

# The Eye of the World:

## An interpretation of the *Kore kosmou* on its Egyptian Background

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Even though it is an excerpt and thus a fragment, the *Kore kosmou*<sup>1</sup> is one of the longest of all the Hermetic tractates, and in addition, it is the most explicitly Egyptian of all Hermetic texts. In most other Hermetic tractates, Hermes, Tat and Asclepius, who are slightly euhemerized versions of the Egyptian gods Thoth and Imhotep, act as teacher and pupils in dialogues. In this way they make up a narrative framework of philosophical and religious negotiations, but the narrative is always about successful teaching and spiritual illumination. In the *Kore kosmou*, Isis and Horus are of course also teacher and pupil, and had the tractate been complete, it would no doubt have ended up with the illumination of Horus, but at the same time, both Isis and Horus are *personae* of a mythological narrative which is, at least as far as they and their immediate entourage of Egyptian gods are concerned, very close to classical Egyptian mythology.

It is thus an obvious task to understand the *Kore kosmou* on its Egyptian background. Isis and Horus are no mere pseudoepigraphic framework, but the *Kore kosmou* tells a story about them. From each end of that story, however, two perhaps insoluble questions confront us: who or what was the *kore kosmou*, and how much longer was the story. Stobaeus at least did us the favour of ending his excerpt with the words *proseche, pai* - so that we may be absolutely sure that the story did not end here. On the contrary, since with these words, Isis calls for the intense attention of her son Horus, it is obvious that something important, perhaps the very point of the story, would have followed. Horus has just asked his mother to teach him the hymn that she and Osiris used in order to ascend to the level of the supreme god. The minimum further development of the story, then, would be the text of that hymn, perhaps adapted to the use of Horus. In fact, quite a number of Hermetic texts end up or culminate in hymns.

There may, however, have been still further developments, for there is another question of Horus that remains largely unanswered: At a certain point in Isis' mythological account of the present deplorable condition, the earth, polluted by crimes and dead bodies, implores God for a holy emanation from himself that might somehow make things right. In response to the prayers of not only earth, but all the elements, certain measures are taken by God, but Horus interrupts his mother's narrative and asks: "Mother, how did earth succeed in obtaining an emanation from

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<sup>1</sup> Text in Nock, A.D. & A.-J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum* IV, 1-50, introduction and commentary in III, cxxviii-ccxix

God?”<sup>2</sup> Isis refuses to answer straightforwardly, for this, she says, is about the very origin of Horus himself and thus a secret not to be betrayed to humans. It is intimated that an indirect answer may be implied in what follows, but as far as I see, this important point is not unfolded in the extant text. I know it is methodologically wrong to attach great expectations to texts that no longer exist, but already the extant text informs us that some kind of emanation of the supreme god came into being in this world, and that this was also more or less the coming into being of Horus, the pupil or the model Hermetic adept of the story. And just as a number of Hermetic texts end up in hymns,<sup>3</sup> it is also rather common that Hermetic dialogues end up with the adept discovering the salvific human potential in himself.<sup>4</sup> It is thus at least a qualified assumption that the original story had some further development of this point. And since the story did not end with Isis and Osiris withdrawing to heaven, it must have continued with Horus, perhaps making the point we just mentioned. A few pages more would be sufficient to end the story in this way, but of course, any estimation of the size of the no more existing part of the text will remain a guess.

The other problem is, I believe, the more entertaining one: What could be the meaning of *Kore kosmou* as a title of this story? Most scholars agree with W. Bousset<sup>5</sup> that in one way or another, it must denote Isis, the religious teacher throughout the story, and many, including Bousset himself, are inclined to accept Zielinski’s Weltenjungfrau or Virgin of the World.<sup>6</sup> The most thorough modern discussion of the matter, by Howard Jackson,<sup>7</sup> ends up with ‘the pupil of the eye of the world’, a translation long ago suggested by Reitzenstein. There are many arguments in favour of this, and Jackson makes very good sense of it in relation to the story as a whole. But like Zielinski and Bousset, he takes it as a designation of Isis and thus ends up with Isis impersonating the gnostic reader’s hopes and aspirations – and that is what I seriously doubt.

