

The search for Noah and the Flood in ancient Egypt—part 2

Gavin Cox

Was the concept of Noah and the Flood incorporated into ancient Egyptian religion and belief? Such a concept can be recognized in the ‘Hermopolitan Ogdoad’, a mythical Egyptian cosmology involving eight creator deities, comprising four males and their female consorts. This article will explore this group of eight and their connections to Noah, his family, and the Flood. I will continue my investigation with New Kingdom evidence first, found in well-known pharaonic funerary inscriptions, then the later *Book of the Dead* and progress through history up to later stages, including a survey of evidence of temple worship and the burial tomb of the Ogdoad. My investigation will proceed based upon 10 search parameters, or predictions for Egyptian history and religion, based upon the implications of the biblical text of the Genesis 5 and 11 chronogenealogies and Flood narrative of Genesis 6–9.

The Ogdoad and the Flood in the New Kingdom

In this article I will discuss several New Kingdom (NK) sources of information for the Ogdoad and/or the eight *Hēh*-gods who are associated with the Flood. These sources are themselves elevated to great significance as they appear in the funerary inscriptions of some of the most well-known pharaohs in history. Two religious sources for information regarding the Ogdoad will be analyzed, firstly, *Book of the Heavenly Cow* (HC) and *Book of the Dead* (BD), particularly focusing on BD 175.

Book of the Heavenly Cow and the Ogdoad

The myth of the Heavenly Cow is preserved in several versions, dating to the NK (c. 1539–1077 BC).¹ Of specific interest is the appearance of the eight *Hēh*-gods, who function within the story by assisting Shu in supporting the sky.² The eight *Hēh*-gods stop the sky from collapsing, so preventing creation from returning to its original primeval condition represented by Nun—the embodiment of the Flood.³ HC describes mankind’s rebellion (*sbi*) against Re, his ordering mankind’s destruction, and subsequent reorganization of the cosmos, before permanently retiring to heaven. Egyptologists have noted HC is reminiscent of Mesopotamian and biblical passages concerning the Flood and destruction of mankind due to their shared themes of rebellion and judgment by the Flood.⁴ Within HC, Nu, the ‘father of the gods’, is summoned to the divine council for his advice, where he proclaims the judgment of man’s destruction by Hathor. This is followed by a ‘flood’,⁵ the purpose of which is to trick Hathor and pacify her anger thereby saving a remnant of mankind.⁶

HC is first attested from the time of Tutankhamun (NK, 18th dynasty, c. 1324 BC), and subsequent versions appeared in tomb inscriptions of Seti I, Ramses II, III, and IV⁷ (19th dynasty), located within subsidiary rooms of the kings’

sarcophagus chambers, reserved exclusively for these inscriptions. The dates of these texts extend through NK from the 18th to the 20th Dynasties.

Passages from HC appear for the first time in Tutankhamun’s shrine I, but sources for the myth are to be detected in the most ancient of texts, specifically the *Pyramid Texts* (PT), where the Cow’s title, *mhyt-wrt*, “Great Flood” occurs in five spells (as discussed in part 1) along with the eight *Hēh*-gods as supports for the sky.⁸ Within the Coffin Texts (CT), direct allusions to HC can be discerned. In CT 79, the eight *Hēh*-gods appear alongside Nu, where Re is described as resting on the Heavenly Cow—“Great Flood”.

Tutankhamun, the Great Flood and the eight *Hēh*-gods

‘Shrine I’ is the outermost and largest of Tutankhamun’s shrines (figure 1) richly decorated within and without with text. On the left, and back panels, are passages from HC, including imagery on the back panel of the Great Flood (represented by the Heavenly Cow), supported by Shu, and assisted by the eight *Hēh*-gods. The belly of the Cow is covered with stars, representing the sky, where Ra is depicted sailing in his solar bark (figure 2). It should be noted here that the function of the eight *Hēh*-gods aiding Shu in supporting the sky is identical in function to that of the Ogdoad, aiding Shu in supporting the sky, as seen in the 26th dynasty tombs at el-Bawiti, thereby establishing the identity of the eight *Hēh*-gods as that of the Ogdoad. In other words, the Ogdoad who represent the eight *Hēh*-gods, prevent the cosmos from being destroyed by the Flood.

