

English Translation of an Egyptian Creation Story Recorded at the Temple of Horus in Edfu, Egypt

Manu Seyfzadeh

Lake Forest, CA, USA

Email: Manu@cheopspyramid.com

How to cite this paper: Seyfzadeh, M. (2024). English Translation of an Egyptian Creation Story Recorded at the Temple of Horus in Edfu, Egypt. *Archaeological Discovery*, 12, 93-114.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ad.2024.122006>

Received: February 12, 2024

Accepted: April 9, 2024

Published: April 12, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Only fragments of the hieroglyphic texts engraved into the walls of the Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt have been translated into English. Initially, translations were based on transcriptions by Maxence de Rochemonteix, Émile Gaston Chassinat, Sylvie Cauville, and Didier Devauchelle. In 1986, the German Edfu Project, led by Dieter Kurth, revisited earlier work, and has since published updated transcriptions, transliterations, and translations of most Edfu texts in German. Here, I have translated into English from the Edfu Project's German a passage written near the northwest corner of the interior face of the temple's enclosure wall. It recounts the creation of the world according to the Memphite cosmogony. My translation aims to reflect both the essence of the Edfu Project's German interpretation of the text and the original hieroglyphic composition, thus preserving originalist content in an attempt not to introduce unwanted English adaptations of German language nuances into the content. The passage explores metaphysical and religious themes some of which trace back to the Pyramid Texts, offering insight into early ancient Egyptian beliefs. Thus, this translation may provide a valuable resource for researchers unfamiliar with German, or Ptolemaic hieroglyphic.

Keywords

Edfu Temple, Creation Story, Memphite Cosmogony, Hieroglyphic, Ptolemaic

1. Introduction

The Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt. Nearly oriented to the cardinal directions on the west bank of the River Nile is Egypt's most well-preserved temple containing the most voluminous compendium of hieroglyphic texts written in

the Ptolemaic phase of the language (**Figure 1 & Figure 2**). They feature some two thousand different sound-, word-, idea-, and context-symbols. Construction



Figure 1. The Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt. View of the northwest corner of the Enclosure wall with the Pylon gate in the background. The wall's dimensions are 137×47 meters, not including the pylon. The Egyptian creation story presented here is inscribed on the inner face of the western end of the north wall shown here shaded from the exterior. Photo courtesy of Dieter Kurth and the German Edfu Project.



Figure 2. View from the pylon gate northwards towards the pronaos in the foreground with the naos behind, both narrowly surrounded by the enclosure wall. Photo courtesy of Dieter Kurth and the German Edfu Project.

of the Edfu-Temple began on August 23, in the year 237 Before the Common Era (BCE) during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes and only ended 180 years later, on December 5, 57 BCE during the joint rule of the two queens Cleopatra VI and Bernice IV (Effland et al., 2009: pp. 7-8).

In modern times, the temple was excavated by Egypt's first director of Antiquities, the Frenchman Auguste Mariette (1821-1881), epigraphically surveyed over four decades time by French archeologist Émile Chassinat (1868-1948) who continued a project begun by Maxence de Chalvet marquis de Rochemonteix (1849-1891). Most recently, the temple has been resurveyed and translated by the German Edfu Project under the direction of Dieter Kurth (1986 until present), funded by the German Research Foundation (D. F. G.; 1986-2001), the Göttingen Academy of Sciences (German Edfu Project, 2002-2017), and by Dieter Kurth himself (2018-present). Chassinat published his epigraphic survey in fourteen volumes (IFAO, 1985, 1987, 2008). Reference is made to one of these in this translation (Chassinat, 1931), with page and line numbers written by convention as, for example, 181,9, i.e. page 181, line 9. They appear as superscripts wherever a new line begins in Chassinat's transcription, so that readers can cross-reference this translation with the original hieroglyphic text, albeit before edits to it made by the Edfu Project. I therefore kept in place the same convention as that observed by the Edfu Project.

The most up-to-date translation into German by the Edfu Project has three major advantages: It is based on a more accurate survey of the hieroglyphic symbols carved into the temple's sandstone walls, it benefits from a much vaster repertoire of more easily accessible lexical cross-references generated from its computerized vocabulary database, and it incorporates the most recent advances in grammatical insights into this phase of the language, Ptolemaic hieroglyphic. Nevertheless, most non-German speaking Egyptologists, and virtually all Egyptophiles have not been able to appreciate these updates and insights as to the import of the texts, especially the creation story and cosmogony it develops.

Ptolemaic Hieroglyphic. The English translation I present in this paper is based on the Edfu Project's German translation of Ptolemaic hieroglyphic writing developed by temple scribes to reinterpret older originals written in cursive Middle Egyptian, i.e. hieratic. The Koine-Greek speaking Ptolemies (reigned from 305-30 BCE) were the Macedonian beneficiaries of Alexander the Great's liberation of Egypt from the Persians under Darius III in 332 BCE, but the Egyptian people they ruled spoke and wrote a form of Late Egyptian called Demotic. Demotic was the fourth phase of the ancient Egyptian language after Old, Middle, and Late hieroglyphic Egyptian. The fifth and final phase was Coptic, an extended Greek alphabetical rendition of Demotic.

