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The Possible Sources for the Development of the Christian Trinitarian Concepts

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With Tertullian a major step in the evolution of Christianity was accomplished. He is the first who expressed the constitution of divinity as a plurality of "dispositions" or "dispensations" within the unity of substance defined as a plurality of persons which he termed the Trinity. There was no Christian trinitarian doctrine before him. Two basic orientations were developed, the so-called "low Christology" where Christ was considered an ordinary man who was justified by progress in character and born of an intercourse of man with Mary (represented in the thoughts of Jewish-Christian, or rather Messianic, Ebionites),[1] and the so-called "high Christology" where Christ was considered divine though inferior in status to his Father. The Son and the Holy Spirit were assigned subordinate roles (Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen). Tertullian postulated one God, not a monad, but differentiated within himself: Logos coming from God through an act of internal generation thus becoming the Son; the Holy Spirit sent by the Father through the Son.

Tertullian's Trinity was not yet the full-blown trinitarian doctrine which we observe for the first time in Augustine's *De Trinitate* at the beginning of the fifth century. In addition Tertullian established the Christian eschatological doctrine and that of original sin. We have seen how the Christian doctrines evolved from the original Hebrew religion through the process of assimilation of theological and religious-philosophical doctrines of the ancient peoples into a syncretic religion.

Religious doctrines do not appear suddenly but rather they undergo a stepwise evolutionary process of modification giving rise to new religions. We shall now summarize briefly the sources of various triadic concepts which led eventually to the trinitarian Christian concept first postulated in a formal theological treatise by Tertullian. It is important to emphasize that our search for the sources of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity should be focused on the early formative years and stages of discussion before a fixed formula was approved in the fourth century after numerous debates, especially those between the Arians and Athanasians. In a study about the development of the doctrine of the Trinity entitled *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, its author belittles the influence of Greek philosophy, but emphasizes the importance of the recognition of the full divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.[2] These were the crucial steps which necessitated a new formula in order to satisfy the postulate of a relative monotheism or trinitarian monotheism.

There are doctrinal parallels in a number of pre-Christian theologies which are antecedents of trinitarianism. There are primarily three sources of the trinitarian doctrine. The Hebrew tradition in spite of emphasizing the unity of God contained elements which could be interpreted as triadic. These triadic elements had themselves a long history which reflects influences from other cultures, such as the Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian.[3] The emphasis of the Hebrew religion on the divine influence or activity in the world and among humans gave impetus to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Philo of Alexandria fused the Platonic, Stoic, and Middle-Platonic transcendentalist and abstract philosophical doctrines concerning the divinity and divine structure with the Hebrew biblical mythical tradition. Justin Martyr explained the mythical New Testament tradition in terms of the philosophical metaphysical concepts of Numenius of Apamea. Both these biblical traditions, one issuing from the other, offered a personal approach to God which was lacking in the abstract, impersonal analysis of the philosophers. Thus both, Philo of Alexandria and Numenius were the crucial figures in the development of the Logos christological

doctrine and theory of the triadic or dyadic structure of the divinity. Such views are absent from the Old and New Testaments, nevertheless, the Christian church read these philosophical speculations into the biblical texts. We have discussed these issues extensively in the chapters devoted to Philo of Alexandria and Justin Martyr.

Finally there is the Egyptian tradition, where we find for the first time in the Mediterranean region the religious mythical concept of the tri-unity,[4] thus operating at a personal level an approach to God. Tertullian combined this with Greek abstract thought into a trinitarian synthesis.

1. The possible Hebrew tradition of divine plurality

A. The plurality of gods and God's appearances

The notion of a possible concept of divine plurality in the Hebrew tradition is important because the early Christian Apologists stressed the alleged presence of three divine entities in the Hebrew Bible. This reference to the Old Testament is one of the reasons for maintaining the continuity between Judaism and Christianity. The Catholic church still maintains that the Trinity was revealed in the Old Testament by claiming in the official church catechism:

> The Trinity is a mystery of faith in the strict sense, one of the "mysteries that are hidden in God." To be sure, God has left traces of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his revelation throughout the Old Testament.[5]

And further, the catechism quotes Gregory of Nazianzus to demonstrate the Trinity:

> The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son and gave us a glimpse of the divinity of the Spirit.[6]

The religion of the ancient inhabitants of Palestine was not monotheistic. There are many references in the Hebrew Bible to many gods who were worshiped by the Israelites or by neighboring peoples. The Pentateuch books and the Prophets constantly reprimand the Israelites to be faithful to their tribal and only God,

Yahweh. Yet this God himself has traces of plurality which are remnants of a polytheistic past. It is enough to mention three cases of the plurality of God among the Hebrews:

> Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness' (Gen. 1:26).
>
> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' (Isa. 6:8).
>
> Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech (Gen. 11:7).[7]

Though Hebrew prophets recognized only one supreme God, Yahweh, as their God, whom they considered superior to all other gods (henotheism), they also accepted the existence of other gods for other nations.

The real issue here is, however, whether divinity itself represented a plurality or a strict unity. Then Yahweh would be either a composite of several gods or a name representing strictly one entity. We find traces of plurality of divinity in the name *'Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים). The word has a plural form and as such it refers in the Hebrew Bible to rulers and judges who are divine representatives or to a divine majesty and power, to superhuman beings, gods, angels, and to the sons of God or sons of gods. In a singular meaning it refers to the supreme God of Israel, Yahweh. Its origin is unknown but probably has Sumerian roots and is connected with the root *'El* meaning strength, power, might. Then the term would refer to the personalized creative powers which participated in the process of creation of the universe. This is reflected in the Genesis story of creation which finds its origin in the Babylonian epic *Enūma elish* (*When above*):

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ: (Gen 1:1)

We find such views in the Sumerian cosmogonies and cosmologies where a pantheon of superhuman beings is called collectively *"dingir."* The world originated from the preexisting cosmic ocean (*nammu,* personified by the goddess *Nammu),* "the mother who gave birth to heaven and earth" in the form of a united "heaven and

earth" (*an-ki*). They were separated by the atmosphere, air, wind, or space (*lil*) located between them and personalized as the god *Enlil*.[8]

Another aspect of the Sumerian myth is the role ascribed to the divine word through which the divinity was able to act. The biblical myth of the creation is a copy of the Mesopotamian myth with some modifications.[9] The Hebrews, however, put emphasis on the unity of God expressed in the well known liturgical statement in Deuteronomy 6:4:

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Yahweh] is our God [Elohim], the LORD
> [Yahweh] alone.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃

There are in the biblical texts some statements which were interpreted by the church Fathers and still are considered by trinitarian Christians as indicative of the presence of the Persons of the Trinity. Such is the visit of the three men to Abraham representing Yahweh in Genesis 18:1-16:

> The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at
> the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw
> three men standing near him. (Gen 18:1-2).

Or angels visiting Lot in Genesis 19:1, 15. Also God sends angels as his messengers 1 Chronicles 21:15. Philo of Alexandria, under the influence of the Middle-Platonic philosophy, saw in Abraham's visitors a triple vision of a single God; Justin Martyr saw in them two angels and Christ. Augustine saw the Trinity in Abraham's visitors, in Lot's – the Son and the Trinity.[10] These observations, however, reflect only a tendency to read into the ancient texts more recent religious or philosophical doctrines.

B. God's pronouncements and utterances.

God's pronouncements and utterances were interpreted as demonstrating plurality within divinity (Gen 1:3; Ps. 33:6; Wis. 18:15; Hos. 6:5; Jer. 23:29) and God's "word" would be personified or hypostatized. The use of the "word" in all these cases is either metaphorical or literal, and there is no clear personification. We

find similar situations where the speech of divinity is the agent of action in Sumerian myths and in Egyptian texts of the so-called *Memphite Theology of Creation* where the god Ptah creates the world by his word and his speech becomes a separate being transmitting the power of Ptah to all other gods and communicating life to all living things:

> The mighty Great One is Ptah, who transmitted *life* [to all gods], as well as (to) their *ka's,*[1] through this heart, by which Horus became Ptah, and through this tongue, by which Thoth became Ptah. (Thus) It happened that the heart and tongue gained control over [every] (other) member of the body, by teaching that he is in every body and in every mouth of all gods, all men, (all) cattle, all creeping things, and (everything) that lives, by thinking and commanding everything that he wishes.[11]

The Greeks, as we have seen, had the concept of *Logos* as the active component of the universe making it alive. By the time of Philo of Alexandria, it became a personified power of God but not God himself; in the Gospel of John, *Logos* is presumably represented by the person of Jesus, and Justin Martyr explicitly identified it with Jesus and made him a "second God" following Numenius of Apamea.

C. The concept of Wisdom

The concept of wisdom as an attribute of divinity may lead to its perception as a multiplicity. Wisdom is represented in the Old Testament as procreated, as a daughter of God (Prov. 8:22-23):

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1 *Ka* designates the force of conscious life in men, gods, and *akhs* (or deceased persons whose *ba* i.e., nonphysical personality or modern soul, united with the *ka* in order to make possible for them eternal life). *Ka* is transmitted by the creator to the world, by the king to the people and by fathers to their children.

> The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his
> acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the
> beginning of the earth.

Or as a personification of human wisdom, truth, justice, rule, and order (Prov. 8:10-17):

> Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than
> choice gold;
> for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot
> compare with her. I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain
> knowledge and discretion.
> The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the
> way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
> I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have
> strength.
> By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just;
> by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly.
> I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Wisdom stood by God during his work of creation:

> Then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his
> delight, rejoicing before him always (Prov. 8:30).

