

Nile Valley Civilization Forum

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In our exchange this evening it is important to remember the value of supporting evidence for allegations made, in other words we all have to prove the assertions we make. Our friends will be proposing a basic thesis for which they will provide supportive arguments and evidence in proof of that thesis. But what is the level of proof by which we should operate and evaluate the presentations this evening? In matters of this nature absolute mathematical-type proof or certainty is impossible so that's out. My colleague and I deem it fair to require only the level of proof expected in a court of law in a civil jurisdiction i.e. proof to a high degree of probability, a preponderance of evidence from which we can all make an inference to the best explanation. Unless and until our friends provide that level of proof in their presentations their basic thesis lacks support and therefore ought to be rejected.

Let me now provide some general pointers for our consideration.

1. If one looks at the forest of Egyptian and Judaeo-Christian religions, superficially, then one can see broad similarities and thus be led to assume borrowing, stealing or dependence. However if one looks at the trees of Egyptian and Judaeo-Christian religions carefully, deeply, then one can see broad and specific differences in philosophical outlook and socio-religious traditions.

Let me illustrate. The Hebrews were in Egypt as a subject 'people group' for approximately 400 years and one would take it for granted that when they came to document their socio-religious traditions these would betray stark similarities to Egyptian socio-religious traditions. Well the extant documents concerning health regulations provide a shock for that thesis.

Test Case 1 – Comparing Health Care Norms

Consider this, the available medical literature of Egypt, especially the Papyrus Ebers, written about 1552 BC, recommends such remedies for diseases as lizard's blood, swine's' teeth, putrid meat, excreta from animals including human beings, donkeys, antelopes, dogs, cats, and even wasps and flies!!¹ Nothing resembling the Mosaic prescriptions re disease control appear in the Egyptian texts! Remember the books of Moses, written about 1400 BC, or to indulge the liberals, any date you choose prior to the 20th century AD, provide modern regulations concerning clean and unclean animals and health practices re dead bodies (see e.g. Numbers 19.11-22; Leviticus 11.32-35).

- Note the repeated suggestion of washing self and clothing as a health precaution (Lev. 11.32-40). Drying clothes would be in the sun (with its bacteriocidal ultra violet rays) "unclean 'til evening" = necessary exposure to sun for cleanness.
- Open vessels near a dead body are regarded as unclean, and if made of clay (porous) were to be smashed (Lev. 11. 32ff). All of this avoids the build up of culture media for infectious micro-organisms. If not revealed to him by Yahweh, how could Moses have come up with these counter-cultural regulations on his own?

¹ See S.I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases*, 11-12. Ancient Egyptian Medicine: The Papyrus Ebers, translated from the German version by Cyril P. Bryan, 1974, Chapter 15, Diseases of the Skin.

- Moses would have had to know something about the germ theory of disease minus the knowledge of germs. He would have needed to know something about the nutritional requirements of infectious micro-organisms to know that open clay pots with food particles could maintain such organisms; he would have to know about food chains to know that pathogens can be carried in that manner for him to know which animals should be regarded as clean or unclean.
- Please remember that not until the 20th century (after the invention of x-ray technology and the electron microscope) did humankind develop the technological base for understanding the relationship between microscopic organisms and disease, including how and by what means diseases are transmitted.

■ **Which explanatory inference has more power and scope? Remembrance of Egypt or Revelation from Yahweh?**

Test Case 2 - Comparing Concepts of Deity

On the issue of concepts of deity, Egypt and the escaped Hebrews were worlds apart despite how the forest appears to the superficial observer. Note the popularity of pictorial and carved depictions of deity in Egyptian sources and the central taboo on graven images of Yahweh in the allegedly borrowed or stolen Ten Commandments. Exodus 20.4-5 says, “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them...” (New American Standard Bible).

Familiarity with this taboo in scripture has softened for us its philosophical and socio-religious radicalism. Don't forget the Egyptian religio-cultural prominence of “the wild animal of Seth...the bulls [that were] manifestations of Atum and Ptah at Heliopolis and Memphis...the jackal (the god Anubis)...the crocodile (the god Sobek), the baboon (the god Thoth) and the cobra (the goddess Uto)...the falcon (associated with [dear] Horus [and others] the vulture (the goddess Nekhbet...”² How could a people so exposed to the worshipping of physical manifestations of Egyptian deities come up willy nilly with this central counter-cultural double-edged taboo on making and worshipping any representation of their deity?

■ **Which explanatory inference has more power and scope? Remembrance of Egypt or Revelation from Yahweh?**

Analyze the forest and you can be led astray, analyze the trees carefully and they may just lead you to the God of the Bible.

Let's pitch a tent here a bit. The claim that Moses got his concept of monotheism from Akhenaten or at least from Egypt, is a fairly common but flawed one among Afrocentrists.³

² Finegan. Op. cit., 43.