*Kore* may certainly mean virgin or girl, but the alternative ‘pupil of the eye’ is equally well attested. None of the two meanings are impossible as designations of Isis; they would both somehow imply that she is an attractive young woman of central importance for the world. On the other hand, the sense that can be made of it is not an obvious, immediately convincing one. But does it have to be a designation of Isis? According to the dictionary of W. Pape,<sup>8</sup> *kore* may in fact also be translated simply as ‘eye’. And if the title of the tractate is ‘The Eye of the World’, that certainly makes a salient and obvious sense within the relevant framework of Egyptian mythology. The Eye of the World is of course the Eye of Horus, one of the most central symbols of Egyptian mythology and ritual. In order to become the successor of his father Osiris on the throne of Egypt, Horus had to fight with his father’s brother and killer Seth. During their

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<sup>2</sup> § 64

<sup>3</sup> Podemann Sørensen, J., ‘The Secret Hymn in Hermetic Texts’, *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literatures: Ideas and Practices*, ed. Chr. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied & John Turner. Leiden 2012: 465-486

<sup>4</sup> fx *CHI*, § 31-32, *CH IV*, 8-11, *Asclepius* § 41

<sup>5</sup> Pauly-Wissowa, *Realenzyklopädie*, s.v. ‘Kore Kosmu’

<sup>6</sup> Zielinski, Th., ‘Hermes und die Hermetik.’ *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 8, 1904: 356-368

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, Howard, ‘Isis, Pupil of the Eye of the World,’ *Chronique d’Égypte* 61 (fasc. 121), 1986: 116-135

<sup>8</sup> Pape, Wilh., *Griechisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch I-II*, Braunschweig 1914

contendings, Horus had his eye torn out or somehow damaged by Seth, but once the victory was his, the eye was restored to him. That was the end of mythological battles and the establishment of dynastic rule, and in the temples of all the gods, every ritual act was appointed the restoration of the eye of Horus. This implied that the god of the temple was now, like primeval Horus, complete and restored to all his creative and upholding functions. In classical Egyptian religion, that ritual restoration was a constituent of the human condition, and the eye of Horus was its most widespread and known symbol.<sup>9</sup>

But is W. Pape right in assuming that *kore* may simply be translated ‘eye’? His dictionary is by no means as comprehensive and as well documented as that of Liddell and Scott, but he does give an – admittedly debatable – example of *kore* meaning ‘eye’: a passage from Empedocles, quoted by Aristotle,<sup>10</sup> in which primeval fire is said to have put itself in wait in the *kuklóps kore* – the round eye/pupil. If primeval light is somehow still present in the human eye, would it be in its darkest part? No final certainty is within reach here, but at least the general idea in Empedocles is that the human ability to see is due to the presence of primeval fire within the human eye. But even if Pape is wrong and Liddell & Scott are right, the pupil of the eye might still be that of the eye of Horus. As a matter of fact, in late hieroglyphic writing, the pupil is often substituted for the eye.<sup>11</sup>

More than the ambiguous *kore*, the second word of the title may serve to settle the matter. *Kosmos* could hardly mean anything but the world, and while Isis may be very important for the world, Plutarch straightforwardly identifies Horus as the image of the *aisthêtos kosmos* or *mundus sensibilis*.<sup>12</sup> This is, of course, a platonizing allegorical interpretation, but may be relevant for the understanding of the *Kore kosmou*. Ancient Egyptian texts sometimes construe a sacrifice as both the Eye of Horus and as the entire cosmic order, *maat*.<sup>13</sup>

Such external evidence will, however, not be decisive in itself and, honestly speaking, how important or interesting is it to prove that *kore kosmou* is a designation of the Eye of Horus rather than of Isis? What is interesting and what may be decisive is how to understand our text as a Gnostic text exploiting central motives of Egyptian mythology. For this purpose, we shall now consider the structure of the text.