The book of Proverbs is an ancient collection of various teachings from the ancient sources. It is suggested that the sources of the concept of wisdom or the Law could be found in the ancient Egyptian goddess Maāt who personified Truth, Justice, Law, or Cosmic and Moral Order as an escort of the cosmic god of the sun, the god Re. She was also regarded metaphorically as the "daughter of the god Re," the "eye of Re," "lady of heaven, queen of the earth, and mistress of the Underworld."[12]

We find in the Egyptian *Pyramid Texts* and in the *Book of the Dead* Maāt standing with the god Thoth next to the Sun-god Re. Maāt and Thoth existed with Re when he sprang from the abyss of Nu (the primeval ocean) thus they were coeval

with him. Thoth was considered the self-created, unbegotten, god "One." He was the "heart of Re," i.e., his mind, reason, and understanding, and his tongue, "lord of divine words," "lord of the words of god." He spoke the word which resulted in the creation of the heaven and the earth. He made calculations regarding maintaining heaven and the stars. He spoke the words that enabled Isis to bring back to life the dead body of Osiris and later of Horus, and to beget a child by Osiris without physical contact. He possessed unlimited power in the underworld, He was master of physical and moral law, had knowledge of "divine speech" (word). He was "judge of the two combatant gods," (as we find in Egyptian mythology a fight between the god of light [Horus] and the god of darkness [Set]), thus he maintained equilibrium between day and night, or good and evil. He performed funeral works by which the deceased acquires everlasting life. The ancient Greeks identified him with Hermes because of his wisdom and learning. "They described him as the inventor of astronomy and astrology, the science of numbers and mathematics, geometry and land surveying, medicine and botany; he was the first to found a system of theology, and to organize a centralized government in the country; he established the worship of gods, and made rules concerning the times and nature of their sacrifices; he composed the hymns and prayers which men addressed to them, and drew up liturgical works; he invented figures, and the letters of the alphabet, and the arts of reading, writing, and oratory in all its branches; and he was the author of every work on every branch of knowledge, both human and divine." He was reported to have written forty two so-called "Books of Thoth." He was called "Thrice great" and hence the epithet "Trismegistos" was derived.[13] Thoth represented the highest idea of deity and personification of the divine mind in Egyptian thought.

The goddess Maāt, closely associated with Thoth was his feminine counterpart. The term *maāt* indicates primarily something "that is straight" e.g., a tool or instrument. Metaphorically it was associated with a rule, or law, or canon by which lives of men were governed, thus it meant right, true, upright, righteous, just. Goddess Maāt was thus a personification of physical and moral law and order. With

the Sun-god Re she represented the regularity of sunrise and sunset. As a moral power she was the lady of the Judgment Hall with forty-two judges and the personification of justice. She represented the highest conception of physical and moral law and order in Egyptian ideology. As such, she could be a model for the Jewish Law, Torah.[14]

In the Greek Wisdom of Solomon dating from the second century B.C.E., wisdom (*Sophia*) is considered a power affecting the author (Wis. 7:7) and teaching him (Wis. 7:22). She is praised for her qualities:

> There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle…. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; …. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail (Wis. 7:21-30).

In the Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) also dating from the second century B.C.E. wisdom is represented as part of the assembly of God that is of the beings residing with God: "In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory: 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud'" (Sir. 24:2-4).

In the Greek Wisdom of Solomon and in the Wisdom of Sirach written during the time of Hellenistic influence on the Jews, wisdom may be modeled on the figure of the Egyptian goddess Isis, the greatest of goddesses. She was the personification of feminine creative power; she was a faithful and loving wife and mother; she was the "mother of God" or "God-mother," hers was a virgin birth; Isis united in herself all the attributes of all the goddesses of Egypt. She was reported by Plutarch (ca 120 B.C.E.) to be the goddess of wisdom.[15] In the *Book of the Dead* Isis is reported to have "knowledge how to use" her mouth.[16] She was venerated in Rome in the second century C.E. as "queen of the heavens."[17] The praise of Wisdom found in Sirach 23:1-34, certainly reflects the hymns to Isis found in Egyptian literature, e.g., *"Hymns to Isis in Her Temple at Philae"* published by Louis Vico Zabkar, which derive from the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (284-264 B.C.E.) We find also the concept of Wisdom, *Sophia* in Gnostic literature.[18] Certainly she is a model for the Christian Gospel myth.

Moreover, there are many other congruencies with the Christian story: the doctrine of the virgin birth was widely spread in Egypt in connection with the goddess Neith, the conception of Horus by Isis through the power of Thoth, who represented the Intelligence and Mind (Logos) of the God of the universe, the resurrection of the body to everlasting life, the theology of divine incarnation in the God-King.[19] Undoubtedly, Jewish and Christian writings were inspired by and modeled their own stories on the whole constellation of doctrines, views, beliefs, stories that were circulating and well known in the Hellenistic milieu of the last centuries B.C.E. and the first centuries C.E. discussion of which is beyond the scope of this work.

Neither Wisdom nor Word in the Hebrew tradition, before the Christian era, constitutes a triad. They do not contribute to the idea of the plurality of God since they represent aspects or attributes of God, though they are sometimes treated as personifications.

D. The concept of "Ruach" (רוּחַ)

In the Hebrew scripture we find the term "ruach" which in its original meaning designates "wind," "breath." It is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning "to blow" or "to breathe" and is associated with "breath of life." Therefore it is translated often in the Septuagint into the Greek *anemos* (ανεμος), *pnoē* (πνοή) or *psychē* (ψυχή). Another most common translation, however, is into *pneuma* (πνεῦμα), i.e., spirit as "Spirit of God" (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים) or "Holy Spirit." In the Hebrew culture this term reflected God's presence and God's activity as illustrated in many passages:

> Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy
>
> spirit (רוּחַ קָדְשְׁךָ) from me (Ps. 51:11).
>
> Where can I go from your spirit (מֵרוּחֶךָ)? Or where can I flee from
>
> your presence? (Ps. 139:7).
>
> But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit (אֶת־רוּחַ קָדְשׁוֹ) (Isa.
>
> 63:10).

The term implies also, as its Greek equivalent, disposition, inspiration, as "prophetic inspiration." It can be identified with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge:

> I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,
>
> for wisdom (σοφία) the fashioner of all things, taught me.
>
> There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy (πνεῦμα νοερόν
>
> ἅγιον) (Wis. 7:21-22).
>
> The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and
>
> understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of
>
> knowledge and the fear of the LORD (Isa. 11:2).

It was believed in late Judaism that the spirit of prophecy had been extinguished. However, the spirit of God is constantly invoked in the New Testament and has a direct connection with the Old Testament concept. We find in Acts 2:17-21 such a statement referring to Joel 2:28-32:

> Now, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women in those days, I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

2. The triune understanding of the divinity in the Trinity

The Christian church admits that:

The Trinity is a mystery of faith in the strict sense, one of the 'mysteries that are hidden in God, which can never be known unless they are revealed by God.' To be sure, God has left traces of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his Revelation throughout the Old Testament. But his inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to reason alone or even to Israel's faith before the Incarnation of God's Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit.[20]

The church is aware that the Trinity is nowhere present in the New Testament though the New Testament is concerned with the divine Father and son ideas which also include the holy spirit. But these concepts are squarely within the framework of the Hebrew theological doctrines. The church recognizes that this "doctrine of faith" was "articulated," i.e., developed over the centuries by the Fathers of the church:

who distinguish between theology (*theologia*) and economy (*oikonomia*). 'Theology' refers to the mystery of God's inmost life

within the Blessed Trinity and 'economy' to all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life. Through the *oikonomia* the *theologia* is revealed to us; but conversely, the *theologia* illuminates the whole *oikonomia*. God's works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions.[21]

This paragraph summarizes the church's understanding of the Trinity – the works of God can be explained by ascribing them to the three entities by analogy to human actions which could be ascribed to the three persons. Yahweh was the Father and God and he sent Jesus on a mission to perform the role of his sonship. But Yahweh acted with his spirit (*spiritus* = *pneuma* = πνεῦμα = רוּחַ) among his followers and through Jesus. As we have seen, the problems arose when Jewish Messianism was fused with the Hellenistic worldview, when Jesus was identified with the full divinity as preexisting Logos and the Greek mediator. At the same time the spirit of God who controlled the Hebrew prophets now controls the Christian activists. Such ideas had to be reconciled with the Hebrew concept of the unity of the Godhead. The writings of the New Testament themselves are not the work of one author or contemporary with the presumed figure of Jesus. They underwent modifications, rewriting and the Hebrew story naturally was changed in the Hellenistic milieu. Some scholars suggested that the doctrine for which one could argue in the New Testament writings would be, at best, binitarian.[22]

The modern Catholic catechism, and I take it as a paradigm of orthodox Christian faith, formulates the dogma of the Trinity in terms of an elaboration of various church councils:

> *The Trinity is One.* We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the 'consubstantial Trinity.' The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God

whole and entire: 'The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and Son that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e., by nature one God.' In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): 'Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature.'

The divine persons are really distinct from one another. 'God is one but not solitary.' Father,' 'Son,' 'Holy Spirit' are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another: 'He is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son he who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit he who is the Father or the Son.' They are distinct from one another in their relation of origin: 'It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds.' The divine Unity is triune.

The divine persons are relative to one another. Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another: 'In the relational names of the persons the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both. While they are called three persons in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance.' Indeed 'everything (in them) is one where there is no opposition of relationship.' 'Because of that unity the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and is wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.' [2, 23]

There is one point in the traditional formulation of the Trinity overlooked by the church – if there is one substance as was postulated by Tertullian, shared by the three "persons," then the Trinity is a "quaternity."

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2   Council of Nicaea (325); Council of Constantinople (381); Council of Chalcedon (451); Council of Toledo III (589); Council of Toledo VI (638); Council of Toledo XI (675); Lateran

3. Summary of Tertullian's doctrine of the Trinity

Tertullian was the first who coined the Latin term *trinitas* for the description of the three divine entities in his doctrine of the Trinity.[24] He translated the Greek term τριάς which was used for the first time in describing the Christian triad by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, ca 180 C.E. In one place the word was used by Valentinus to describe the triple nature of man.[25] Theophilus describes the three days before the creation of the luminaries as "types of the Triad (τριάς), of God, and His Word, and His wisdom."[26] Before Tertullian, Justin Martyr developed the Logos Christology and described the Christian triad in terms of rank or order (τάξις) of its members.

The term triad must have been in common use in philosophy and religion for the definition of principles in the world and for the worship of Gods.[27] Greek philosophy abounds in the concept of triads or three entities. The term was also used to describe various abstractions e.g., "flesh, souls, spirit;" "the sacred Triad faith, hope, love."[28] It goes back to Pythagoras and can be found in many cultures as representing groupings of three divinities. In its early version the doctrine of the Trinity was described in terms of subordination to God the Father, but it was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 381. If we wish to differentiate between groupings of three entities without any special connotation of the unity we use today a term "triad."

But Tertullian's innovation was that he developed the concept of a triune God applied to the Christian myth and changed the meaning of the original term τριάς, though only in Latin. The question arises, however, whether Tertullian developed this idea of a triune divinity by himself or was inspired by other sources. Tertullian shows in his writings enormous erudition and knowledge of cultures and literatures of his time, a familiarity with Egyptian religion, and mystery religions, Greek as well as

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Council IV (1215); Council of Florence   (1439); Council of Florence (1442).