³ See Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan, *African Origins of the Major Western Religions*, 1970, 156, where an undocumented claim is made that Africans had “spoken of a monotheistic God in the person of RA (the Sun God)”. Diop also says, “Ra is the first God, the first demiurge of history who created through the word. All other gods in history came after him...”. See 311 of his *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, 1991. Diop seems a bit contradictory in that he says at 310, “[t]his primordial matter, the *nous* or the ‘primordial waters’, was elevated to the level of divinity (called *Nun* in Egyptian cosmogony).” Later at 311, he writes, “...eternal matter, uncreated...ends up by becoming self-aware. The first consciousness thus emerges from the primordial *Nun*; it is God, Ra, the demiurge (Plato) who is going to complete creation.”

Amenophis/Amunhotep IV, took the name Akhenaten ('Servant of, or well-pleasing to, Aten') when he established his cult of the Sun-disc (the god Aten) at Amarna.

After Akhenaten's death, says Donald Redford, the foremost authority on Akhenaten, he was regarded as a doomed rebel because he had "overthrown the socioeconomic system and had almost disrupted the running of the state. But no one back then ever called him anything like 'monotheist' (whatever lexical form that would have conjured up in the Egyptian language), and certainly no pejorative was ever hurled at him for espousing one god."⁴

The notion of a supreme god or sole god appeared before and after Akhenaten in that the sun-god was for quite a long time, before Akhenaten, regarded as being of high esteem in the theology of Heliopolis and Aten was an old name for the sun-disk.⁵ Interestingly, this high view of the Aten is reflected in a hymn written in the name of two brothers, Seth and Horus, who were architects at Thebes under Akhenaten's father (Amenophis III). The hymn praises the sun under the names of Amun, Harakhti, Re, Khepri and Aten (sun disk) and says in part, "Hail to thee, sun disk [Aten] of the daytime, creator of all and maker of their living!...The sole lord, who reaches the ends of the lands every day...He who rises in heaven, [his] form being the sun..."⁶

Later than Akhenaten in the 19th dynasty (early 13th century BC), similar sentiments in praise of the sun (under different names) are expressed in Spell 15 of the *Book of Going Forth by Day*.

Hail to thee, Re at his rising, Atum at his setting...Thou art lord of sky and earth, who made the stars above and humankind below, sole God, who came into being at the beginning of time...Hail to thee, Amun-Re...Thou crossest the sky, everyone seeing thee...O my Lord, living through eternity, thou who shalt exist forever; O thou disk [Aten], lord of rays, when thou risest everyone lives. Let (me) see thee at daybreak every day.⁷

After Akhenaten's death, Haremhab (who was Pharaoh about thirteen years after Akhenaten) launched a program to wipe out his name and reign from the records of Egypt. How? By a general destruction and concealment by re-use, of his monuments.

The major written source of Akhenaten's view of the Aten comes from a hymn, in praise of the sun-god, inscribed in the tomb of Aya, his private secretary (and Pharaoh for about 4 years, 1327-1323 BC).⁸

When thou settest in the western horizon,
The land is in darkness, in the manner of death
They sleep in a room, with the heads wrapped up...
Every lion is come forth from his den...

At daybreak, when thou arisest on the horizon,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Shaw, op. cit., 275.

⁶ James Pritchard, ANET, 367-368.

⁷ Cited in Jack Finegan, *Myth & Mystery: An Introduction to the Pagan Religions of the Biblical World*, 1989, 59.

⁸ Finegan, op. cit., 57.

When thou shinest as the Aten by day,
Thou drivest away the darkness and givest thy rays...
All the world, they do their work...
O sole god, like whom there is no other!⁹

Beyond the common belief in one god, one has to examine the content of that belief, philosophically, because not all similar beliefs are identical. The monotheism of the ancient Egyptians was radically different in content from that of the Old Testament.¹⁰ Even the Egyptian 'sole god' notion is different from the Hebrew 'one God' notion. The Hebrew *shema* (Deut. 6.4) "Hear O Israel" uses a term for one that suggests composite oneness, as opposed to digital oneness. That word is ***echad***. (like a plurality of grapes on a stem constituting ***one*** bunch). The Hebrew term for digital oneness, ***yachid*** is never used of Yahweh in the Bible.

There is an acute philosophical difference between the theism of the Bible and that of the Egyptians. The God-Creator of the Bible is infinite, eternal and a person whereas that of the Egyptians in general, was the sun or contingent matter. The philosophical difference is that biblical monotheism wields explanatory scope and power re the origin of anything/everything *including persons and mind* because God is infinite, eternal and personal whereas Egyptian concepts of god lack it because a contingent, material entity, the sun, is giving rise to everything *including persons and mind*. This is a neglected problem for any alleged theory of stealing, borrowing or influence concerning Egyptian concepts of deity and the biblical one.

Analyze the forest and you can be led astray, analyze the trees carefully and they may just lead you to the God of the Bible.

⁹ Finegan, op. cit., 57.

¹⁰ Egypt may be more defensibly said to have had henotheism than monotheism given the plurality of gods and the regional supremacy of particular gods like Atum in Heliopolis, Ptah in Memphis, Amun and Ra/Re in Thebes. See Finegan, op. cit., 51-55.