In Tutankhamun’s shrine 1, the image of the Cow is framed by the inscription:

“Words spoken by (the Cow) the Great Flood: Come my son of my body, my beloved one, Lord of the Two

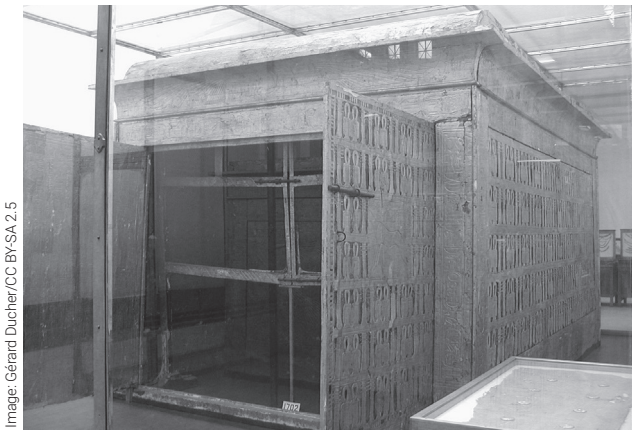
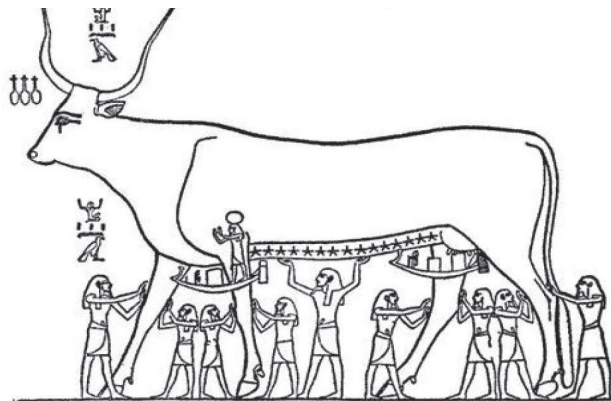
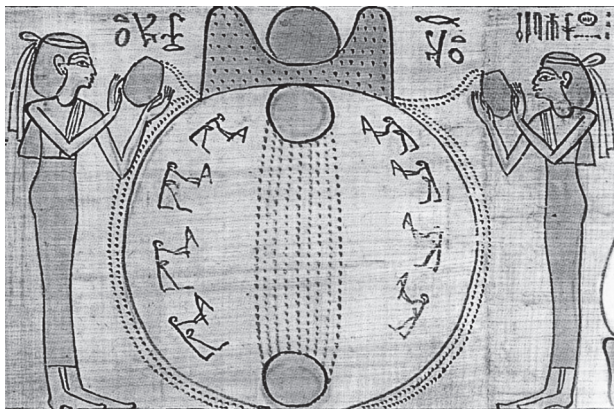


Image: Gérard Ducher/CC BY-SA 2.5

Figure 1. Tutankhamun shrine I (Wikipedia Commons CC BY-SA 2.5)

Figure 2. The eight Heh-gods assist Shu supporting the Heavenly Cow (Great Flood), Tutankhamun shrine I, in Piankoff⁹Figure 3. Khonsumes papyrus, Ogdoad hoe the earth, in Silverman¹⁸

Lands Neb-Kheperu-Re. Be with thy father Re as one of these gods who are in his following at the side of (the Cow) the Great Flood. Osiris, King Tutankhamun, ruler of Heliopolis of the South, lives—he will not die again in the Necropolis!”¹⁰

It should be noted that the name Tutankhamun (*Amen-tut-ankh*) is itself connected to the Ogdoad, as the boy-king’s name means “living image of Amun”; Amun being one of the

male members of the Ogdoad, who by this time had become an important god in his own right. So Tutankhamun having inscriptions of the Great Flood and the Eight gods inscribed on his funerary chapel is consistent with his Amun title. The memory of the Eight and the Great Flood is also shared by some of the greatest names in pharaonic history.

Book of the Dead

The Book of the Dead (BD), known by the Egyptians as “going out in daylight” (*prt m hrw*), has a history that spans one and a half thousand years c. 1450 BC to 50 AD.¹¹ At the start of the New Kingdom (18th dynasty), BD was still in the process of formation, and only by the Saite period (26th dynasty) did BD reach its final canon, when all the spells were organized into an established order of chapters. BD comprises a large set of spells whose function was to ensure the resurrection of the deceased and their security in the afterlife. BD is the successor to the Middle Kingdom CTs and Old Kingdom PTs, representing religious funerary rituals and spells which were collected and inscribed on papyrus scrolls, becoming available to purchasers for their burials. BD texts use cursive hieroglyphs, and are accompanied by colourful ink vignettes.