Egyptian. He mentions in *De Corona* (7), *De Pallio* (3), and in *Adversus Marcionem* (1.3) the story of Osiris and Isis. In his *Apology* (6.8) he mentions the triad of Sarapis, Isis, and Harpocrates. In *De Anima* (15.5) he alludes to the Egyptian hermetic writings. So it is only natural and logical to infer that he was influenced by the surrounding culture with which he was intimately acquainted. He found useful the Egyptian concept of the trinity for interpretation of the Christian biblical mythology and, at the same time, he explained it in metaphysical terms using the Middle Platonic Logos doctrine and the Stoic logical categories. His theory is based on the assumption of unity and unchangeability of the substance i.e., the spirit as the substance of God and the relative distinctiveness of the three members of the divinity.

We shall repeat briefly the major postulates of Tertullian:

1. Tertullian fully used the Logos Christology in a conscious effort to integrate Christianity and classical Greek culture. God is a transcendent being and it is impossible for him to enter into a direct relation with the world of time and space.

2. The Logos is as the Prolation of God which took place only for and with the world as a necessary mediator to perform a work which God could not perform. Thus the Logos assumed its "own form" when God said "Let there be light."

3. Tertullian ascribed to light a metaphysical and ontological meaning in accordance with Greek theology of the second century.

4. The Logos is only a "portion" (*portio)* of God, in the same way as is the ray only a "portion" of the sun. The difference between them is in measure not of mode. The Logos is a produced and a reduced divinity, with its substance spirit or *pneuma*, brought to a level that could become creator and principle of the world.

5. The prolation of the Logos was a voluntary and temporary act of the Logos and will of God. He is thus subordinate to and less than

the Father subject to the Father's will and, after accomplishing his mission he returns to the divine substance.

6. Tertullian was very explicit as to the temporary origin of the Logos Son. His argumentation came from the analysis of the terms "God" and "Lord," and of "Father" and "Judge." But later Tertullian distinguished between the uttered Logos, Sermo, and the unuttered Logos or Ratio which was an integral part of the divinity: "for he [God] had with him that which he possessed in himself, that is to say his own Reason. For God is rational and Reason was first in him; and so all things were from himself."[29] But certainly God's Reason was not an individual being as the prolated Son. The prolation of the Logos Son was a temporary mechanism to accomplish work by a transcendent God.

7. Tertullian postulated the unity of God by using the Egyptian concept, the "tri-unity." God is one, but has the following internal structure, described in Tertullian's terminology as "dispensation" or "economy." He has a physical pneumatic Son (*Filius*) his Word (S*ermo*), who proceeded from himself. Through this Son all things are made and the world maintained. The Son was sent by the Father into the virgin and was born as a man and God, as Son of Man and as Son of God, and is called Jesus the Anointed (Christ). He was resurrected by the Father, taken into heaven (*in caelo*) and he will come to judge all men, dead and alive, before the institution of God's kingdom on earth. In the meantime the Father in heaven sent the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

8. Before Tertullian there was a tradition of the unity of the Godhead as a concept derived from the Hebrew tradition, and a tradition of the triad, of his appearance and function, as formulated by the Apologists and based on Philonic hypostatization of the divine

powers. The innovation introduced by Tertullian was the ascription of the relative unity to the triadic entities found in the Christian Logos theory as the unity of substance. Starting from the baptismal formula, Tertullian distinguished three persons and prolations with specific names in one God who is the common substance as a mode of existence of God and his economy, that is, his internal organization. Tertullian never defined what he meant by the term "person," we must understand this word as a depiction of a distinct divine individual with a distinct quality and function. Substance is the unifying element in the divinity while person is the differentiating characteristic in the life of God. If so, then there is no real division in the Godhead, only a purely relative modal distinction. But then Tertullian is in contradiction when he claims a reality of the Word, and of the Holy Spirit by extension, as a *substantiva res* and a rational substance. Thus it seems to be a verbal device to reconcile a popular triadic interpretation of the terms found in the New Testament and in the baptismal formula with the requirement of the oneness of God.

Another term used for "person" is "hypostasis" which originally meant a sediment, foundation, substructure, individual substance, individual existence or reality.[30] In philosophical meaning it represents contrast between substances, the real things, and the reflection as in the mirror, or between reality and illusion. From about 350 C.E. in the Christian world it meant "individual reality," "individual," and "person." There was much confusion in the usage of the word since it was often wrongly translated as "substance." In the English usage the term means "personality," "personal existence," and is distinguished from both "nature" and "substance." From the noun the verb was formed by early Christian

and Gnostic writers, "hypostatize" meaning making into or regarding as a self-existent substance or person, thus personalization or individualization.

9.   The task of Tertullian, therefore, was to develop a formula by which the complete deity of Jesus and the reality of his identity as the Logos or the Mediator is distinct from the source-deity yet without creating two Gods. In Logos theory the distinction was introduced between the transcendent God and the derivative God, the absolute and the relative, and special problems arise when we consider now the question of eternity or temporality of this distinction. The new trinitarian formulation evidently was not a popular or accepted belief during the time of Tertullian since he emphasized that the simple may have problems understanding this trinitarian assumption. Instead, they accept a triadic division of the unity of God, whereas, according to Tertullian, the triadic doctrine is a misunderstanding of God's economy (*oikonomia*) or dispensation/disposition (*dispensatio* or *dispositio*).

10.   Tertullian was a profoundly Stoic philosopher who developed his understanding of the trinitarian God from the analysis of four general Stoic logical categories. His theory is based on the assumption of unity and unchangeability of the substance and the relative distinctiveness of the three members of the divinity, i.e., the Spirit as the substance of God. His concept of substance and the Spirit as the material substance of God is unquestionably Stoic and used to describe the nature of God.[31] The source of these assumptions is found in the four categories of being as formulated by the Stoics: substrates or substances of everything that exists (ὑποκέμενα), qualities (ποιὰ), the modes of existence or dispositions (πῶς ἔχοντα), and the relative modes or dispositions

of existence (πρὸς τί πῶς ἔχοντα).[32]

11. Tertullian, using such speculations, transposed the logical relationship between objects on the metaphysical existence of the divine Father and his Son, and also the third entity – the Holy Spirit. Thus the divine Father and the divine Son have their existence conditioned by their disposition only. They are not identical. Moreover, the Father makes a Son and the Son makes a Father by logical relationship, i.e., relative disposition.

12. Tertullian used a similar analysis for the term monarchy and deduced that it does not preclude the monarch from having a son or from ministering his own monarchy by a few agents. Even then the monarchy is not divided and does not cease to be one. Such an idea of the unity of the monarchy projected on the divine monarchy where the divine essence is one and is governed by the many Sons of God, was a common concept among the Greeks and non-Greeks as well.

13. The unity of God (monarchy of the king) hinges on the unity of substance (closeness of the king's family or administrators) which is the basis for "internal dispensation" or "economy," that is, the internal organization of God. Transposing this analogy to the situation of the Deity, the Son derives his substance from the substance of the Father and does nothing without the Father's will, since he received his power from the Father. In this way the divine monarchy (i.e., unity) is preserved. The same applies to the "third degree," because the third pneumatic being, the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus*) proceeded from the Father through the Son (without explanation how and why).

14. Tertullian himself was very equivocal about the third person of the Trinity describing him also as the *"Spiritus in sermone."*[33]

Nevertheless, Tertullian was the first to call the Holy Spirit God explicitly in a theological treatise, but it seems that he only repeated what was probably religious folklore in the Greek environment. Tertullian, under the influence of the Logos speculation, was the first to conceive the Spirit as a prolation from the Son as the Son is from the Father, and therefore subordinate to the Son as the Son is to the Father. This is the most characteristic trait of his doctrine. Still Tertullian preserved the conception of the Father as the ultimate source in his assertion that the Spirit, being the third degree in the Godhead, proceeds "from no other source than from the Father through the Son."[34] The Father and the Son are represented by the root and the stem, the fountain and the river, the sun and its ray; so the Spirit, being "third from God and the Son," is as the fruit of the tree, which is third from the root, or as the stream from the river, which is third from the fountain or as the apex from the ray, which is third from the sun.[35] It may be said that the Son receives the Spirit from the Father yet himself sends him forth: "The third name in the Godhead and the third Grade in the divine Majesty, the Declarer of the One Monarchy of God and yet, at the same time, the Interpreter of the Economy."[36]

15.   Tertullian by analysis of the verbal formulations of the announcement of Jesus' birth argues that by saying that it was the "Spirit of God" and not simply God who came upon Mary, the author wanted to emphasize that it was only a portion of the whole Godhead which entered her and became "the Son of God." But, at the same time, the Spirit of God must be the same as the Word for the Spirit (*Spiritus*) is the substance of God and as such it must be the substance of the Word because the Word is the operation of the Spirit, and the two are one and the same. But how Tertullian

equated the operation (*Sermo*) with the substantative being (*substantiua res*) is not explained. Thus the Spirit and the Word are God, but they are not actually the very same as the source. The Word is God so far as it is of the same substance as God himself and as an actually existing being (*substantiua res*) and a portion of the Godhead.

16. After claiming to have established that there is a distinction between the Father and the Son without destroying their union by making an analogy to the union of the sun and the ray, or of the fountain and the river, Tertullian next attempted to establish that there is a distinction between the two natures united in the Son. Tertullian explained the mode in which the Word could exist in the flesh without transfiguration into flesh, because "The Word is God and 'the Word of the Lord remains for ever' (Isaiah 40:8) – even by holding on unchangeably to his own form." Thus God cannot change in substance (undergo transfiguration), and the only possibility left was that the Word became clothed in flesh. Jesus is of both natures, of both substances remaining in opposition, God and Man. Moreover, Tertullian insisted that the property of each substance is so preserved that "The Spirit on one hand did all things in Jesus suitable to itself, such as miracles, and mighty deeds, and wonders; the flesh, on the other hand, exhibited the affections which belong to it."[37] Just as in the Godhead Tertullian saw three persons united by one substance, in his christology the one person had two substances.

In previous speculations of church Fathers such as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, and Athenagoras, the Son and Holy Spirit were assigned subordinate roles in the triad. The same can be said about Clement of Alexandria and Origen who are not subjects of the present study.[38] These early church Fathers

followed the Greek Platonic and Middle Platonic speculations either directly or through Philo of Alexandria. Later, in the third century, Plotinus (204-270 C.E.) developed his own abstract on a metaphysical trinity,[39] but this was already after the formative years of the Christian doctrine. Moreover, the members of the Plotinian trinity do not have the character of anthopomorphic "persons" and they do not represent the Tertullian sense of the triunity, namely, *una substantia, tres personae*, consubstantiality of individual separateness.

