, pp 260.8–11; 262.2.

<sup>47</sup> Ref 8, p 223, note 22.








Translation		Comments
still unknown. <sup>(l)</sup>		<p>someone.</p> <p><sup>(l)</sup> The subordinate clause is partly destroyed, but according to J. Kahl, still visible traces confirm the character sequence  <i>bw rh.tw šmj.t=k</i> “your stride was not yet known”<sup>48</sup> In my opinion, it refers to prehistoric times, when a solar calendar was not yet in use.<sup>49</sup></p>
When you set on the western horizon, the land is in darkness, as if in death. Those who sleep are in the shelter <sup>(m)</sup> where their heads are cloaked. One eye cannot see the other, <sup>(n)</sup> so all their belongings are stolen. Even if they [the belongings] were under their heads, they would not notice.		<p><sup>(m)</sup>  <i>šsp.t</i> is an ambiguous word that can refer to a bower, a summer house, or a chamber.<sup>50</sup> However, here it seems more likely to refer to a sleeping place of the lower classes: a tent or shack. This is indicated by the cloaked heads resting on the belongings, as mentioned in the next two sentences.</p> <p><sup>(n)</sup> Even by day, one eye cannot see the other. Perhaps it was an idiom to express that one cannot always see everything. In any case, it remains unclear who the thieves are.</p>
④ All lions only come out of their den when all kinds of vermin have bitten them. <sup>(o)</sup>		<p><sup>(o)</sup> This is a misconception. Lions often hunt at night.</p>
The hearth <sup>(p)</sup> is dark. The land lies in silence when he, who creates them [the creatures], has set on his horizon.		<p><sup>(p)</sup> The controversial word  appears in the dictionary by R. Hannig as  <i>h3.w</i> “hearth, fireplace”.<sup>51</sup></p>

<sup>48</sup> Ref 16, p 74, note 46. My translation is based on a comparable phrase from the New Kingdom: *nj rh.tw=f* „when he/it was not yet known“ (Ref 19, p 505 [18186]). Other authors translated the sentence as „You are in their faces, yet your course is not known“ or similar (Ref 8, p 218 [25]; Ref 16, p 75 [12]; Ref 17 [11]); „Though one sees you, your strides are unseen“ (Ref 15, p 97).





<sup>49</sup> On the calendar in ancient Egypt: Ref 20.

<sup>50</sup> Ref 19, p 904 (33541, 33543).

<sup>51</sup> Ref 19, p 536 (19356). Previous translations: „hearth fire“ (Ref 8, p 218 [35]; Ref 16, p 77), „tomb“ (Ref 8, p 218 [35]), „concealment“ (Ref 17 [18]), „ambush (?)”

Translation		Comments
The land is bright again when you have dawned on the horizon, shining as the sun by day. You dispel the darkness by bestowing your rays.		
The Two Lands are now in a festival of the sun. <sup>(q)</sup> The watchmen are standing on their feet again, after you awakened them. Their bodies are clean, when they have received their linen garments. <sup>(5)</sup> Their arms are in a gesture of praise at your appearance throughout the land, so that they fulfill their task. <sup>(r)</sup>		<p><sup>(q)</sup> Many translators ignored the addition  after  <i>hb</i> „festival“.<sup>52</sup></p> <p><sup>(r)</sup> I consider  <i>jrr=sn k3.t=sn</i> to be an unmarked noun clause (“that they fulfill their task”).<sup>53</sup></p> <p>The term used for the men described in this paragraph is  <i>rs(.w)</i> „watchmen“ (lit. „those who are awake/watchful“).<sup>54</sup> However, the hymn says that they wake up at dawn. Therefore, the term refers to a special class of priests, not night watchmen.<sup>55</sup> This is supported by the fact that they were given fresh linen garments every morning and were tasked with praising the Aten.</p>
All the small livestock have rested in their pasture, where the trees and herbs now turn green <sup>(s)</sup> . The birds have already flown from their nest, their wings raised in praise of your Ka. All the small livestock jump to the feet, and all those who fly and land <sup>(t)</sup> <sup>(6)</sup> come		<p><sup>(s)</sup> The color of their leaves becomes visible again in the light.</p> <p><sup>(t)</sup>  <i>p3y.w(t) hnn.t</i> „those who fly and land“ is an idiom</p>


(Ref 12, p 30 [left col]), or „to hover“ (Ref 15, p 97).

