

What's the point of the pyramids?

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There is evidence from the Great Pyramids of Egypt that may well be testimony to the events of creation and the Flood. It is literally the point of the pyramid, the so-called ‘benben’, which points towards this evidence. The benben, or the primeval mound, represented in the minds of the ancient Egyptians the first land that appeared from the primeval ocean, called the ‘Nun’. It was upon this land that the first eight ‘gods’ sprang into being: four males and their wives, headed by the chief god, called ‘Nu’. This all sounds remarkably evocative of Noah’s family stepping onto the land after the Flood.

Such connections are to be expected when we remember that Egypt in the Old Testament is called ‘the land of Ham’ in the Psalms, and is called ‘Mizraim’ throughout the Hebrew Old Testament.¹ Ham, Noah’s son, would have naturally taken with him knowledge about creation and the Flood, passing it on to his son Mizraim, and on through the generations.² The

Egyptian civilization is one of those, along with Mesopotamian ones, which arose much sooner following the Flood than others around the world—not surprising since the point of dispersal for humanity was ‘the plain of Shinar’ (Sumeria/Mesopotamia).

The benben—the point of the pyramid

There are numerous examples of benben stones stored in museums around the world. A famous example of a benben, presently kept in the Cairo museum, belonged to the 12th Dynasty Pyramid of Amenemhat III (see figure 1).

Egyptologist James Allen explains the ancient Egyptian ideas of creation: “The benben was a pyramid-shaped mound symbolizing the first land that appeared from Nu at the creation.”³

The Nu (or Nun) was the Egyptian idea of a primeval ocean, or flood. The benben stone was a central feature of the more ancient solar temples, which Egyptologist David Silverman states

“... were constructed, in addition to the pyramids, by six Fifth-Dynasty kings and based on the sun temple of Heliopolis. The focus of each temple was an altar before a benben,



Figure 1. Benben stone from a 12th Dynasty pyramid

a squat obelisk with a pyramid point representing the hill over which the sun rose at the beginning of creation.”⁴

Up from the depths

The idea of the primeval mound rising up from the primeval ocean occurs in two versions, one from Heliopolis (which is now a suburb of modern Cairo), and the other from Hermopolis (located 322 km south of Cairo, at the modern city of El Ashmunein).⁵ These ideas are evocative of the accounts of both creation and the Flood in Genesis. To explain: during Creation Week, God called the dry land to appear from the Great Deep on Day 3 (Genesis 1:9, 10). At the end of the Flood the text states: “And the waters continued to abate until ... the tops of the mountains were seen” (Genesis 8:5). In both cases, land emerges from a state of watery chaos. It may also be significant that the word ‘Nu’ is linguistically very close to the name of Noah, which is still Nûh in modern Arabic, for example. In the Heliopolitan version, after the primal mound arose from the Nun, onto it sprang an Egyptian creator god, called Atum. He created two children called Shu and Tefēnet.⁶

Within pyramids that are from an era in the Old Kingdom called the 5th Dynasty are inscribed pyramid texts (PT) which were believed to protect the deceased pharaoh in the afterlife. The pyramid of a pharaoh called Pepis II has inscribed in it a spell:

“O Atum ... you became high on the height, you rose up as the *bnbn*-stone in ... Ōn, you [created] Shu, and Tefēnet ... O Atum, set your arms about the King, about this construction, and about this pyramid ... that the King’s essence may be in it, enduring forever ...”⁷

This inscription describes the hope of the pharaoh for the afterlife in relation to his pyramid.



Figure 2. Wall painting, c.1164–1157 BC, showing Ra-Atum slaying Apophis at the Ished tree

Biblical connections to place names

The city mentioned in this pyramid text occurs in the Bible as “Ōn”, where one of Joseph’s wives, Asenath, is introduced as “the daughter of Potipherah priest of Ōn” (Genesis 41:45, 50; 46:20). The Greeks called the city ‘Heliopolis’, meaning ‘City of the Sun’. The Egyptians called Ōn ‘Iunu’, which means ‘pillar’ (or obelisk, in reference to the benben).⁸ The chief temple of Ōn was called the ‘Great House of Atum (Per-Atum)’⁹, which occurs in the Bible as ‘Pithom’,¹⁰ the place where the Hebrew slaves built Pharaoh’s grain stores (Exodus 11:1). However, the Hebrew slaves were not responsible for building the pyramids; that is a myth started, surprisingly, by Josephus, the Jewish historian.¹¹

Atum who?

The ancient Egyptians viewed Atum as a solar deity (Re), and in his role

as a creator-god his responsibility was to hold back the forces of chaos by destroying the evil snake called Apophis. In tomb paintings,¹² and in papyrus rolls buried with mummies—containing spells for protection in the afterlife, called The Book of the Dead—are a number of colourful images that depict Apophis being slain by Re-Atum. He is depicted in the form of a tomcat, which the Egyptians considered the natural enemy of snakes (figure 2). Re-Atum is depicted either cutting off or stamping on the head of Apophis, a ritual re-enacted by the priests of Ōn, with models of snakes.¹³

In front of Re-Atum and Apophis is the sacred Ished tree, which was believed to grow on the primal mound at Heliopolis. The Ished tree was linked to wisdom, as evidenced from inscriptions at Ramesses’ II temple at Thebes (c. 1300 BC), which picture Thoth (the god of wisdom) seated on a throne and Sheshat (a goddess of writing, known as ‘foremost in the library’) standing alongside, writing

on the tree's leaves.¹⁴ Many of these aspects are evocative of the Fall narrative in Genesis 3, although the Egyptian telling is somewhat on its head when we consider Adam was vanquished by the serpent at the Tree of Knowledge. The Gospel promise is that the Last Adam would be the One to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15 cf. Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:25).