4. The Egyptian source of the concept of the triune God

Egyptian deities: personification of natural forces and objects, deification of the pharaoh

Egypt belongs to the countries with the oldest cultures the dominating aspect of which was religion. The monuments in Egypt and their splendor attest to the importance given to the worship of gods, funeral services, and the expectations of life after death. Their beliefs developed very early in predynastic times (ca 4000-ca 3000 B.C.E.) and continued throughout the history of Egypt with modifications until the time of the Ptolemies and Romans. Egyptians believed that they were a nation created by the one God who created the universe and other gods who ruled on earth. To the Egyptians god was a being who was born and died like a human being, but is resurrected, is corporeal and endowed with passions, virtues and vices.[40] However, beneath the rich imagery of the Egyptian myths lies a serious and profound interest in the origin and constitution of the universe and our place in it. Religious narrative was only an expression of these interests. For explicit philosophical speculation we would have to wait until the time of the Greeks.

These earthly gods ceased to rule on earth in person and their divine attributes were given to the king who ruled in their stead. Thus in the Egyptian tradition three stages in the king's life could be differentiated: his natural birth, his birth to life as a king (coronation), his birth to life after death when his divine portion returned to the

adobe of gods and was worshiped by men. This return was accomplished through certain funeral ceremonies and festivities. Such views are the foundation for the origin of the legend of Osiris, Isis, and Horus.[41]

Thus Egyptians worshiped a large number of beings who personified either the celestial bodies or various natural powers, natural elements, and phenomena whose worship was necessary in order to gain their favorable attitude towards men. They often resided in animals, especially those that were feared, hence the cult of animals in ancient Egypt. Among the most feared were the snakes. *The Pyramid Texts of Unis* begins with a series of spells against snakes and scorpions.[42] Probably originally in the neolithic times animals were venerated as animals, but later in the dynastic times they were venerated as the abodes of those powers or deities.

These beings were real creatures to the minds of average Egyptians with characteristics of human beings, with the same passions, feelings, and moral reactions. The term that was used by Egyptians for those higher beings was *neteru* which we translate as gods and *neterit* for goddesses. But the same term in the singular, *neter*, and *netert*, was used for the one God or Goddess. We know, however, nothing about the origin of the word *neter* and its earliest signification. On monuments dated from the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties (ca 2300 B.C.E.) it refers to the great power or the Great God. For example, we find in the *Pyramid Texts of Unis,* representing the oldest inscriptions on the walls of the pyramids a statement like this: "O Great God whose identity is unknown."[43] This unknown Great God was later in the Ramasside period (ca 1230) described with more precision: "The One who initiated existence on the first occasion, Amun, who developed in the beginning, whose origin is unknown. No god came into being prior to Him. No other god was with Him who could say what He looked like. He had no mother who created His name. He had no father to beget Him or to say : 'This belongs to me.' Who formed his own egg. Power of secret birth, who created His (own) beauty. Most Divine God who came into being Alone. Every god came into being since He began Himself."[44] Nevertheless, we can surmise that at least among the educated and more critical

Egyptians the idea of monotheism existed since the remote times and we may conjecture that there was a small minority who had an abstract concept of a unique, solitary, supreme God.

This One and Great God existed together with a plethora of his various aspects, forms, images, manifestations. Such a theology was expressed in popular polytheistic practices of piety (monuments, statues, and written texts). From the Nienteenth Dynasty (ca 1308 B.C.E.) this monotheistic theology was expressed explicitly in the writings which are preserved today in the form of Hymns to Amun. Here the word "*neteru*" seems to acquire new meaning designating the creative attributes of Amun, the One and Great God and other gods are his manifestations or transformations, thus they lose their autonomy.

> The Eight[3] were Your first manifestation, until You completed these,
> You being Single. Secret was Your body among the elders, and You
> kept Yourself hidden as Amun, at the head of the gods. You made
> Your manifestations in Tatenen,[4] to accompany the primeval ones in
> Your first primeval time. Your beauty arose as the Bull of His
> Mother.[5] 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. You began manifestation with nothing, without the
> world being empty of You on the first occasion. All gods came into
> existence after You …[45]

This was not a radical monotheism but a compromise between monotheism and polytheism

In other cultures the functions of Egyptian gods were performed by lesser divine beings such as angels among Hebrews and Moslems. By the combination of

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3   Ogdoad was the primordial chaos or chaos-gods worshiped at Hermopolis.

4   Tatenen was the primordial hill emerging out of Nun (oceanic abyss), a solid ground for the creator to step on. It was a material principle of creation.

5   The bull is a metaphor for strength and fertility. Amun had no father, so he, metaphorically speaking, impregnated his mother himself for he formed himself.

evil beings among them with the souls of evil men, Egyptians developed a concept of hell and punishment. By a similar process grouping beneficial and friendly beings with the souls of good men and women when Egyptians developed the doctrine of immortality, they conceived the concept of heaven and reward. Thus the Egyptians were able to differentiate various classes of spirits and gods with the cosmic or universal gods clearly differentiated from all others as, for example the glory given to the Sun-god who is preoccupied with cosmic events and contrasted with the man-god Osiris who responds to the personal prayers of the Egyptians.

Egyptians also believed that their gods could intermarry with human beings and beget offspring as it is described in other cultures (e.g., Gen. 6:1-5).[6] These "sons of God" were originally the pharaohs who were resurrected after their earthly death. Later, however, the whole concept applied to all humans. The ancient Egyptians believed that each human being consists of a perishable material body and of two nonmaterial components they named *ka* and *ba*.[7] *Ka* is a life force of each individual which comes ultimately from the creator and returns to the gods after death. *Ba* is an equivalent of the modern concept of the soul as personality. In order for an individual to survive after death his *ka* and his *ba* which, were separated at

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6   Gen 6:1-5 : "When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the LORD said, 'My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.' The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown."

7   *Ka* designates the force of conscious life in men, gods, and *akhs* (or deceased persons whose *ba* i.e., nonphysical personality or modern soul, united with the *ka* in order to make possible for them eternal life; *akh* is described in the Pyramid Texts as "imperishable"). *Ka* is transmitted by the creator to the world, by the king to the people (e.g., "Unis [the king] is in charge of *ka's*") and by fathers to their children. We read in the *Pyramid Text of Unis* at the moment of anointing the dead king: "You shall make it pleasant for him, wearing you; you shall akhify him, wearing you; you shall make him have control of his body; you shall put his ferocity in the eyes of all the *akhs* who shall look at him and everyone who hears his name as well." And "You have come to your *ba*, Osiris, *ba* among the *akhs*, in control in his places, whom the Ennead tend in the Official's Enclosure." Unis in the end is declared Osiris and the "son of god": "Sun Atum, your son has come to you. Elevate him to you, encircle him within your arms: he is your bodily son forever." In another fragment the dead king Unis receives his *ka*: "Wash yourself, Unis, and part your mouth with Horus's eye. You shall summon your ka – namely, Osiris – and he shall defend you from every wrath of the dead." In *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, James. P. Allen, translator, *op. cit.,* pp. 22, 23, 27, 34.

death, have to be reunited. The resultant nonmaterial being is called *akh* and it has eternal life not only on earth but also in the cosmic sphere inhabited by gods. The function of the so-called *Pyramid Texts*, that is, ancient spells and utterances written on the walls of the inner chambers of the ancient Egyptian pyramids, was to enable the deceased to become an *akh* and hence these texts in Egyptian were called "*akh-makers*." They were recited by the priests during the funeral rites and contained three major groups of spells: the Offering and Insignia Rituals which accompanied preparation and presentation of a meal and of royal dress and regalia to the statue of the deceased; the Resurrection Ritual which was designed to release the deceased spirit from its attachment to the body and to send it on its journey to join the gods; the Morning Ritual contained the spells for entering the sky.

This transition was done with the help of two forces, the Sun and Osiris. Sun is the daily source of life. At dawn the rising Sun was called "Beetle" from the word "to come into existence" or "evolve" and also the "Evolver" or Khepri, Kheprer, or Kheper. During the day the Sun was identified with Horus, the god of the kingship; and at sunset he was Atum, the oldest of all gods. Osiris represented the force which was renewing the generations of the living beings. He was envisioned as a mummy lying in the netherworld in the region through which the Sun passes during the night. By merging of the Sun with Osiris's body, the Sun receives new power and Osiris is resurrected as the Sun. By analogy to the Sun each person's *ba* was reunited with its own Osiris, i.e., its mummified body lying in the tomb, receiving power to become an *akh*.

The oldest text of the *Pyramid Texts* is the *Pyramid Texts of Unis*.[8] We read there:

> The sky has grown cloudy, the stars obscured; the (sky's) arc has
> quaked, the horizon's bones shaken; and those who move have grown
> still, having seen Unis apparent and ba as god who lives on his fathers

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[8]   Unis was the last king of the Fifth Dynasty (ca 2333-2323 B.C.E.). But the text itself may be copied from still older texts the meaning of which may even be forgotten.

and feeds on his mothers.

Unis is the lord of jackal-like rapacity, whose (own) mother does not know his identity:

for Unis's nobility is in the sky and his power in the Akhet,[9] like Atum, his father who bore him–and though he bore him, he is more powerful than he;

for Unis's kas are about him, his guardian forces under his feet, his gods atop him, his uraei on his brow;

for Unis's lead uraeus is on his forehead, ba when seen and akh for shooting fire; for Unis's powers are on his torso.

Unis is the sky's bull, with terrorizing in his heart, who lives on the evolution of every god, who eats their bowels when they have come from the Isle of Flame with their belly filled with magic.

Unis is an equipped one who has gathered his effectiveness, for Unis has appeared as the great one who has assistants, sitting with his back to Geb.

Unis is the one whose case against him and whose identity is hidden was decided on the day of butchering the senior ones.

Unis is lord of offering, who ties on the leash (of the sacrificial animal), who makes his own presentation of offerings.