The teachings of Isis to Horus – in whom we may probably recognize the exemplar Hermetic and gnostic adept – has the form of a mythical narrative, beginning with a cosmogony and concluding in what was to Isis and her exemplar disciple the present situation. The cosmogony is a long trial-and-error-process passing through quite a number of stages, each of

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<sup>9</sup> Already in the Pyramid Texts (from 2323 BCE) the eye of Horus is the standard symbol of the offerings to the deceased king, e.g. Pyr. 31-117. In the Daily Temple Liturgy celebrated in major temples from the New Kingdom into the Roman Period, the eye of Horus occurs some 60 times – cf. Moret, Alexandre, *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte*. Paris 1902, repr. Genève 2007

<sup>10</sup> DK 84. Quoted by Aristotle, *de sens* 2, 437b 23

<sup>11</sup> Cauville, Sylvie, *Dendara. Le fonds hiéroglyphique au temps de Cléopâtre*. Paris 2001: 55

<sup>12</sup> *de Iside et Osiride* 54 (*Moralia* 369 B). Cf. also Merkelbach, Reinhold, *Isis regina – Zeus Sarapis*. München 2001: 263 (§ 474)

<sup>13</sup> In an 18th dynasty theban tomb of a certain Imhotep (TT no. 102) an inscription expresses the ritual merit of the tomb-owner thus: “It is with arms carrying the eye (of Horus), that I have come to you, *maat* fills my hands..” (MS Sethe 8, 18). Cf. also CT III,327 and the Ritual of opening the mouth, scene 75 c.

which I call a primordium. Since a myth is really about the present, it will often assume this form of a trial-and-error-process,<sup>14</sup> so that the present condition may appear as the ultimate and proven solution. Another characteristic feature of longer mythological narratives is that the successive stages or primordia will often exhibit the same basic structure. Gnostic mythology abounds in chains of aeons, each a variation on the theme of the preceding one.

The first primordium of the *Kore kosmou* (§2-8) is almost a prologue presenting the basic theme: Heaven with its cosmic circuits is made the very mechanism that governs and forms the world below. An elaboration of this principle is found in CH III, where an astral circuit governs the biological circuit of nature.<sup>15</sup> In our text, however, it is briefly stated that the world below was seeking the world above, but that this longing gave rise to fear. As in the *Gospel of Truth*,<sup>16</sup> the condition of *agnoia* causes fear. The creator wanted to make himself known and put an end to *agnoia*, and for this purpose he induced love and light in the gods. Hermes was the one who achieved complete knowledge, wrote it down and deposited his books in a secret place<sup>17</sup> close to the secrets of Osiris. The relics of Osiris, of which the most important, his head, was kept in Abydos, were to the ancient Egyptians the crucial link with the mythical past,<sup>18</sup> and in this way, the teachings of Hermes are made both a pre-existing book very much as in certain Jewish ideas about the Tora or in the muslim idea of the heavenly Quran, and at the same time, for the readership to come into existence much later, the souls, a reliquary with a link to the first primordium.

The second primordium (§9-21) departs from the inorganic inertia of the first. Nature is created, and the whole universe is coordinated by God very much as the deistic dream of a clockwork. There is heaven and the world above and obedient nature below; and by filling the upper world with spiritual beings and by mixing holy substances, God introduces movement in the universe. He develops a quite exceptional mixture, a kind of foam called *psychosis*, i.e. a soul-substance, from which many myriads of souls are born.

These myriads of souls, still without bodies, are divided into 60 different ranks and each and every soul is given its own place or opening in the heavenly vault, from which it may contribute to the regular movement of the cylinder and thus please the father. God also tells them all to be obedient and never move away from the places they had been given. From the remains of the mixture, he forms the zodiac, and the very last part of it he leaves with the souls of the upper ranks, encouraging each of them to continue creation by forming something corresponding to his own nature. Then God withdraws – with the promise to infuse the visible works of the souls with invisible spirit and the ability to reproduce themselves. Even if the condition of *agnoia* is not

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. my analysis of the myth of Attis in Podemann Sørensen, J., *Rethinking Religion*. Copenhagen 1989: 23-29.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Podemann Sørensen, J., 'The Egyptian Background of the *hieros logos* (CH III)' in Bilde, Per, H. Kjær Nielsen & J. Podemann Sørensen (eds.), *Apocryphon Severini*. Aarhus University Press 1993: 215-225

<sup>16</sup> NHC I, 17; it is a central idea in the *Gospel of Truth* that fear and *agnoia* give rise to *planê* (error), which in turn materializes into the world we know through the senses.