The Ogdoad and the Flood in BD

Texts that refer to the Ogdoad include BD 27:2, “for as for this heart of mine it is the great heart that is in the Ogdoad”.¹² BD 164:2 (known from a 26th dynasty copy, c. 350 BC)¹³ states: “The Ogdoad (and) the living souls who are in their coffins (*ḏb t*) are praising thy dignity ...”¹⁴ (Interestingly, the Hebrew word used for Noah’s ark is *tēbat*, recognized as a transliteration of *ḏb t*, the Egyptian word for coffin.¹⁵ (The idea of the Ogdoad in their coffins as ‘dead gods’, will be discussed later).¹⁶ *Heh* is mentioned singularly in BD 150:2, “Abode of *Heh*”.¹⁷ A significant BD vignette illustrates the Ogdoad (figure 3), from the 21st dynasty papyrus of Khenumose, priest of Amun (his hieroglyph can be seen top right). The vignette shows the sun rising in three stages on the first day of creation before setting behind the twin horizon of the primeval mound. Two goddesses representing North (right) and South (left) pour out the waters of Nun. On the primeval mound are shown the Ogdoad—as eight creator divinities hoeing the earth. This is very evocative of Noah’s family disembarking and setting up agriculture as outlined in Genesis 9:18. This vignette may well represent a cultural memory of Noah and his family starting agriculture afresh in the post-Flood soils, bringing forth the first crops—in effect creating anew the conditions for human life to flourish. Therefore, the Egyptians would naturally commemorate them as creator gods.

Images of Nu standing in the Nun holding up the solar-bark containing seven gods and/or the Ogdoad is an image

seen on temple walls of pharaohs¹⁹ and is depicted in the 19th dynasty BD papyrus of Ani,²⁰ (figure 4). Nu entirely takes over the function of the eight *Hēh*-gods and the Ogdoad in supporting the sky, enabling Ra to sail in his sun bark, thereby preventing the sky's collapse and a return to chaos and Nun.

The Ogdoad and the Flood in BD 175

BD 175 includes a description of a cosmos destroying flood, resulting in Osiris and Atum (transformed as a snake) remaining alone, together with impersonal concepts of *Nu* and *Hēh*—representing an example of individual Ogdoad members functioning within funerary literature.²² Thoth is the chief deity being addressed at the beginning, who, it should be noted, is lord of *hmnw* (Khemnw, City of the Eight). The passage contains a divine complaint against the evil, rebellion (*sbi*), and violence of mankind. Part of the divine judgment is that mankind's time would be limited, and that everything created would be destroyed by the Flood. The following lines from BD 175 are taken from Quirke's 2013 translation:

“(4). O Thoth, what is to happen (5) with the children of Nut. (6) They have made tumult, they have raised strife, (7) they have done evil, they have formed rebellions (*sbiw*), (8) they have caused slaughter ... (13) You shall not see evil, you shall not suffer. (14) Their years are limited, (15) their months are closing in ... (51) and I shall indeed destroy all I made, (52) and this land shall turn into Nun, (53) as a floodwater, as its original condition ...”²³

Table 1 below, explores and tabulates vocabulary that theoretically serves as scribal allusions to the four names associated with the Ogdoad within this passage of judgment and destruction in BD 175.

The chaos and return to Nun described here may well be accented by puns and scribal play-on-words referencing the Ogdoad as chaos gods. The divine complaint resulting in the Flood judgment is due to moral failure on the part of mankind, described as rebellion (*sbi*), evil and violence and conceptually parallel to the divine complaint recorded in Genesis 6:5, 11. BD 175:14 describes man's years as being “limited” and their months as “closing in”, is evocative of the divine curse of Genesis 6:3 limiting the timeframe of mankind to 120 years, presumably before the Flood judgment. The term for “floodwater” used in BD 175 is *hwhw*, defined as a “primeval god” in Wb 3, 56:15, likely an alternate spelling for the Ogdoad member *hh*.