Unis is one who eats people and lives on gods, one who has fetchers and sends off dispatches.[46]

The pharaoh Unis is declared to be the son of Atum; he became stronger than his father; when he enters the sky as a god, sky, stars, and all creation are stricken with fear; upon earth he was a mighty conqueror; those who were conquered by him

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9   *Akhet* was the place where the dead were becoming *akhs*. It was this part of Duat or Tuat (the netherland) lying between the center in which the Sun unites with Osiris during the night and the visible horizon above where the Sun is rising at dawn. In the *Pyramid Texts* it represents the antechamber of the pyramid.

are beneath him; he appears in heaven with his *kas*[10] and his gods (probably small figures of gods which were laid upon the bodies of the dead) upon him; he is led by a serpent-guide; he is endowed with powers: "The sky will be given to Unis and the earth will be given to him, says Atum;" he is depicted as a bull who feeds on what is produced by the gods[11] and "eats their bowels when they have come from the Isle of Flame with their belly filled with magic."[12] By eating gods Unis also ate their words of power and their spirits thus acquiring their attributes ("Unis is the one who eats their magic and swallows their *akhs*.") Next Unis appears as "the great one" and sits opposite to the god Geb. He becomes the habitation of the divine power and the first born of the gods. This idea that by eating the flesh of animals or strong men and by drinking their blood one absorbs their nature and life was common among many primitive peoples and among the Egyptians in predynastic and dynastic times. The heart (*ab* or *besek*) was the organ which was associated with the "power of words." Unis seems to be able to judge his own actions, probably as Osiris; and we learn that he "eats men and lives on gods."[13] Unis also absorbed the knowledge (or perception) (*saa*) of gods ("Unis's privileges [or dignities] will not be taken away from him, for he has swallowed the perception [or intelligence or knowledge] of every god"). Unis is a part of the triad, "Unis is the third in his appearance (with Horus and the sun)."

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10   An ordinary man had only one *ka*, or "double," whereas a king or a god possessed several *kas* or "doubles" and several *bas*.

11   This mention of a bull reflects an old worship of the bull which survived until the Roman times in the mystery religion of Mithras. Allusion to the food of the bull refers to the green herbs and the ancient Egyptians believed that every object was a habitation of a spirit or god. Eusebius confirms in his *Praeparatio evangelica* that the productions of the earth were consecrated, considered as gods and worshiped. Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica,* I. 10.

12   This Isle of Fire refers probably to the region in the Underworld (Tuat or Duat) where the dead were residing, just like Sheol of the Hebrews. "Magic" designates here the "words of power" (*hekau*) which was a magical protection by which gods preserved their existence. In the old times Egyptians thought that for humans, in order to obtain immortality, it was necessary to eat the gods and through this one could obtain their words of power and their *kas*. But the composition of human beings was still more complex because Egyptians still distinguished the "spiritual body" (*sāhu*) which was the ethereal and intangible body which was supposed to grow from the dead body, preserving its form. It was itself animated by the so-called "spiritual power" (*sekhem*). Gods were composed of all these parts but they possessed superhuman powers.

13   The statement about eating men probably refers to the predynastic times when this was the practice of the victorious who were not only appropriating the property of the conquered but also

All these beliefs of the Egyptians were not different from beliefs of other nations and tribes in the ancient world from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean region. The Egyptian religion evolved over thousands of years but scribes in the temples preserved the beliefs that were often forgotten by the people and such texts were considered sacred and had to be preserved. Moreover many new texts were added to the old ones and priests attempted to reconcile and fuse often-contradictory views.

Grouping of the gods into companies

During the Fifth Dynasty (ca 2330 B.C.E.) priests of Heliopolis developed the idea of grouping the gods into three companies. The first was named the "Great" and the second one the "Little," the third one remained nameless. The Egyptian name for the grouping is *paut* that means "dough cake," or cake of bread which forms part of the offerings made to the dead. The term was translated by Egyptologist H. Brugsch as meaning an Ennead and is in current usage. This was done because frequently (but not always) nine gods were assigned to this sign. E.g., we read in the *Pyramid Texts of Unis* that Unis, the pharaoh has come to his father Atum "that you may make this Unis rule the Nine and provide the Ennead (or and that he may complete the company of gods)."[47] Willis Budge on the basis of analysis of the *Papyrus of Ani* argued for the translation of the term as "substance" or "material" of the gods.[14] Often it is associated with the word "primeval" or "first."[15] Moreover, these groupings treated as enneads contained more than nine gods. E.g., the Great

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eating their dead enemies. Such practices did not exist in Egypt during the dynastic times.

14   In *The Egyptian Book of the Dead, op. cit.* we read : "Hail Tatunen (Ta-tenen = Ptah), One creator of mankind and of the substance of the gods of the south and of the north, of the west and of the east." Chapter XV, 6-7. In the same book Khepera, the creator of all things, is said to have a body that is made of both classes of matter : "Hail, Khepera in thy boat, the twofold company of the gods is thy body. Chapter XVII, 116.

15   The deceased identifies himself with the divine substance : "I am the eldest and the first-born son of matter; my soul is the gods, who are the eternal souls. I am the creator of darkness who maketh his dwelling-place in the limits of the regions of heaven.." *The Egyptian Book of the Dead, op. cit.* Chapter LXXXV, Appendix, 7-8. And Khepera says : "I have brought myself into being together with Nu (primeval matter) in my name of Khepera. In their forms I have come into being in the likeness of Rā. I am the lord of light." Ibidem, Chapter LXXXV, 6-7.

Ennead contains in *Pyramid Texts of Unis* ten gods without the deceased, instead of nine.[16] Similarly in the Little Ennead from the *Pyramid Texts of Unis* there are eleven gods.[17] Egyptologist M. Maspero gave an explanation of this phenomenon arguing that admission of one god to the group automatically meant admission of all other gods who were associated with him.[48] It was suggested that the Great company of gods was grouping of gods residing in heaven and the Little company, the grouping of gods who resided on earth. This was in accordance with the Egyptian cosmology in which the heaven was a duplicate of earth. So, as there were gods of heaven and earth there were gods of the Underworld or Tuat (or Duat) which probably belonged to the third group of gods never specified in the Egyptian texts.

Grouping of gods into Enneads which could be designated in the original Egyptian language as the groups (companies) of gods with the same divine substance or material can be corroborated by some texts. For example, in *The Pyramid Texts of Unis,* Unis is identified with the entire Ennead:

> There is a Heliopolitan in Unis, god: your Heliopolitan is in Unis, god. There is a Heliopolitan in Unis, Sun: your Heliopolitan is in Unis, Sun.
>
> The mother of Unis is a Heliopolitan, the father of Unis is a Heliopolitan, and Unis himself is a Heliopolitan, born in Heliopolis when the Sun was above the Dual Ennead and above the subjects, Nefertem[18] without peer, heir of his father, Geb.[49]

The groupings of gods arose when the local priests were obligated to accept the theologies of the dominating priests of Heliopolis, they simply added gods of Heliopolis to their local gods and produced a combination of gods into new entities with combined names. Some of such entities remained a cluster of several gods, but

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16   James P. Allen, *The Pyramid Texts of Unis, op. cit.,* 152: Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Isis, Seth, Nephthys, Thoth, Horus.
17   James P. Allen, *The Pyramid Texts of Unis, op. cit.,* 155.
18   Nefertem was a youthful god depicted as seated on the lotus flower. Often he was regarded as a youthful sun.

in other cases they were fused into one unity – a trinity.

Triadic groupings of gods

Egypt has the oldest tradition of triadic groupings of divinities. John Gwyn Griffiths, a British Egyptologist,[50] in an exhaustive work collected all triadic groupings in Egypt and various parts of the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions. He counted 54 sites with 115 triadic representations in the form of sculptures, statues, mural carvings, and drawings. The best known is the family based triad of Osiris, Isis, and Horus (father, mother, and child) which certainly was the prototype for the gospel story.[51] But Egypt is the only country in the Mediterranean basin where we find an idea of the divine tri-unity, labeled by Hugo Gressmann[52] as "trinitarian monotheism." It was suggested by Siegfried Morenz, a prominent German Egyptologist, and before him by other Egyptologists, that Egypt has been the influence in the formulation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in which the Godhead is believed to exist as a triune divine being.[53] And such was the understanding of the trinity by Morenz. He was not concerned with the trinity's substance which was considered in the Greek philosophical elaboration adopted by the Christian thinkers as we have seen in Justin Martyr and Tertullian. Morenz emphasizes the fact of fusion of three divine entities into one Godhead as a model for tri-unity which is found in Tertullian:

> In order to avoid any gross misunderstanding, we must at once emphasize that the substance [i.e., here, the main theme] of the Christian Trinity is, of course, Biblical: Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. The three are mentioned alongside one another in the New Testament, probably for liturgical reasons.[19] But one essential point is

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19   1 Cor. 12:4-6 : "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.: 2 Cor. 13:13 : "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." Matt. 28:19 : "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

still lacking for the Trinity in the proper sense: the concept or notion of such a combination. Indeed, there is no sign as yet of an awareness of the problem of three-in-one, or of the complex theological prerequisites for this awareness, i.e. the attitudes of mind inculcated by a certain type of education and the existence of appropriate trends of thought.[54]

The number three does not have any magic significance in the Egyptian tradition; it represents, however, plurality. So the earliest Egyptologists assumed that the source of the triadic representations was an idea of natural family relationship: father, mother, and child, which developed into a variety of other triadic arrangements. The oldest prehistoric probable triadic representations go back to the fourth millennium B.C.E. depicting on a vase from El-Amah near Abates, a triad consisting of mother, father, and daughter.[55] They are supposed to represent the first divine triad. The most frequent type of triadic representations are mother (the goddess Hathor depicted as cow-goddess, the goddess of fertility and heaven) and the son (the falcon-god Horus, the living pharaoh) and the son's spouse or marriage, then the ruler acts as both a son and lover of the goddess. This depiction comes from the original concept of the ruler as the son of the cow-goddess Hathor, goddess of fertility and heaven. Her name means "House above" and originally represented only that portion of the sky in which Horus, the oldest form of the Sun-god Re, was brought forth. In the oldest theology dating to the archaic and predynastic times Hathor was mother of Horus, the god of the sky and the kingship. It seems that from the Third Dynasty (ca 2700 B.C.E.) Egyptians developed an idea of the sun not only as the celestial body but also as the great Sun-god Re who throned in the sky. From the Fourth Dynasty Egyptians developed their solar theology in which the king was considered a human being and at the same time the "son of Re," who ruled on Earth

and who, in the afterlife, returned to his source. But the pharaoh was not in the filial relationship with the god Re. He was only a manifestation of Re which he acquired after coronation. Just like the falcon as a bird of prey watches over his territory, so the pharaoh ruled over his kingdom as the incarnate Horus.[56] He was also a unifier of the two parts of Egypt, the Upper and Lower. We read in *The Pyramid Texts of Unis*:

> Art thou Horus, the son of Osiris? Art thou, O King, the eldest god,
>
> the son of Hathor? Art thou the seed of Geb [God of earth]?[57]

Hathor was also a cow-goddess of the Underworld or Amentet and was designated as the "lady of the Holy Land." She was the great mother of the world; she personified the creative power of nature and was worshiped all over Egypt. Later she was represented as a young female figure with vulture head-dresses and identified with many other goddesses. The Greeks identified Hathor with their goddess Aphrodite.[58]

From the Fifth Dynasty the Sun-god Re became the active power of the world surpassing Horus and the pharaoh the sole mediator between the divine and human spheres offering truth and justice to his father Re. The divine king maintained creation and conquered the forces of darkness and destruction in the world. On earth he was the incarnation of the divinity. In the afterlife, the pharaoh ascended to his father Re. Re is coalesced in Heliopolis with the primordial self-generating god Atum and Horus to form Re-Atum and Re-Harakhti (Re-Heru-khuti) (Re, "Horus of the Horizon") and his cult became established in the entire country.