<sup>17</sup> The idea of sacred texts deposited for a much later readership to discover, cf. e.g. *The Eighth and the Ninth*, NHC VI, 61-63 and *The Three Stelses of Seth*, NHC VII, 118, 10-20

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Podemann Sørensen, J., 'The Argument in Ancient Egyptian Magical Formulae', *Acta Orientalia* 45, 1984: 16

spelled out in the section dealing with the second primordium, the condition of the souls bears some resemblance with social oppression. The souls are divided into multiple ranks and toiling in a treadmill, happy prisoners in the perfect deistic clockwork, perhaps, but never the less prisoners by modern and probably also late antique standards.

In the third primordium (§ 22-49), the souls are not just happy prisoners, they are also supposed to continue creation by means of the remaining *psychosis*-mixture. As they seek to find the nature and composition of it, they begin to fear the wrath of the father and hasten on to do what they had been told: to create. In this way birds, mammals, fish and reptiles are created. The souls fail, however, to comply with the more restrictive commandments of the father: they begin to move away from the positions allotted to them. God does not let this violation of his commandments pass unnoticed; as the most fitting punishment, he decides for that very human organism, a soul in a body, which is only too well known, and Hermes is summoned to create human nature. A lot of heavenly gods are gathered and promise to contribute to the new, revised version of the cosmos, now with anatomically modern humans. Sun and Moon promise to enlighten the world even better than before, Cronus begets Justice and Necessity, Zeus provides humanity with hope and peace, and while Ares contributes with Strife, Aphrodite eases the human lot with Love, Lust and Laughter.

Hermes, from whom Isis has her knowledge of this anthropogony, is in charge of the creation of man. He decides to provide humans with wisdom, self-control, conviction and truth, and by means of the very last remnants of the wonderful animating mixture and considerable amounts of water he manages to create those weak, but beautiful human bodies, that have since been the abodes of the souls. While all the gods seem quite happy with this revised order of things, the souls are certainly not. Isis has heard of their great pain and their intense lamentations when having to enter bodies, this time no longer directly from Hermes, but through *Kamephis*, who is called *propatôr* and *progenesteros*, “when he honoured me with the ultimate darkness.”<sup>19</sup> He has learnt it from Hermes as secret teachings, now Horus learns it from his mother Isis.

We shall return to the enigmatic darkness of *Kamephis*, but what further happens in the third primordium is that the souls bitterly lament their lot as prisoners in bodies, now torn away from the gods and the whole heavenly life, where they used to breathe with the winds, and, on the whole, to be integrated in an immense and exalted world. Now they will be confined to the narrowness of the human heart. One remarkable detail in their lamentations is that the eyes they will get, or ‘the wet round thing in them’, will see the heavenly world whence they came only as quite small and sometimes not at all (§ 36). In this their great distress, they pray to their ruler and father and creator for some limit to or alleviation of their punishment, and from his throne of truth he announces a new moral order of existence, in which a good life will regain the heavenly life, while bad conduct may cause hapless wanderings of a soul from one animal to another. There will even be a sort of karmic logic in the way souls enter bodies, but this will not now be our concern.

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<sup>19</sup> § 32. Zielinski took the *teleion mela* as an alchemical term, on which he based his idea of the *Wellenjungfrau*. Cf., however, note 25 below.

Hermes begins to unite souls with human bodies as the plan was, but at this time an impressive spirit in human form appears: *Momos*, one of the children of Night in Hesiod<sup>20</sup> and a kind of Sarcasm or Disapproval personified. Throughout Greek literature, the figure of *Momos* occurs from time to time with reproach and objections that sometimes even make gods change their plans. In the *Kore kosmou* *Momos* describes very vividly for Hermes how dangerous men will be if they are carefree, and suggests that they should be beaten with treacherous desire, fear, pain and bewilderment so that their creative curiosity is never unfolded. Hermes had, however, already foreseen problems of this kind and assures *Momos* that he will provide “a secret tool (*krypton organon*), consisting in unwavering and perpetual contemplation (*theôria*), to which everything on earth, from the creation till the final destruction, will necessarily be subjected, since it implies the assemblage of what is completed”<sup>21</sup> The exact meaning of these sentences is debatable, but I take it that the *krypton organon* is the human potential for *gnosis*, and that *theôria* is not just a set of doctrines or a vision of the world as it should be, but that spiritual breakthrough, often called *gnosis*, in which reality is experienced in its solid totality, in a manner transcending all divisions and distinctions. Better than any catechism or innate anxiety, this capacity for *gnosis* will direct the lives of men.