The Ogdoad in 20th dynasty Ramesside Letters

A collection of 50 papyri letters written in hieratic, and dated to the late Ramesside period (20th dynasty), has been collected and studied. The papyri come from the family archive of Djehutymose the scribe, and his son

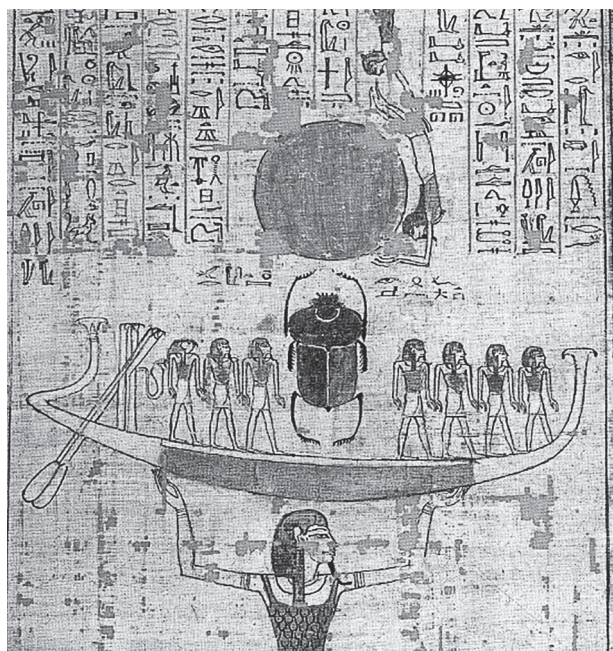


Figure 4. Nu supporting the solar bark containing seven deities and Re, in Wilkinson²¹

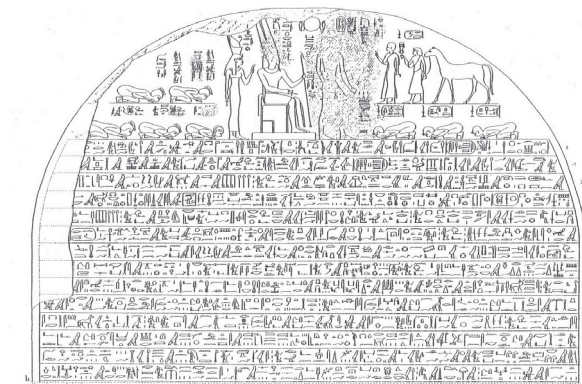


Figure 5. Top section of Piankhi stela Auguste Mariette (1821–1881)



Figure 6. Piankhi stela Ogdoad inscription, in Grimal²⁸



Figure 7. Named Ogdoad, Great Amun Hymn³⁴

Table 1. Ogdoad vocabulary in BD 175

Line #	Transliteration	Ogdoad allusion
16	<i>ḡr ntt irw.n.sn ḡḡw imnt</i>	"because they have caused harm to the <i>hidden</i> "
20	<i>nn nwi m-m nw n ḡḡ imnt.sn</i>	"I am not among those who caused harm to their <i>hidden</i> things"
27	<i>mḡ.ti sp sn kkwt.ti sp sn</i>	"when it is deep ... in <i>darkness</i> ..."
28	<i>ḡḡ.ti sp sn</i>	"and of <i>seeking</i> ..."
38	<i>m ḡnty ḡḡw</i>	"in the boat foremost of <i>millions</i> ."
48	<i>iw.k r ḡḡw n ḡḡw</i>	"You are to have <i>millions of millions</i> ."
49	<i>ḡ n ḡḡw</i>	"a lifespan of <i>millions</i> ."
52	<i>iw t pn r ii m nnw</i>	"and this land shall turn into <i>Nun</i> ."
53	<i>m ḡwḡw mi tpy.f</i>	"As a <i>floodwater</i> , as its original condition."
62	<i>iw ir.n.i ḡry st.f n wi n ḡḡw</i>	"I have made him to bear his seat in the boat of <i>millions</i> ."

Table 2. Late Ramesside Letters (LRL) Ogdoad references²⁵

Ref.	Inscription
312.LRL No. 50	"... Amun, Holy of Place, and the great and [august] Ogdoad ..."
314.LRL No. 16	"... upon Amun of Djeme, upon Amun of the Throne(s) of the Two Lands, upon the great and august Ogdoad that rests in Kheftehinebos ..."
315.LRL No. 28	"... upon the great and august Ogdoad that rests [in] Kheftehinebos ..."
318.LRL No. 15	"... upon Khnum, who has fashioned the great and august Ogdoad that rests in the Promontory of Kheftehinebos ... and who made for them the hills in which you are, upon Amun of Djeme ..."