In Sais, a city in the eastern delta of the Nile, the main goddess was Neith. When the priests of Sais adopted the Heliopolis theological system, Neith became associated with the chief god of Heliopolis, Atum, thus goddess Neith acquired attributes like "great lady, the mother-goddess, the lady of heaven, the queen of the gods." She also acquired attributes of the god Atum, "the great lady, who gave birth to Re, who brought forth in primeval times herself, never having been created." In a similar way the goddess Hathor was treated in the city of Dendera.[59]

The oldest form of Horus was Heru-Ur (or Haroeris, Horus the Elder) and he represented the Face of heaven, i.e., the Face of the head of an otherwise unknown and invisible god by day. He had a twin, god Set, who represented the Face of heaven by night. In later dynasties Horus was identified with man and became the son of Isis. Another form of Horus was Heru-pa-Khart or Harpocrates, Horus the Younger. He was the son of a Horus god and goddess Rāt-tauit. He was depicted as a youth with a lock of hair on the right side of his head and usually wearing a triple crown with feather and disks; he was a form of the rising Sun and represented his early rays.

The most important form of Horus was that of Heru-Behutet, god of Edfu, usually depicted with the head of a hawk carrying weapons in his hand. He is described as the power that dispels darkness and night. He created himself and he renews his birth daily. In one of his aspects he was identified with Osiris, and Isis and Nephthys are said to help him to emerge from the abyss, Nu. The form of Heru-Behutet which was most appealing was the one in which he fought against the god of darkness, Set, as the god of good against the god of evil. In the pre-dynastic descriptions they fought without weapons, but in the later descriptions found on the walls of the temple of Edfu, Horus is armed with weapons of iron and is surrounded by *mesniu* or *mesnitu*, i.e., the blacksmiths or metal workers armed with spears and chains. Set and many other enemies of Horus and Re are defeated and after the battle Set changed himself into a serpent and found a hole in the ground in which he is hiding. Then god Re said: "Let Horus, the son of Isis, set himself above his hole in the form of a pole on the top of which is the head of Horus, so that he may never again come forth therefrom." The story is mythical but it may reflect some historical fact of invasion of some people who had a superiority of weapons. Their ruler was in later times identified with Horus, god of heaven of the earlier times and subsequently with Re, still later.[60]

Then we have Horus who was the son of Isis and Osiris and who combined the attributes of all the other forms of Horus gods. But he represented the rising sun and the offspring of the dead-man god Osiris and his successor. He represented what
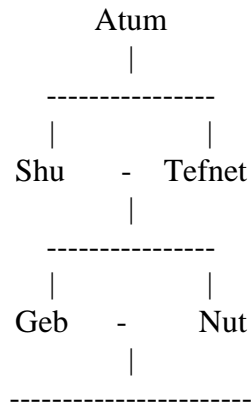
all Egyptians, and more, all people of the world wish to possess, that is a renewed eternal life. Osiris represented the past and Horus the present or future: "Osiris is yesterday, and Re (i.e., grown up Horus) is tomorrow." According to the story Isis searched for the body of her dead brother–husband Osiris and after finding it she revived him and had a son with him. But she was persecuted by Set who caused the death of Horus. Horus, however, was resurrected by the power of Thoth and began his fight with Set in order to avenge the death of his father. Isis then in some way supported Set, but Thoth seeing this took the head of the goddess, transformed it into the head of a cow and put it on her body. In the end Isis released Set from his chains, but Horus tore off the head of Isis the symbols of sovereignty. In the end, Horus succeeded to the throne of Osiris and reigned instead. He was triumphant and was given sovereignty over the world. Horus was also a god who helped the dead in the Underworld as a mediator pleading for them with the judges. In the Christian story, sovereignty over the world was given to the resurrected Christ. Stories of Horus fighting against his enemies were the prototype of later pre-Christian stories of dragons and of the Christian stories of Saint George.

Finally there was Heru-pa-Khart, Horus the Child, the son and successor of Osiris. He became a type of new birth, a new life, the first hours of the day, the first days of the month, the first months of the year. Later the characteristics of the Sun-god were added to him and all these forms of Horus became interchangeable and also identified with other gods.

From the time of the pharaoh Amasis (ca 526 B.C.E.) we observe a continuous immigration of Greeks and a stepwise assimilation of Greek culture by the Egyptian upper class. This cultural syncretism was especially strong in Alexandria and Fayum during the reign of the Ptolemies (332-30 B.C.E.). Greeks introduced their mystery religions with the concepts of renewal and rejuvenation during one's lifetime here on earth.

The oldest and certain triadic representation comes from the Old Kingdom (ca 2780 –2250 B.C.E.) in the form of a wall carving from the temple of Giza in which

the pharaoh Mycerinus is presented between the goddess Hathor and the nome-goddess. There are four more such representations of the triad of Mycerinus. Goddesses are depicted as human in form and represent the earliest sculptured figures of deities in the Old Kingdom. It is suggested that this triadic representation may indicate the identity of man with God, the presence of God in man and a divine sanction of the Egyptian kingship. The goddess Hathor represents the celestial world and the nome-goddess represents the terrestrial world. The theme of such a triad is unity and the king is the focus. Another representation is an Ennead like the Great Ennead of Heliopolis (found in the *Pyramid Texts*), a grouping of four marital pairs (Ogdoad) headed by Atum[20]:

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              Atum
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        ----------------
        |              |
       Shu     -    Tefnet
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        ----------------
        |              |
       Geb     -      Nut
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20   *Atum* (also named as *Tem, Temu* or *Atem*) means literally *finished, complete.* He was the first god of the Ennead and represented the primordial source of all the elements of the world, the first god to exist in primeval matter. Originally he was the local god of Annu or Heliopolis. He was held to be one of the forms of the Sun-god Re and personified the setting sun. In the pre-dynastic period he was the first man among the Egyptians and was believed to have become divine and at his death was identified with the setting sun (the third manifestation of Re). Thus he was the first living man-god just like Osiris was the first dead man-god. He was thus depicted in human form with human head wearing the crowns of the South and North whereas Re was depicted by a disk being rolled by a beetle and Khepera was represented by a beetle. Atum was a manifestation of god in human form and his conception marks the end of the period when Egyptians represented gods by animal forms. This was the beginning of the development of the idea of an unknowable God who was the maker of the universe. He was regarded as the father of the human race. From the Fifth Dynasty priests fused Atum with Re and Re-Atum (also Rā-Tem) became the national God. He was also identified with Osiris and with Horus. The Big Ennead represented the gods of Lower Egypt, whereas the Little (or Elder) Ennead represented the gods of Upper Egypt.

| |

Osiris – Isis   Seth – Nephtys

O you Great Ennead which is on Ôn [Heliopolis], (namely) Atum, Shu, Tefnet, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephtys; O you children of Atum, extend his goodwill to his child in your name of Nine Bows. Let his back be turned from you toward Atum, that he may protect this King, that he may protect this pyramid of the King and protect this construction of his from all the gods and from all the dead and prevent any evil from happening against it for ever.[61]

Triune divinities.

A. Trinity as a unity of three gods in one

Triads, according to the studies of Griffiths,[62] gained popularity in Egypt after the New Kingdom (1562-1308 B.C.E.) and they often represented the concept of tri-unity. One of the oldest and most developed examples is the trinity found in the papyri hymns to Amun (now located in Leiden)[63] composed during the Ramesside period (1308-1085 B.C.E.) where it is stated:

All gods are three: Amun, Re and Ptah, without their seconds. His identity is hidden as Amun, he is Re as face, his body is Ptah. Their towns are on earth, fixed for the span of eternity : Thebes, Heliopolis and Memphis are established perennially. When a message is sent from the sky, it is heard in Heliopolis, and repeated in Memphis for the god-with-the-beautiful-face,[21] put in a report, in Thoth's[22] writing, directed to the town of Amun, bearing their concerns, and the matter is answered in Thebes, by an oracle emerging, intended for the Ennead. Everything that comes from His mouth, the gods are bound

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21   This is god Ptah.

22   Thoth was the god of writing.

by it, according to what has been decreed. When a message is sent, it is for killing or for giving life. Life and death depend on Him for everyone, except for Him, Amun, together with Re, [and Ptah]: total, 3.[64]

The trinitarian pattern is extended in this fragment to Egyptian geography, Thebes, Heliopolis, Memphis. All three gods, Amun, Re, Ptah, compose the trinity: its hidden identity or name is Amun; its face or presence is Re, the principle of light and life, i.e. the son; and Ptah, the third member of the trinity, is its body or manifestation. This name Ptah means probably "sculptor, engraver" and he was the god of craftsmen. He was identified from the early dynasties to the period of the Ptolemies and Romans with one of the primeval gods who came into being in the earliest time, "the father of beginnings, and creator of the egg of the Sun and Moon," master architect and designer of the world involved in the construction of the heavens and the earth. It was believed that it was he who fashioned the new bodies in which the souls of the dead were to live in the Underworld. He is usually depicted as a bearded man holding in his hands a scepter and an emblem of life.

One can draw parallels of the Egyptian Theban trinity with the later Christian triad and Trinity. There are similarities and differences, however, what is important is the intellectual mindframe created by the Egyptians which could have inspired philosophical metaphysical speculations as well as the interpretation of narratives and myths of other cultures. Thus such Egyptian ideas could have influenced the Platonic philosophers leading to the triadic philosophical doctrines of Middle Platonism on one hand and the development of the Hellenistic salvation and mystery religions, and to the triadic interpretation of the Hebrew narratives and myths on the other hand.