Everything seems now ready for the fourth primordium (§ 50-63). The One Lord once again summons the assembly of gods and encourages them to create, i.e. to unfold their intelligent design in visible form so that it may be known. Apparently, whatever world there was until now was only a latent one. Since the first primordium, the creator wanted to make himself known and thus put an end to the fear caused by *agnoia*, but till now only Hermes and the books he had deposited in a secret place near the relics of Osiris had become bearers of that knowledge. But now that souls have been put into bodies, the time has come to make a *mundus sensibilis*, a world accessible to the round, wet thing called an eye. The creator himself takes the first step and causes a division in the darkness; the world appears with heaven above and earth below, both wonderfully designed. Holding in his hands all nature, he asks the holy earth to take it and become the mother of everything.

But in this beautiful world, ignorance is everywhere. The recently encapsulated souls have not accepted their condition, and rebellion, violence and mutual killing make the world intolerable. It soon reaches a point, where the elements in turn raise complaints that they have been polluted by the lawless and godless conduct of men. Fire recommends divine laws and a system of punishments and rewards; the Air complains that it has become unhealthy from the noxious stench of dead bodies, and Water deplors that so much of it is used in rites of atoning bloodguilt while rivers are used as an outlet of murdered bodies. The Earth, in turn, advances the most significant complaint: while acknowledging the grandiose plan for the fourth primordium, which had equipped it with a capacity to accommodate and contain all nature, it now finds itself

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<sup>20</sup> *Theogony* 214. Cf., in general, Roscher, W.H., *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*. Leipzig 1894-97: II, 2, 3117-3119

<sup>21</sup> § 48: Festugière translates *theôria* as ‘doctrine’ and probably understands the *krypton organon* as some kind of innate catechism or rule of conduct.

trenched in the outflow of dead bodies and disgraced by crime and evil. And while it contains all nature, including evil, it does not contain God. Earth admits that it would hardly have the capacity to contain God, but prays for an emanation from him, i.e. for some degree of divine presence in the world.

The problem as stated by Earth is, I believe, the turning point of this Hermetic tractate. It is the problem of monotheism as Hermetists may have known it from Judaism or the problem of the transcendent summodeism they themselves practised. We might even say that, in the whole Mediterranean region, it is the religious problem of the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era. A transcendent creator leaves a godforsaken world; it may be most blessed and intelligently designed, but it no longer contains God and possesses nothing divine. One of the most well known solutions of this problem is, of course, the Christian idea of the incarnation. Later Judaism and Islam have other ways of handling this problem, but the Hermetic tractates are in fact important as source material for the study of first or second century responses to this problem. In traditional polytheism, and certainly in ancient Egyptian religion, the relation between creator and created world was much more of a continuum. The Egyptian creator god does not create a world different from himself; rather creation means that the god stretches himself into what is now called the world. In the regular temple service, this pantheist genesis is ritually performed every morning, in some major temples perhaps three times a day. The ritual acts are sacramentally construed as returning the eye of Horus to its owner. In this way the god is restored to his functions and may come into renewed existence in stretching himself into the world. The restoration of the eye to Horus also denoted the completion of the creation and the establishment of legitimate rule in Egypt after crisis and struggle.