Butehamun, who were employed at Thebes, and who lived in Medinet Habu. The letters represent correspondences by the chief scribes of the necropolis to a certain individual for administrative purposes. The letters have been dated with some certainty to the reign of Ramses XI, between regnal years 1–19.²⁴ Of interest to this study are four letters referring to the Ogdoad as part of their lengthy introductory blessings and invocations (dated to regnal year 10), thereby representing an incidental written testimony to the association of Hermopolis (*Khemnw*) with the Ogdoad and their tomb. The letters which contain Ogdoad references (table 2) are: No. 15–Papyrus Phillipps; No. 16–Papyrus Turin 1971, and No. 28–Papyrus British Museum 10375; and No. 50–Papyrus Turin 2026.

Letters 15, 16, and 28 refer to the Ogdoad tomb in the phrase "who rest in Khefte-hi-nebos", meaning "opposite her lord", i.e. Medinet Habu. Letter No. 15 refers to the hills made for the Ogdoad, and "Amun of Djeme", representing the Ogdoad tomb.²⁶ An important observation regarding these Ramesside letters is that they possess an established tradition referring to the Ogdoad tomb at Djeme, Medinet

Habu during the 20th dynasty. The tomb of the Ogdoad referred to here will be discussed later in this article.

25th dynasty Victory Stela of Piankhi—testimony to Ogdoad worship

The Victory Stela of Piankhi, or Piye, an invading Nubian king who reigned from c. 753–723 BC during the 25th dynasty, makes reference to the temple of Hermopolis (*Khemnw*), where the Ogdoad were worshipped. The granite stela (figure 5) consists of 159 lines of text, including a description of Piankhi's victories over Egypt and Hermopolis, where he entered the Ogdoad temple to sacrifice. The inscription §13:1.58–60 (figure 6) states: "His majesty arose in splendor from his palace and proceeded to the temple of Thoth, lord of Khemennu. He sacrificed oxen, shorthorns, and fowl to his father Thoth, lord of Khemennu, and the Ogdoad in the temple of the Ogdoad."²⁷

The mention of the Ogdoad in the Piankhi stela is brief and does not name the group, but stands as a 25th dynasty textual witness to the worship of the Ogdoad at Khemn, "Eight City".

City of the Eight, and the Ogdoad temple

El-Ashmunein is the Arabic name of a modern city in Upper Egypt, some 322 km south of Cairo which contains an archaeological site that marks a temple where the Ogdoad were worshipped. The El-Ashmunein site was marked by a Greco-Roman temple of Thoth, dedicated to the Ogdoad's worship, itself destroyed in modern times, but archaeological evidence has shown traces of 18th dynasty foundations laying beneath. Ashmunein is derived from the Coptic (Ⲭⲙⲏⲛ, *Shmun*) which means "City of the Eight", in memory of the Ogdoad. The Greeks called it by the name of Hermopolis Magna (after their god Hermes, whom they associated with the Egyptian god Thoth). The Egyptians knew it by the name *Khemnw* ("Eight City"). Spencer in an archaeological report states: "Of the very early temples of El-Ashmunein, no intelligible traces have survived, and any remains must lie deep below the present level of the subsoil water".²⁹ However, four colossal baboon statues were excavated at El-Ashmunein, bearing inscriptions to the 18th dynasty ruler Amenophis III, along with inscriptions to *Khemnw*. Spencer

notes Prof. Abu Bakr has argued for eight baboons originally, which would be consistent with the Ogdoad known from tradition, which likely guarded the temple where the Ogdoad were worshipped.³⁰ The evidence presented here is consistent with prediction 5, that Noah and his family were worshipped by the ancient Egyptians as deified ancestors, with their own accompanying temple.

Darius I, 27th dynasty Temple of Hibis and the Ogdoad

The temple of Hibis at the centre of the southern el-Khargeh Oasis is the greatest surviving Persian monument in Egypt,³¹ lavishly decorated throughout, from the reign of Darius I (cf. Daniel 5). Hibis Temple provides a near-complete expression of Late Period religion, which includes representations of approximately 700 deities in the sanctuary, including obscure deities in unusual forms.³² The most notable inscription is from the Great Amun Hymn, located on the south wall of the hypostyle hall, which depicts the Ogdoad as Nun, Nunet, Kek, Keket, and Gereh and Gerehet (figure 7), which represent the first occurrence of “night”, or “cessation” found in Egypt.³³ The Ogdoad names substitute for Amun and Amunete in a unique way.