Amun (or Amen) was the god worshiped since remote antiquity. He is mentioned in the *Pyramid Texts of Unis,* the last king of the Fifth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom (ca 2353-2323 B.C.E.). In the New Kingdom (ca 1562-1308) he became the patron of the entire empire with a short interval during the reign of Amenophis IV (Akhenaton) (1361-1340 B.C.E.) when his name was erased from the monuments.

His cult reached a zenith during the Ramesside period (1308-1085) and survived until the times of the Ptolemies. During the New Kingdom period non-royals also acquired the right to participate in the ritual of becoming Osiris after death. Most likely the short-lived episode of the monotheistic cult of Aten was the basis for the development of Mosaic monotheism among the Hebrews.

In the Theban context the main triad was Amun – Mut – Khons and it was changed into Osiris – Isis – Horus indicating increasing power of Osiris in the Ptolemaic era.

God Amun (also Amen, Amûn, Amon) and his consort Amaunet (also Ament) are rarely mentioned in *The Pyramid Texts*. In the oldest Pyramid Texts of Unis (Fifth Dynasty, 2353-2323 B.C.E.) Amun is mentioned after the deities of Nu (Nau, Niu, Nun) and Undersky (Nen, Nēnet, Naunet) personifying the primeval water abyss from which all things sprang:

> You have your bread-loaf, Nu and Undersky [Nun and Naunet], you
> pair of the gods, who joined the gods with their shadow;
> You have your bread-loaf, Amun and Amaunet, you pair of the gods ,
> who joined the gods with their shadow;
> You have your bread-loaf, Atum and Dual Lion, who made their two
> gods and their body themselves – that is Shu and Tefnut, who made
> the gods, begot the gods and set the gods.

And in *The Pyramid Texts of Pepi I* (Sixth Dynasty, ca 2289-2255 B.C.E.):

> This emergence of yours from your house; Osiris Meryre, is Horus's
> emergence in search of you, Osiris Pepi. Your envoys have gone,
> your runners have run, your announcers have bustled, and they will
> say to the Sun that you have come, Pepi, as Geb's son, the one on the
> Amun's throne.[65]

In the Coffin Texts which replace the Pyramid Texts from the Eighth Dynasty he is listed as "he whose name is hidden." His name is mentioned only once:

> I am he in this name. Make way for me, that I may see Nun and

Amun! I am that equipped spirit who passes by the (guards). They do not speak for fear of him whose name is hidden, who is in my body. I know him, I do not ignore him! I am equipped and effective in opening his portal.[66]

From the Twelfth Dynasty Amun is represented as the bull Min ("the bull of his mother"), a god who was assimilated by Amun.

The word "Amun" means "hidden," "what is not seen." Thus he was in the Old Kingdom the personification of the unknown creative power associated with the primeval abyss, Nun. Nun was a preexistent self-creative activity which has to be understood as a "negative existence," a certain passive principle of creation which creates and establishes itself in which in turn the active potential or principle of creation, Atum, the "father of the gods" creates itself and emerges "ex nihilo." Amun was the Great God who existed before creation and was kept secret and revealed only to the higher initiates, i.e., royalty, high priests, and high administrators. He was usually depicted as a bearded man who wears on his head a double plume (representing the two lands of Egypt) or a man with the head of a hawk. His sanctuary was built during the Twelfth Dynasty (Middle Kingdom, 2040-1730 B.C.E.) in Thebes. But the pharaohs worshiped also Ptah, the god of Memphis. As Thebes became the national capital and its princes the kings of Egypt, so Amun eventually acquired a privileged position and became a patron of the empire (Eighteenth Dynasty, New Kingdom, 1562-1308 B.C.E.) with a national temple in Karnak. The cult of Amun eventually was spread to the South and North of Egypt and to all the surrounding countries. His name was fused with that of Re who acquired now prominence in the Egyptian pantheon as Amun-Re. Priests now develop a new solar theology which searched for a new concept of the divine. His priests started to claim that he was not one of the great gods, but that there was no other God like him ("Thou art One") and that he was the greatest of them all. Nevertheless other divinities still existed and were respected.

During the Amarna period (1361-1340 B.C.E.) pharaoh Amenophis IV

(Akhenaten) brought to the logical conclusion the notion that there were "no other gods" and that they could not be tolerated. His message was not original but rather politico-religious implementing religious monotheism and closure of all other cults including eradication of the name of Amun. But the Amarna period provoked a crisis because personal conscience was considered of no importance. The netherworld was eliminated. The identity of the netherworld deity, Amun, was eradicated. Akhenaten re-introduced the deification of the pharaoh (ideas of the Old Kingdom). He was again the incarnated Re. He had subjected his people to his views and tolerated no opposition.

Amun's cult was afterwards restored under Tutankhamun and reached his zenith during the Twenty First Dynasty. After the last Ramsesses died the high priest of Amun-Re, Heri Hor, became the king of Egypt initiating the Twenty First Dynasty of priest-kings (ca 1085-950 B.C.E.). The power of Amun was described in various hymns devoted to him. We read in one of them: "Thou art the chief of all of the gods, thou art the lord of Maāt, and the father of the gods, and the creator of men and women, and the makers of animals, and the lord of things which exist… O thou art the maker of things which are below and of things which are above… When thou didst speak the word the gods sprang into being… Thou art the Form of many forms… " Amun-Re acquired all the attributes of the Sun-god that were ever worshipped in Egypt. Amun-Re was identified with the great unknown God who created the universe. During the Ptolemaic period he acquires an attribute of the eternal.[67]

The cult of Amun-Re survived until the time of the Ptolemies and served as inspiration for personal piety and new religiosity. Its characteristics were described by J. Assmann in the following way: "1. the emphasis on the oneness and hiddenness of the god; 2. the formula of the 'one who makes himself into millions', with all its variants; 3. the concept of the god dwelling in the world as 'ba,' image and body, who has created the world as earth, heaven, and underworld for these three constituent elements of his self; 4. the theory of the 'life-giving elements,' i.e. the

concept that god sustains and gives life to the world not only by, but also as light, air and water; 5. the idea of all-pervasiveness in the form of air, as is expressed in the formula ['(Amun) enduring in all things']; 6. the role of this god as god of time and fate in connection with 7. his personal aspect as 'ethical authority.'"[68]

The most important aspect of Amun-Re is his oneness. Despite multiplicity and variety he is One. The formula for multiplicity is expressed in the Leiden Papyrus : he is "The One alone, whose body are millions." "He is One before creation because he is a primordial god, 'existing' before existence; he is One during creation as sole creator; he is One after creation for he is 'hidden' behind all other deities who are his images, forms, and manifestations. He is 'millions' in the polytheistic divine world of reality after creation but he did not cease to be One. He is the many in that mysterious way, hidden and present at the same time, which this theology is trying to grasp by means of the *ba*-concept. A common text even goes so far as to describe god as the *ba* of gods and humans, i.e. the 'millions.' (...) By linking the *ba* concept and the theology of the hidden, it becomes clear in what respect this formula goes beyond the traditional creation theology of the opposition between unity and plurality. (...) In the context of this hymn, the concept of 'all that is' is then explained as the totality of living creation, from gods and humans to worms, fleas and mice."[69] Such ideas were picked up in Hermetic writings, by Hellenistic Neo-Platonism, and later by Michael Servetus in the sixteenth century. Even today they are continued in the so-called Process Theology.[70]

Among other concepts that were associated with the cult of Amun in the Middle Kingdom were the concepts of individuality and personality, and individual judgment in the afterlife. No longer the king, the pharaoh was the redeemer as it was claimed in the Old Kingdom. However, both in the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom, the underlining principle was the permanence of the existence after death and the concept of an unchangeable order (*maāt*) (Greek *logos*), which had to be followed (public and/or personal).

During the Ramesside period :

In Ramesside theology, the sacredness of Amun is no longer realized by this spatiotemporal segregation (his essence being pre-creational), this 'temporal Beyond.' Instead, Amun-Re as creator is '*summum bonum*' and '*summum ens*' (first cause), *dwelling everywhere in his creation 'behind' the screen of an infinite number of forms*. Amun-Re is ontologically segregated from all other deities and none of them knows his name. Like the subtle 'logos' of the Stoics much later, Amun-Re is present in the invisible domains of creation.

Therefore, regarding the transcendence of Amun-Re, two aspects are distinguished:

- pre-creational transcendence : Amun is primordial so that he spatiotemporally transcends the order or creation (this is the traditional line of thought, starting with Atum) ;

- sacred transcendence : Amun-Re is the self-created 'soul' (*Ba*) of creation, the '*summum en'* the supreme being. He is present *in* his creation as a sacred, hidden god, a supreme being, that transcends all other beings, because Amun is the all-pervasive, sacred unity in all beings that remains hidden for his transformations (late Amun-Re theology or Amenism).

Ramesses II allowed the oracle of Amun-Re to guide him in the appointment of the god's high priest, which made the step to a hereditary priesthood simple. At the end of the New Kingdom, Egypt had become a sacerdotal state ruled by Amun-Re of Thebes. Pharaoh had yielded his power to the head of the state church, whose high priest knew the will of Amun-Re.[71]

Thus we find the following philosophical elements in the myths of the ancient Egyptian theology and religion: 1. the existence of an ontology of pre-creation in the form of an undifferentiated and inert ocean of potential energy which exists before,

during, and after creation ends; it is limitless, spaceless, and timeless, and implicates order produced by the process of creation; 2. in the self-creation of the creator "*ex nihilo,*" he emerges as his own cause and splits into space, time, and the elements; 3. creation is produced through "great speech," "authoritative utterance," "generative command," and "divine words" in the mind and on the tongue of the creator; 4. light becomes the metaphor for creation just like darkness is the metaphor for pre-creation. The light of the disk of the Sun is the cause of all forms of life on the surface of the Earth. This image was first projected on the king and kingship, later attributed to Amun.[72]

With Amun-Re is associated a form of Sun-god known as Menthu (also Month, Montu). Menthu was probably an ancient local god in Thebes before Amun and personified the destructive heat force of the sun. He is mentioned in several *Pyramid Texts*; in the *Book of the Dead* he is described as the "soul and body of Rê" and is usually depicted in the form of a man with the head of a hawk wearing a crown of the solar disk with uraeus[23] and two plumes. Elsewhere he is depicted as a bull, so that originally in pre-dynastic times he may have been a personification of the strength of a raging bull.