In fact, it is this myth of dynastic legitimacy that our text mobilizes to remedy the problem of transcendent summodeism. The myth of Osiris, Isis and Horus was always a myth of the presence of the divine in the world of men, but certainly centered on kingship as the fundamental institution of Egyptian society. It is well preserved in a late antique edition in Plutarch's *de Iside et Osiride* as well as in ancient Egyptian sources.<sup>22</sup> The following details are all part of classical, traditional Egyptian versions: Osiris and Seth and their sisters Isis and Nephthys are the children of the male god of the earth, Geb and the sky-goddess Nut. Osiris succeeds his father Geb on the throne, and he and Isis reign and govern in justice and prosperity. Seth, however, wants to be king himself and manages to kill Osiris, cuts his dead body into many parts and spreads them all over Egypt. The mytho-logic of this strange feature is that in this way, the entire country comes to participate in the god. Horus is not yet born, not even conceived, but Isis assembles the parts of her dead husband, and with the help of Nephthys, she manages to revive the dead king at least to such a degree that he may beget an heir. Apart from this episode, Osiris remains dead, but Horus grows up to claim his heritage. This leads to his contentings with Seth, a favoured fund of mythological motifs for use in ritual. There was a ritual drama enacting the killing of Seth (in the

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<sup>22</sup> Good survey of evidence in J. Gwyn Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris*. Berlin 1966 and id., *The Conflict of Horus and Seth*. Liverpool 1960. Translation of important texts in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II*, Berkeley 1976, pp. 81-86 (The great hymn to Osiris) and 214-223 (Horus and Seth).

shape of a hippopotamus) by Horus, and in the late period, practically all animal sacrifices were sacramentally construed as Horus killing Seth.<sup>23</sup> We have already mentioned how the eye of Horus, which Seth injured during their fights, but which Thoth (or, in Greek, Hermes) restored to him after the victory over Seth, became the standard symbol or sacramental construction of incense, offerings, unguents, clothes or any other matter of ritual service offered to a god.

When Horus is finally victorious over Seth and accedes to the throne as king of upper and lower Egypt, myth has come to an end and a kind of historical or genealogical time has begun. Every reigning king who ascends the throne of Geb is 'the living Horus.' Everybody would know that he was human, but in his office and through his dynastic legitimacy, he is never the less ritually a divine presence in the world of men, and his ritual divinity is perpetually renewed in acts of exchange with the gods in the temples.

There was even, at least since the New Kingdom, a ritual perpetuation of the wonderful conception, embryology and birth of the royal/divine child in certain temple rooms and later in buildings called *mammisi* or birth-houses. In the temple of queen Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari, there is a famous series of reliefs and texts describing how the chief god Amun decides to beget an heir to the throne of Egypt, comes to the queen in the shape of her husband, the reigning king, has intercourse with her and tells her about the name of the child and the authority and fame it will later obtain. Then he makes arrangements with the god Khnum, who will form the child on his potter's wheel and with the goddess Heqet, who will take care of the birth. The birth of the child, attended by gods and goddesses, is also represented in reliefs and in texts.<sup>24</sup> It is above all with a view to this function as the begetter of the heir apparent, that Amun is called *Kamutef*, 'his mother's bull', the *Kamephis* of our Hermetic text. The idea behind this rather strange epithet is that of divinity reproducing itself in the dynastic line.<sup>25</sup>

The *mammisi* of the late period and the Greco-Roman period, are independent buildings close to the great temples, in fact small temples themselves. This must reflect an increased interest in the theme; the reliefs and texts on the walls, however, are no longer about royal heirs, but about the birth of the child of the local triad. Thus in Dendera, the music-god Ihy, the son of Hathor, the goddess of the great temple, was the god of the *mammisi*, and in Philae, where the great temple of Isis became the last bastion of ancient Egyptian religion, the child-god of the *mammisi* was of course Horus.<sup>26</sup> One reason for this might be that dynastic continuity was losing plausibility, but it must have implied also a more abstract and universalized

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<sup>23</sup> Junker, Herrmann, 'Die Schlacht- und Brandopfer und ihre Symbolik im Tempelkult der Spätzeit,' *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 48, 1911: 69-77

<sup>24</sup> Texts in Urk. IV, 216-234

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jacobsohn, Helmuth, *Die dogmatische Stellung des Königs in der Theologie der alten Ägypter*. (Ägyptologische Forschungen 8) Glückstadt 1939. The pattern discovered by Jacobsohn is not necessarily attached to Amun; Kamutef is a primeval god reproducing himself in the dynastic line. In our text, the *Kamephis* who honoured Isis in the darkness will probably have been Osiris, who is in fact said by Plutarch to have consorted with Isis 'in the darkness of the womb before being born' (*de Iside* 12, *Moralia* 356 A).