Then there were eight

The Hermopolitan version of the primeval mound rising from the Nun involved eight creator gods springing onto the mound at the first sunrise. This group are known as the 'Ogdoad' by Egyptologists (from Greek, meaning 'eight'), consisting of four males and their wives.¹⁵ The chief was called Nu, who was described as 'the father of the gods'.¹⁶ Their names appear in the Pyramid Texts, either as divine titles (Nu and Naunet, Amun and Amunet), or concepts that describe the forces of chaos—Kek, meaning 'darkness', and Heh, meaning 'unlimited'.¹⁷ They also appear in The Book of the Dead, and a colourful vignette shows the Ogdoad hoeing the earth on the primeval mound on the first day of creation (figure 3). (The two goddesses are pouring out the waters of Nun).¹⁸ Allowing for the way in which real events rapidly become distorted with time and retelling, this is very evocative of Noah and his family setting up farming for the first time after the Flood, and may well be a memory handed down from Ham and Mizraim.

Conclusion

The hope of the pharaoh for the afterlife involved being buried beneath the benben, to be reborn and see the first sunrise in the afterlife. Such thinking was futile. As believers in Jesus Christ (the True Light of the world), we are assured that we will rise with Him. After Jesus' burial He

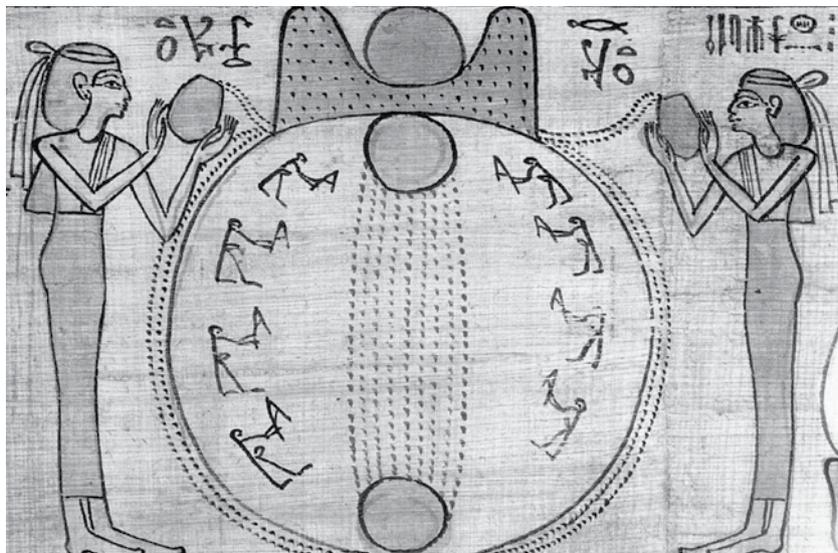


Figure 3. The Ogdoad hoe, the primeval mound

conquered death; His tomb is empty, unlike those of the pharaohs. So next time you see the pyramids, remember the point—the benben—which may well be evidence of ideas handed down from Ham and Mizraim about creation and the Flood.

14. Sheshat and Thoth fixed the length of a king's reign by inscribing his name on the leaves of the Ished tree at Heliopolis.

15. Cox, G., The search for Noah and the Flood in Ancient Egypt—part 1, *J. Creation* 33(3):94–101, 2019; Cox, G., The search for Noah and the Flood in Ancient Egypt—part 2, *J. Creation* 33(3):102–108, 2019.

16. Pinch, ref. 12, pp 172–173.

17. Pinch, ref. 12, pp. 175–177.

18. Silverman, ref. 4, p. 121.

References

1. Egypt is called 'Mizraim' 611 times in the Hebrew Bible, and the 'tents/ land of Ham' are referred to in Psalms 78:51; 105:23, 27; 106:22.
2. This is consistent with the Table of Nations as laid out in Genesis 10.
3. Allen, J.P., *The ancient Egyptian pyramid texts*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, GA, p. 427, 2005.
4. Silverman, D.P., *Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 188, 1997.
5. Another later creation myth was engraved on the Shabako stone, termed the Memphite theology, which refers to the rising primal mound as a deity in its own right, Ta-tanen.
6. Silverman, ref. 4, p. 123.
7. Faulkner, R.O., *The ancient Egyptian pyramid texts*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 246, 1969.
8. *jwn*, interestingly *jwn-mw.w* means 'pillar of Nu'.
9. *pr-jtm.w*.
10. According to Koehler, L. and Baumgartner B., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 7821 "חֶבֶן: place name; Egyptian *pr-'itm* "the house (temple) of Atum ...".
11. Whiston, W. (trans.), *The Works of Josephus Complete and Unabridged*, chapter 9, p. 97, 1974.
12. BOD, chapter 17, Deir el-Medina tomb painting. In Pinch, G., *Egyptian Mythology*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 107, 2002.
13. Pinch, ref. 12, p. 108.