The female counterpart of Amun-Re was Mut whose name means "mother" and was regarded as "world-mother." She was represented by a female figure with the united crowns of the South and North. In other depictions she united in herself all the attributes of all the goddesses of the South and North including Amaunet (Ament), the old female counterpart of Amun. She was one of the few goddesses who were declared to be "never born."

The third member of the great triad of Thebes was Khensu (also Khons). He was an ancient Moon-god whose cult preceded that of the Sun-god. When the priests introduced Amun-Re as the national god, they made Khensu the son of Amun-Re and

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23   The Uraeus (plural Uraei or Uraeuses, from the Egyptian word meaning "rearing cobra") is the stylized, upright form of an Egyptian spitting cobra, used as a symbol of royalty and divine authority in ancient Egypt.

Mut. His name derives from the word meaning "to travel, to move about," so he was a form of Thoth and was appropriately identified with the Moon-god. Thus he was the messenger of the gods and traveler through the sky under the form of the moon. He was considered as the "lord of Maāt," the "moon by night;" as the new moon he was a fiery bull. In one form he was Khensu-pa-khart (Harpocrates) and as such he caused the shining of the crescent moon and "through his agency women conceived, cattle became fertile, the germ grew in the egg … he was the second great light in the heaven, and was the first great son of Amun."[73] As a young Sun-god he became the son of Isis, the "Bull of Amentet." He was depicted as a man with the head of a hawk or of a man and usually wears a lunar disk with a crescent or solar disk with the plumes and a uraeus.

In the theology of Apis, the god of Memphis represented by a bull, is one of the trinity of Osiris. Here the bull represents a mortal who became Osiris and an inscription in a Serapeum dated from the time of Ramessides reads: "Osiris = Apis-Atum-Horus at the same time, the Great God."[74]

Another representative trinity is: Ptah-Sokaris (Seker)-Osiris (Asar), a deity centered in Memphis representing the union of powers of the three gods was a symbol of the resurrection from the dead, thus from the Twenty Second Dynasty (ca 950 B.C.E.) was recognized as the "tri-une god of the resurrection." He was depicted in various forms. In a usual form he was a hawk with a white crown and plumes upon his head standing upon a pedestal from which projects a serpent. In another form he is depicted as a human figure seated upon a throne with a crown. Behind him stand Isis and Nephthys, and before him there is the skin of the bull, the head of which was cut off and with blood dripping into a bowl. On the side of the throne is perched a hawk, representing his son Horus. The title given to him is "Dweller in the secret place, great god … king of eternity, governor of everlastingness."[75] Certainly there is a connection between the symbolism of the bull depicted here and in the statutes of Mithras of the Roman period.

Seker or Sokaris was in the early dynasties a god of that portion of the

Underworld which was assigned to the souls of the inhabitants of Memphis so that he represented the power of darkness or of the night and was identified with the forms of the night sun. He was depicted as a hawk-headed man holding in his hands symbols of sovereignty. During the festival of Seker at sunrise, priests drew the sledge on which was placed the "Seker boat" which contained a coffer with the body of the dead Sun-god or Osiris. The sun sailed in the boat over the sky during the second half of the day and entered the Underworld in the evening. The combination with Ptah represented a personification of the union of the primordial creative power with the power of darkness, that is a form of Osiris or the night sun or the dead Sun-god. It was depicted as a man who wears upon his head a crown made of disk, plumes, horns, and uraei with disks on their heads.

A later representation of this tri-une god Ptah-Seker-Osiris is a statuette of a divinity with an inscription dated ca 690 B.C.E., called "Lord of the Secret Sanctuary." This inscription states: "Pi-heri-pa-shai, the son of Pakhois, will serve Ptah-Sokaris-Osiris for ever and ever."[76] This composite deity arose as a result of the decline of Amun in Thebes.

The trinity can also be incorporated into the fourth god as in the Demotic text from the third century B.C.E. where the three gods, Ptah, Re, and Harsiesis (Horus, son of Isis), are fused into one who is Apis and each one is Apis. Apis, therefore, incorporates three gods. It should be added, however, that Apis is identified with each of the three gods separately; the net result is a tetrad in which one deity is equated with each member of the triad.[77] In the Christian Trinity, on the other hand, with its doctrine Three in One and One in Three, the triadic structure remains unless one posits, a quaternity – one substance and three persons.

These examples represent a trinity as a unity of three gods in one. Thus this trinity can be classified as tritheistic.

B. Modalistic trinities

There is another type of trinity in Egyptian theology representing modalistic trinity. Though this type preserves the idea of unity, it could not be a model for a

unity of three persons in one entity. The cult of the sun may provide an example where one sun becomes visible in three aspects or manifestations (*The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Chapter 15). In the Pyramid Texts the three phases of the sun-course are assigned to the three forms of the Sun-god: the process of the sunrise, Khepera (one who rises); the crossing of the sky, Re; and the sunset, Atum (one who sets).[78] Later during the Ramesside period in the *Myth of Re and Isis*, Re is made to say: "I am Khepera in the morning, and Re at noonday, and Atum in the evening."[79] The act of worship is also related with the seasons; there are triple references to places, East, mid-heaven, and West; to heaven, earth, and under earth; to division of age, child, man, old man; to the phases of life: birth, maturity, death; there is a triadic concept of three aspects of time: past (represented by Osiris), present (Horus), and future (Re):

I am Yesterday; I know Tomorrow.

What then is this?

Yesterday is Osiris, and Tomorrow is Re, on the day when he shall destroy the enemies of Neb-er-tcher, and when he shall establish as prince and ruler his son Horus, or (as they say), on the day when we commemorate the festival of the meeting of the dead Osiris with his father Rê, and when the battle of the gods was fought in which Osiris, lord of Amenet, was the leader.[80]

C. The trinity of becoming

The trinity in the Egyptian theology can also come from the process whereby gods are created from one primordial god, the "trinity of becoming." This represents a transition from monism to "tritheistic trinity":

Atum is he who (once) came into being, who masturbated in Ôn. He took his phallus in his grasp that he might create an orgasm by means of it, and so were born Shu and Tefnet.[81]

O Atum Khoprer, you became high on the height, you rose up as the *bnbn*-stone in the Mansion of the 'Phoenix' in Ôn, you spat out Shu, you expectorated Tefnet, and you set your arms about them as the

arms of *ka*, that your essence might be in them.[82]

In another version of the Pyramid Texts this process is described more precisely:

> I am 'life,' the lord of years, alive until infinity, a lord of eternity, [I
> am he] whom Atum, the eldest, has brought forth through his might
> [at the time] when he brought forth Shu and Tefnut [or Tefnet] in
> Heliopolis, when he was One [and] when he became Three.[83]

Atum is portrayed in these texts as the original being self-begotten and who creates the other gods. The meaning of this text is that in creating Shu and Tefenet he produces a divine trinity with the same essence (substance) which is a family unit of a rare kind – father, son, and daughter. This trinity is remarkably similar to the speculation of Tertullian who postulated the unity of the triad based on the unity of substance.

D. More recent trinities

In more recent texts which attest to the occurrences of the triune concepts Griffiths[84] cites the following groupings:

1. In the Demotic Chronicle from the third century B.C.E.:

> 'Apis, Apis, Apis': that maens Ptah, Re, Harsiesis, who are the lords
> of the office of the sovereign … The three gods denote Apis. Apis is
> Ptah, Apis is Re, Apis is Harsiesis.

This text proclaims the unity of the three, nevertheless some supremacy of Apis.

2. An inscription in the Temple of Opet in Karnak, from the third century B.C.E. in which Thoth is described as the "heart of Rê, the tongue of Ta-Tenen, the throat of Hidden-of-name [Amun]."

3. On the gate of Eurgetes in Karnak from the third century B.C.E., god Khons is described in the same way as was god Thoth previously.

4. Martial in *Epigr.* 5.24 from ca 98 C.E. describes Hermes, a gladiator:

> "Hermes who is alone in all things and three times one (*ter unus*)."
> Martial refers here to the gladiatorial contest in which a gladiator
> named Hermes excelled in three arts therefore he is "three times one."

The name of the gladiator invites an association with Hermes Trismegistos, though such an association in the mind of Martial seems unlikely and he probably had in mind a god with three facets or forces.

5. Dedication in an Egyptian quarry of Mons Claudianus, 117 C.E.:

"To Zeus Helius the great Sarapis."

This example represents a syncretism of two traditions – the Graeco-Roman and the Egyptian. The Egyptian tradition points to a fusion of the triad into a trinity.

6. Inscription in the temple of Luxor, 116 C.E. similar to (5) expressing the unity of several deities, dyadic, triadic, or tetradic.

7. Text in Greek on the Egyptian Amulet from the first-second century C.E.:

"One is Baït, one is Hathor, one is Akori, to these belongs one power. Be greeted, father of the world, be greeted, God in three forms (τρίμορφος θεός)." The one God (father of the universe) has in his attributes three forms or appearances. Three gods are combined and treated as a single being.

8. Tertullian in *De Pallio*, 4.3, ca 205 C.E., dismisses the claim of the three-headed monster Geryon showing an interest in the Trinitarian concept:

"Where is Geryon, the three-times one?"

This example illustrates possible influence of an idea of the tri-unity on Christian writers. In Greek culture Cerberus, Chimaera, and Hecate were imagined as having a different body conjoined in one being. Hecate, e.g., a goddess of triple crossroads has statues with three forms: Selene in heaven, Artemis on earth, and Hecate in hell. Similarly, Cerberus has three heads – of a lion, wolf, and a dog which are associated with the present, past, and future.[85]

9. An inscription in Mithraeum in a room of the Baths of Caracala in Rome, dated after 212 C.E.:

"One is Zeus Sarapis Helius, ruler of the world, invincible."

10. This interpretation of Zeus was confirmed later by Julian in his *Orations* IV, in the fourth century C.E.:

"One is Zeus, one is Hades, one is Helius Sarapis."

It seems that Egyptian theologians during the second millennium B.C.E. provided the earliest examples in human history of both monotheism (with Akhenaten) and of trinitarianism. Early Indian religion presents a rival trinity but considering Rig-Veda[86] as the earliest Indian text composed around ca 1200 -1000 B.C.E. the Egyptian tradition has priority. Moreover the influence of the Indian tradition on the development of the Christian doctrines cannot be substantiated.

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