<sup>26</sup> On the *mammisi* and their religious significance, cf. Daumas, François, *Les mammisis des temples égyptiens*. Paris 1958. There is an excellent article in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* s.v. 'Geburtshaus' (1977), also by Fr. Daumas.



understanding of the theme. And Horus-the-child, or *Harpocrates*, as the Greeks got it, remained popular when the temples declined and ancient Egyptian religion was miniaturized.<sup>27</sup>

In the *Kore Kosmou*, the fourth primordium offers a not very explicit solution to the problem stated by the elements. The desperate way in which they had outlined the acuteness of their distress in a godforsaken world reminds us, that behind the discovery of theological problems there was, for Egyptian intellectuals in Roman Egypt, a real world with its atrocities. But it also raises expectations as to the solution that are not readily satisfied. What God does as a response to the complaints of the elements, is to assure them that there is already among them ‘another emanation’ (*hetera aporroia*) of his nature, which will keep an eye on everything that happens and be a stern judge of any misconduct. This makes Horus ask his mother, in which way the earth was fortunate enough to receive an emanation from God – a question that must have been also the most vital question, a contemporary reader with Egyptian roots could have asked when confronted with this analysis of his situation in the form of a mythical trial-and-error-process.

The question of Horus also puts an end to mythical narrative. There have been questions before, to keep alive the framework of a dialogue between a teacher, Isis, and a pupil, Horus, while at the same time continuing the narrative. But this particular question turns the narrative off. Isis refuses to relate the details (concerning the conception of Horus) that would make up an explicit answer to the question. She betrays only that the lord and creator of all granted that she and Osiris became helpers of the world when it was in need of everything. Then she turns off from narrative and begins an aretalogy. In themes and phraseology it is very similar to the Isis-aretaology we know from a number of other sources. In stead of the repeated *egô eimi*, the aretalogy of Isis and Osiris introduces its statements with *houtoi*, ‘these’, namely Isis and Osiris. Like Isis in her aretalogies, they are the founders of human life, civilization, law, religion, society and all kinds of art and knowledge. This aretalogy obviously is a kind of culmination of the preceding narrative, and for Stobaeus it was probably the point with which he could end the excerpt: after many hardships the world had become civilized with law, order, philosophy and all the arts. He only gives a few lines more, in which Isis relates that after civilizing the world, she and Osiris withdrew to the heavenly regions. They performed their *anabasis* in a hymn to the one lord, filling the space with their contemplation (*theoria*). To readers of other Hermetic texts like CH V and XIII or NHC VI, 52-63, this contemplative hymn, which Horus wants to learn, will seem closer to a proper Hermetic concluding point, but Stobaeus may have contented himself with the civilizing achievements of Isis and Osiris.

A reader versed in Egyptian mythology would know that the story goes on and that Horus is the traditional exemplar of divine presence in the world. And throughout the text, he addresses Isis as *tekousa*, ‘giver of birth’. In fact, Isis was reluctant to deal with the emanation of God which earth received because it involved the very conception of Horus. We shall probably never know how much of this secret was betrayed in the missing part of the text, but the deduction seems

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Frankfurter, David, *Religion in Roman Egypt*. Princeton 1998: 132-134.

inevitable that Horus himself, the exemplar adept or pupil, would turn out to be that emanation from God, about which he had asked earlier. Even if this was not written in the text, it would be so understood by any reader who would care to read a story about Isis and Horus. And it would be possible to take the story further – through the crisis with Seth to the restoration of the eye to Horus, perhaps, very much along the lines of Jacksons interpretation, as a remedy of the problems stated by the souls before they entered bodies: that the wet round thing called an eye did not have the capacity to see the world properly (§ 36). Equipped with this new precious eye, Horus would then learn the contemplative hymn and return to God.

In this way, even without the latter developments concerning the eye of Horus, we will have made some progress. For what Bousset saw as “diese wirre Kompilation”, we now see as a perfectly logical trial-and-error-myth which ends up in making a point that is certainly a gnostic and Hermetic one: Listen, child! *You* are that emanation of God ... It does so in a very traditional way: by retelling – to a reader sacramentally construed as Horus – the very myth that had for some 2000 years accounted for the presence of the divine in this world.