<sup>52</sup> Possibly,  is an abbreviation of  *nfr.w* („radiance of the sun;“ Ref 6, vol 2, 262.2),  *st.wt* („sun rays;“ Ref 6, vol 3, p 391.2), or  *hnnm.t* („people of the sun“ [followers of the sun religion]) (Ref 6, vol 3, p 114.6–11; Ref 16, p 78, note 49; Ref 19 p 578 [20956, 20957]).

<sup>53</sup> Previous translations of the sentence differ from mine: „The entire land sets out to work“ or similar (Ref 8, p 219 [42–45]; Ref 12, p 30 [left col]; Ref 15, p 97; Ref 16, p 79 [27–31]; Ref 17 [21–23]; Ref 18, p 5).

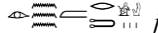
<sup>54</sup> Ref 6, vol 2, p 451.15,20; Ref 19, p 509 (18306).

<sup>55</sup> Certain priests at Dendera were also called *rs.w* (Wb, vol 2, p 451.18).

Translation		Comments
to life as soon as you have dawned for them.		that mainly refers to birds. <sup>56</sup>
Ships are sailing equally well downstream and upstream, because every path is accessible when you appear. The fish out of the Nile spring towards you, for your rays are even within the sea.		
(You) cause the fetuses <sup>(u)</sup> to develop in women, and (you) prepare the bodily fluid in humans <sup>(v)</sup> which brings the son <sup>(w)</sup> to life in his mother's womb and calms him so that his tears dry up. (As) a nurse in ⑦ the woman's womb, you have given the breath to vivify each of his [the son's] two eyes. He comes down from the womb to breathe on the day of his birth, and you open his mouth fully <sup>(x)</sup> and provide for his needs.		<p>(u)  m3y.w, „fetuses“ according to R. Hannig.<sup>57</sup></p> <p>(v) As the described functions reveal, the bodily fluids in question are amniotic fluid and breast milk.<sup>58</sup> This sentence lacks personal pronouns (suffix pronouns), but it is unlikely that nounized participles, imperatives, or the passive sḏm(.w) NP form are present at this point.<sup>59</sup></p> <p>(w) The son represents children of both sexes.</p> <p>(x) Were the Egyptians aware that the lungs only unfold after birth? In my opinion, the practice of opening and cleaning a newborn's mouth immediately after birth is the model for the mouth-opening ritual performed on the deceased upon their rebirth into the afterlife.<sup>60</sup></p>
The chick in the egg that chirps in the shell, you give it breath		


<sup>56</sup> Ref 6, vol 1, p 494.14.

<sup>57</sup> Ref 19, p 334 (12080). „Sperm“ according to Ref 6, vol 2, p 12.10 (used in the translations in Ref 8, p 219 [59]; Ref 12, p 30 [left col]; Ref 15, p 97; Ref 16, p 81 [42]; Ref 17 [32]).

<sup>58</sup> The author of the hymn was careful not to use the same word twice in a couplet of thoughts, therefore writing "humans" instead of "women." Previously, the phrase  jrj mw m rmt.w was translated as „he who turns water into humans“ or similar (Ref 16, p 81 [43]; Ref 8, p 219 [60]; Ref 17 [32]; Ref 15, p 97). I disagree on the grounds of the preposition m (instead of r or hr).

<sup>59</sup> N. van Cleve's translation uses the simple present passive: „Fetuses are created in women, semen in men“ (Ref 18, p 7, note 32).




<sup>60</sup> Ref 21.