The Ogdoad males are depicted here as frog-headed and their female consorts as serpent-headed, both animals associated with water and flooding. Other depictions of the Ogdoad at Hibis temple show them in simian form, as worshippers of the sun on the first day of creation.

18th dynasty Amun Temple—the Ogdoad tomb

Ptolemaic and Roman period traditions³⁵ as well as Ramesside letters state that small 18th dynasty temple to Amun (figure 9) was believed by the Egyptians to be the tomb of the Ogdoad. The temple is located at Medinet Habu, situated within the larger 20th dynasty Ramesside III temple complex (figure 8). Within the Amun chapel, the Ogdoad are named in the temple’s inscriptions with a unique set of compound names, specifically *Imn-Nwn* and *Imn.t-Nwn.t*, *Kk.w* and *Kk.t*, *Hh* and *Hh.t*, and *Niw* and *Niw.t*.³⁶ The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago excavated at the site of Medinet Habu from 1926 to 1933³⁷, publishing 14 archaeological reports, with two further volumes by Breasted and Murnane.

Under the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (died 116 BC), the entrance and bark shrine of the original 18th dynasty Amun temple from the times of Thutmose III, Horemheb, and Seti I, were re-carved in Ptolemaic style.³⁸ Images within the temple show Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II worshipping the Ogdoad. The Ogdoad are shown seated, in two anthropomorphic groups of four, all holding *Was*-sceptres, representing the pillars of the sky, devices used to support the cosmos from collapsing back to Nun (the Flood).



Image: Steve F-E-Cameron/CC BY 3.0

Figure 8. Ramesside III temple

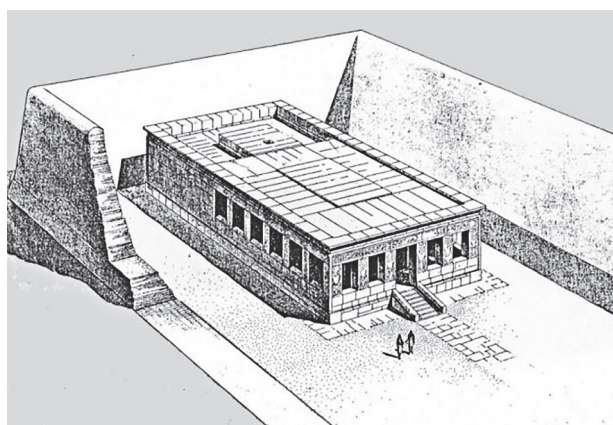


Figure 9. Reconstruction of 18th dynasty Temple Ogdoad tomb (by Hölscher)⁴⁰

An accompanying lengthy cosmological text inscribed on both door jams and lintel (figure 10), describes the role of the Ogdoad at creation, and their burial at Medinet Habu (Djeme), and has been described by McClain as ranking alongside the great Amun Hymn from Hibis.³⁹

From figure 8: (A) 20th dynasty Ramesses III temple; (B) 18th dynasty Amun Ogdoad tomb; (C) sacred lake representing the Nun, or primeval flood.

From figure 10: (A) Door lintel and jambs covered in hymns to the Ogdoad describing their burial within the Amun temple and their role in the Flood, showing the Ogdoad seated receiving offerings from Ptolemy VIII & Cleopatra; (B) bark shrine (room dedicated to the sun bark).

The text within the bark shrine contain striking references to the Flood and burial of the Ogdoad within the shrine itself:

“... the noble fathers who brought into being the beginning who shone in Nun when the land was in utter darkness and every existing thing was flooded ... who opened the light after the utter darkness when they brought Nun in his cloudburst ... (As for) the great elder one, even as he enlarged his mummy in the netherworld, so also he opened the inundation in its time in the presence of his father: it is Amun



Figure 10. Door to bark shrine showing Ptolemy VIII & Cleopatra II worshipping the Ogdoad⁴¹

Djeser-set, the father of fathers [who has gone forth from] Nun, who is therein along with the Ogdoad of the domain of Amun, the burial of all of (them) being completed therein, (namely) those who sleep at the mound of Djeme, the place of the father of the gods, who bore every god at the first occasion, interred in their wrappings, their members being within it, the mound of Djeme ...⁴²

McClain, within his archaeological report, published in 2011, states:

“As an expanded description of the purpose for the shrine’s renewal, these texts illuminate the characteristics of Amun, in particular as the father of the great elder one (Re) ... who ‘comes forth’ here at the mound of Djeme to receive funerary offerings We learn also of the cult of the Ogdoad, who ‘sleep at the mound of Djeme’, ‘interred in their wrappings, their members being within it’, and who declare that this mound of Djeme, the ‘resting-place of Amun’, is their funerary abode ... these texts declared unequivocally to be the locus of the mortuary cult for these ‘deceased’ creator deities.”⁴³

Several unidentified subterranean chambers discovered beneath the Amun temple, filled with dark sand and of unknown function, have been discovered. The possibility of finding more pits existing beneath the floors of other rooms within the temple has been left unresolved due to the desire not to disturb the ancient pavements in these rooms.⁴⁴ To date, no modern survey has been carried out to determine if there are older structures beneath the 18th dynasty temple dedicated to the Ogdoad tomb. What can be said is the Egyptians believed

the Ogdoad were buried here, but until an investigation can be made beneath the temple, the idea that Noah and his family are buried here will have to remain elusive.

Conclusion

From the biblical data outlined in part 1, 10 predictions were made, based upon the implications of Noah and his family living to vast ages as recorded in Genesis 9:29; 11:11. Their unique experiences in human history meant they would have likely been worshipped as deified ancestors by their pagan descendants. Scripture names Egypt after Noah’s son Ham and his son Mizraim which provides a specific search focus. With this in mind, the following predictions based on the implications of the biblical text were used as search criteria. Prediction 1: Noah and the Flood should be found in Egypt’s most ancient texts—which happen to be the 5th dynasty Pyramid Texts. Here two terms for the ‘Great Flood’ are to be found, along with the concept of “the Eight”—known from later Greek texts as the Ogdoad, or *Khemnw* in Egyptian. Two pairs are known from PT—*Nuw*, *Nuw.t* and *Amun*, *Amun.t*, with the other names *Kek* and *Heh* appearing as cosmological concepts. These names then appear in later collections of texts known as the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead. BD 175 notably contains a description of the Flood sent to destroy mankind, where these names appear within the text, possibly as a scribal play-on-words for the forces of chaos.

A group of eight gods connected with the Flood collectively known as the eight Heh gods, (chaos)—a name derived from the Ogdoad (who fulfil the identical function as the Ogdoad, in supporting the sky from collapsing back into the Nun)—appear in funerary inscriptions of Tutankhamun, Seti I, and Ramses II, III, and IV. The Ogdoad also had their own 18th dynasty worship centre, based at modern El-Ashmunein (derived from the Egyptian-Coptic for “Eight City”). And the Ogdoad were also believed by the Egyptians to be buried at the 18th dynasty Temple of Amun, at Medinet Habu.

These combined facts are consistent with the biblically based predictions set forth at the beginning of the first article, specifically:

- ‘Concepts of the Eight’ (No. 2);
- ‘Flood concepts’ (No. 3);
- ‘Deified ancestors’ (No. 5);
- ‘Pharaonic references’ (No. 6);
- ‘Temple and worship’ (No. 7), and;
- ‘Tomb of the Eight’ (No. 9).

The following predictions will be investigated in further articles:

- ‘Creation concepts’ (No. 4). If Ham brought with him pre-Flood knowledge, then there should be striking similarities between ancient Egyptian ideas of Creation compared to Genesis 1–4.

- ‘Egyptian vs Hebrew names’ (No. 8): paper 1 briefly demonstrated how the meanings of the names of Noah and his sons carry over into the meanings of the names of the Ogdoad. This will be further demonstrated in a separate article, which will further strengthen the overall case that the Egyptian Ogdoad represent polytheistic concepts of Noah, his family and the Flood.
- ‘Pioneer eponyms’ (No. 10): are there fundamental concepts, inventions or everyday items from ancient Egypt that were likely derived in memory of Noah, his family, and the Flood? If so, will they manifest themselves in recognizable ways? These questions will form the basis of further articles.

Acknowledgment

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Gavin M. Cox has two master’s degrees, one in biblical studies from Exeter University, the other in Egyptology from Birmingham University, an honours degree in theology from London Bible College, and a Higher National Diploma of minerals engineering from Camborne School of Mines. He now works full time for Creation Ministries International (UK) as a speaker writer since June of 2018. Prior to this, his work included 10 years in the seismic industry as a geophysicist and topographic land surveyor both on land and marine in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the UK.