Translation		Comments
within it [the shell] to bring it [the chick] to life, and you predefined for it its time until it can break out of the egg. It comes out of the egg to chirp at its predefined time. It can already walk on its two legs when it comes out of it. How numerous are the other arcane creations before the face of the ⑧ one God! There is no one else like him.		
You created the land according to your will, whereby you were alone, <sup>(y)</sup> (and with it) human beings, herds, and all small livestock, everyone on the ground who walks on legs and those in the air who fly with their wings, as well as the foreign lands of Khor [Southern Levant] and Kush [Upper Nubia], outside <sup>(z)</sup> of Egypt. You put each man in his place and provide for their needs. Everyone is provided for in terms of his food and the attribution of his lifespan. <sup>(aa)</sup> Tongues are distinct in speech, so are their characters, ⑨ and their skin colors differ as well, for you made the foreigners different. <sup>(ab)</sup>		<p><sup>(y)</sup> "Alone" in the sense that he was the one and only god.</p> <p><sup>(z)</sup> I transcribe the unclear phrase  as <i>ḥꜣs.wt ḥ(β)r k(β)š sn(.jt) km.t</i> lit. „the foreign lands of Khor and Kush, which go beyond Egypt.“<sup>61</sup></p> <p><sup>(aa)</sup> To this day, many religions teach the divine foreordination of one's lifetime.</p> <p><sup>(ab)</sup> I believe the intended meaning is the distinction between foreigners and Egyptians. However, the usual resentment toward foreigners is not evident in this paragraph. The inhabitants of the annexed Southern Levant and Nubia are just as much "sun people" as the Egyptians, as will be made apparent in the following paragraph.<sup>62</sup></p>
You prepare the Nile flood in the Duat <sup>(ac)</sup> and you bring it forth according to your will, to invigorate the subjugated peoples, <sup>(ad)</sup>		<p><sup>(ac)</sup> The Duat is a mythological realm. The sun god Ra (or Amun-Ra) crosses its waters in his barque at night. At midnight, Ra rests „in“ Osiris and vice versa.<sup>63</sup> The details of how this concept was modified during the</p>

<sup>61</sup> *snj* “to cross [borders], to go beyond,” Ref 19, p 771 (28280, 28285). Other translators transcribed this phrase as *h<sup>3</sup>s.wt h(3)r k(3)š {s} <t> n km.t* „the foreign lands of Khor and Kush, and the land of Egypt“ or similar (Ref 8, p 220 [84]; Ref 12, p 30 [right col]; Ref 15, p 98; Ref 16, pp 80, 81 [62]; Ref 18, p 8, note 41).

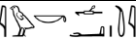

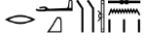




<sup>62</sup> Cf. Ref 15, p 100, note 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ref 20, pp 28–33. Caption of a scene in the tomb of Nefertari, QV 66, 19th Dynasty: „Osiris resting in Ra; it is Ra when he rests in Osiris.“

Translation		Comments
<p>just as (you invigorate them) when you create them. You are entirely their Lord and one who cares for them. You, the Lord of every land, have risen for them, too. You, sun of the day, great in renown in all distant foreign lands, you make them live because you induced the Nile flood to come down from the sky for them.<sup>(ae)</sup></p> <p>⑩ You cause the flood to wash over the mountains like the sea to irrigate their fields in their settlements. How perfectly your ideas are executed, you Lord of eternity! The Nile flood from the sky, however,<sup>(af)</sup> is only (intended) for the foreigners and for all foreign livestock that walk on legs, while the Nile flood that comes out of the Duat is (intended) for the heartland of Egypt.<sup>(ag)</sup></p>		<p>Amarna period are unknown. In any case, Ra/Aten replaced Osiris completely. Thus, the emphasis in the phrase "You are entirely their Lord" is on the "You." The sun god causes the Nile to originate in the waters of the Duat.</p> <p><sup>(ad)</sup> The term  <i>rhv(.t)</i> dates back to the Early Dynastic Period. After the unification of the Two Lands, the term was used to refer to subjugated inhabitants of Lower Egypt.<sup>64</sup> During Akhenaten's reign, the peoples of a large part of Syro-Palestine and Nubia were subjugated. Strictly speaking, however, this sentence refers only to the Nubians, who benefited from the Nile flood.</p> <p><sup>(ae)</sup> This remarkable sentence indicates that the Egyptians were aware of seasonal rainfall in present-day Ethiopia, the „distant foreign lands.”</p> <p><sup>(af)</sup> I believe that the controversial character sequence  after “sky” is a misspelling of the enclitic particle  <i>swt</i> („but, however”).<sup>65</sup></p> <p><sup>(ag)</sup> The ancient Egyptians seemingly distinguished between the floodwaters that came from the sky and those that came from the Duat.</p>
<p>Your rays nourish all fertile land when you rise, so that they [the creatures] may live and flourish for you. You determine the seasons to let develop everything you have made, ⑪ (namely) the Peret<sup>(ah)</sup> to cool them, and the (season of) heat<sup>(ai)</sup> so that it [the</p>		<p><sup>(ah)</sup> Peret, the growing season (from approximately the end of October to the end of February).</p> <p><sup>(ai)</sup> Shemu, the dry season (from approximately the end of February to</p>

<sup>64</sup> Ref 19, p 507 (18244); Ref 22, p 313.



<sup>65</sup> Ref 19, p 737 (26889). Previous transcriptions and translations: <dj =k> sw {k} „you give him” (Ref 16, p 82, 83 [78]; similarly Ref 8, p 221 [101]; Ref 15, p 99, and Ref 18, p 10); N. De Garis Davies suggested *tw=k* : „Thou art a Nile in Heaven” (Ref 12, p 30 [right col], note 12). The latter translation, however, does not do justice to the sequence of words.


Translation		Comments
creation] can feel you.		the end of June).
<p>You made the sky far away to rise on it and to behold all that you have made. You are alone<sup>(aj)</sup>, having risen in your manifestations as the living sun, having appeared luminous, distant, yet near. You allow an infinite number<sup>(ak)</sup> of creations to arise from you, the One, (namely) cities, settlements, fields, roads and the river that is observed, all made for their [humanity's] service.<sup>(al)</sup> You, as the sun of the day, are the ruler <sup>(12)</sup> of those who turn towards you<sup>(am)</sup> because of the presence of your eye [the sun disk], which you throw<sup>(an)</sup> upon them until you can no longer see the bodies (?) [...] <sup>(ao)</sup> the first you made.</p>		<p><sup>(aj)</sup> The phrase  <i>jw=k w<sup>c</sup>.tj</i> "You are alone" once more alludes to the notion that the Aten is the one and only god.<sup>66</sup></p> <p><sup>(ak)</sup> The numeral  for „1 million“ was used to express an infinitely large number, especially when plural strokes are added.</p> <p><sup>(al)</sup> This sentence is unclear due to the ambiguity of the phrase  <i>r<sup>c</sup>q(β)=sn</i>.<sup>67</sup> My translation is based on a lesser-known meaning of this phrase („for their service“)<sup>68</sup> and the removal of the ideogram stroke at  . I believe it was placed by mistake, as in two other places in the hymn.<sup>69</sup> Of course, the sun god is not a servant of his creatures, but he does care for them, as has been emphasized in column 9.</p> <p><sup>(am)</sup>  <i>hr.j-tp n šmj&lt;.t&gt; n=k</i> lit., „the ruler of what goes to you.“</p> <p><sup>(an)</sup>  <i>qm' hr</i> „to throw to/at something.“<sup>70</sup></p>




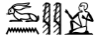

<sup>66</sup> Ref 6, vol 1, p 277.3.

<sup>67</sup> Previous translators made a period after "river," and continued with "Every eye sees you opposite them" or similar (Ref 8, p 221 [117]; Ref 12, p 30 [right col]; Ref 15, p 99; Ref 16, p 87 [95]; Ref 17 [64]).


<sup>68</sup> Ref 19, p 175 (6134).




<sup>69</sup>  *jr.t* („eye“) versus  *jr.t* (past participle of the verb *jrj* used as a noun: „that, which was made“).

<sup>70</sup> Ref 19, p (34213). Other authors chose for the ambiguous verb  *qm'* the meaning „to create“ (Ref 6, vol 5, p 34.6–14; Ref 8, p 221 [121]; Ref 12, p 30 [right col]; Ref 16, p 87 [98]; similarly in Ref 18, p 11). However, this translation is incompatible with the following preposition, *hr*. M. Lichtheim left this sentence untranslated (Ref 15, pp 99, 100, note 7).

Translation		Comments
		(ao) The text is missing due to major damage. Perhaps it says that the Aten returns to primeval waters at night, which were his first creation. <sup>71</sup>
You are in my heart. There is no one else, who knows you. Open the eyes <sup>(ap)</sup> of your son, (Beautiful are the appearances of Ra; He, the only one of Ra), when you cause him to pray, <sup>(aq)</sup> whether for your advice or for your strength.		(ap)  <i>wpj hr z3=k</i> lit. „Open the face of your son.“ <sup>72</sup> (aq) The verb is damaged. I assume it is  <i>ss3j</i> „to pray,“ „to beg.“ <sup>73</sup> The king asks for proper discernment in case the sun god puts him in a situation where he needs divine advice or help.
The land comes into being from your hand, just as you bring them [the creatures] into being. As soon as you have risen, they live; as soon as you have set, they die <sup>(ar)</sup> . You yourself are lifetime, for one lives from you. Eyes are fixed <span style="border: 1px solid red; border-radius: 50%; padding: 0 2px;">13</span> on beauty until you set. All work is laid down when you set on the western (horizon).		(ar) In column 3, night is compared to death ("the land is in darkness, as if in death"). Now, the text speaks of actual death. There is no other known meaning of the verb  <i>m(w)t</i> besides "to die, to be dead." However, this is evidently a metaphor because the hymn mentions nocturnal activities of thieves, lions, and vermin.
Rise (again and again) and let prosper [...] <sup>(as)</sup> for the king who has been present at [your] every step (?) <sup>(at)</sup> since you founded the land! You let them [the creatures] live high because of your son,		(as) Due to a lacuna, the objects of the main clause are missing. Unlike the paragraph discussed under (v), the verb forms here are clearly imperative, serving as a concluding appeal. (at)  <i>wnn[.y]</i> or  <i>wnn[.w]</i> , a nounized participle

<sup>71</sup> Other suggestions for the missing text can be found in Ref 8, p 221 (121); Ref 12, p 30 [right col]; Ref 17 (65).

<sup>72</sup>  *hr* „face“ or „attention“ (Ref 19, p 583 [21117, 21119]); in modern language: „Open your son's eyes“ (Ref 19, p 204 [7303]). Previous translations: „There is no one else, who knows you, except your son“ (Ref 8, p 221 [22–23]; Ref 12, pp 30 [right col]–31 [left col]; Ref 15, p 99; Ref 16, p 87 [101]; Ref 18, p 11). However, this certain usage of the verb *wpj* is not documented in the dictionaries.

<sup>73</sup> Ref 6, vol 4, p 281.2–3; Ref 19, p 827 (30476–30479). Previous authors assumed the destroyed verb to be  *ss3* „to have knowledge, to be informed“ (Ref 6, vol 4, p 543,7–9) and translated the subordinate clause as „whom you have taught your ways and your might“ or similar (Ref 8, p 221 [124]; Ref 12, p 31 [left col]; Ref 15, p 99; Ref 16, p 87 [103]; Ref 17 [67]; Ref 18, p 11). However, the shape of the damaged area and the remaining traces suggest that the hieroglyph  of the verb  *ss3j* „to pray, to beg“ was present.



Translation		Comments
who was born of you, the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, ... <sup>(au)</sup>		<p>translating as „he who is/was.“ So, Egyptian kingship is presented as an institution that has existed since the beginning of time. Another possible interpretation is <i>wn[.y]</i> „he who hurries“ („for the king who hurries with every step“). However, the usual hieroglyphic classifier of the verb „to hurry“ is A27 (running man).<sup>74</sup></p> <p><sup>(au)</sup> There follow the cartouches and epithets of King Akhenaten and his wife, Nefertiti, which are identical to those in column 1.</p>

<sup>74</sup> Previous translations: „Haste is in every foot“ (Ref 8, p 222 [132]; Ref 16, p 87 [110]); „Every leg is on the move“ (Ref 15, p 99; Ref 17 [74]); „All who run upon foot“ (Ref 12, p 31 [left col]); „Every (workman, priest) who has walked“ (Ref 18, p 12, note 54).

## Abbreviations

ASE: Archaeological Survey of Egypt; AUC: American University in Cairo Press; BASOR: Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research; BC: before Christian era; BM: British Museum; Cf.: compare with; col: column; CT: Coffin texts; DWO: Die Welt des Orients: Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Kunde des Morgenlandes; Dyn: Dynasty; KAW: Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt; lit.: literally; MIFAO: Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Cairo; p/pp: page(s); plt/plts: plate(s); QV: Queens' Valley; Ref/Refs: reference(s); SMB ÄM: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptische Sammlung; vol/vols: volume(s); WMANT: Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament; ZÄS: Zeitschrift für ägyptische Schrift und Altertumskunde.

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Fig. 1: Hieroglyphic text of the Great Hymn to the Aten. From Ref 12, plt 27 (public domain).