A set of circa 700 hieroglyph symbols used in the Middle Kingdom some 4000 years ago (circa 2000 BCE) expanded to a repertoire of circa three times that figure used in Ptolemaic hieroglyphic (Kurth, 2009: p. 3, note 1). Hieroglyphic symbols largely encode mono-, bi-, and tri-consonantal sounds that line up to spell

words without vowels, and without punctuation read in columns or rows. Some symbols encode entire words, and some serve to define a context to help distinguish words spelled either similarly, or identically (Allen, 2014: pp. 15-37).

The large expansion of symbols as time went by accompanied the need to express greater semantic complexities than those required merely to spell out words. This is the chief reason why an examination of the original texts has value to get a glimpse of the visual enhancements made, at times, to the meaning conveyed by the mere sounds encoded by the hieroglyphic symbols that spell out the words. The essential features of this unique and complex version of the ancient Egyptian language called Ptolemaic hieroglyphic are as follows:

- The linguistic basis of the hieroglyphic texts at Edfu is Middle Egyptian (Kurth, 2009: p. 6), which ceased to be a spoken language at the end of the 18th Dynasty (circa 14th century BCE), more than one thousand years before the Ptolemaic Dynasty. By the time of the Ptolemies, Middle Egyptian had long been replaced by Late Egyptian and Demotic.
- Traditional Egyptian was a technique used by Late Egyptian scribes to artificially age texts by using older grammar (James P. Allen, personal communication). The difference between Traditional and true Old and Middle Egyptian texts are the occasional slip-ups out of the older grammar in the former, and the pervasiveness of the older grammar in the latter (Dieter Kurth, personal communication).
- The Edfu texts are stylistically and grammatically redacted, i.e. enhanced, versions of older originals written in Middle Egyptian (Kurth, 2009: p. 7), which themselves may have yet older origins because some themes can be recognized in the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts. One reason for resurrecting them in stone at Edfu may have been to preserve the content for posterity from a language that was no longer spoken during the Ptolemaic era in Egypt. While the texts thus appear modified from older originals, the text enhancements were made, remarkably, according to the same general rules of writing innovation put into practice almost from inception of hieroglyphic more than five thousand years ago (Kurth, 2009: p. 14).
- Ptolemaic hieroglyphic was used in temples across all of Egypt. Some innovative features of the language were shared among them all, some were unique to the region.
- The repertoire of symbols began to expand significantly during and after the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (Kurth, 2009: p. 17).
- The motivation to expand the symbol set was driven by the desire visually to enhance the written words to express more complex ideas and associations attached to these words (Kurth, 2009: pp. 22-25), and by the trends to mark the position of vowels not previously apparent in hieroglyphic writing, to substitute, add, or eliminate symbols with similar sounds (Kurth, 2009: pp. 456-486), and to spell out individual consonants as opposed to biliteral or triliteral symbols (Kurth, 2009: p. 5).

- A clear demarcation exists between the Ptolemaic and Roman periods of the five-century-long Greco-Roman phase of the hieroglyphic language (Kurth, 2009: p. 4). This linguistic demarcation can be seen in different parts of the same temples built at different times.
- The topography of the texts as they were laid out on the walls of the temple matters in terms of text content and hieroglyphic style used to deliver it (Kurth, 2009: p. 7). Related content may be in different parts of the temple (Kurth, 2009: pp. 7-8), but the relationship of these parts to each other is non-random.
- Texts and illustrations complement each other to generate the larger context and story lines (Kurth, 2009: p. 7).

2. Topography and Structure

Carved into sandstone in sunken relief, the main body of text on which I focus is located on the third, uppermost register of the inner face of the enclosure wall built around the Edfu Temple (Figure 3). From the entrance through the pylon portal and into the peristyle court, one then keeps to the left (west) entering a narrow alley between the temple proper (pronaos and naos) and the enclosure wall towards the northwestern corner to view it high above the ground on its northern side (Figure 4). The text is written into forty-three columns, one row, and one edge column that mark the western terminus of the north wall as it abuts against the west wall. A relief of the Moon-god Thoth, facing, and pointing his right arm towards east, flanks the forty-third column. The hand and forearm demarcate the end of the creation story in the lower half of Column 42. Except for the preface (see story themes below), the text is contiguously read from east/right to west/left against the general direction of the symbols' faces.

To the east of the text columns is a captioned, panoramic relief that illustrates the main theme of the creation story with its main actors, the divine natures, and spirits of the Egyptian pantheon (Figure 5). The only human being in the relief is Ptolemy X Alexander who faces the story actors to the east, and whose back is immediately next to the first column of the story text to the west. Thus, Thoth presents a text to Horus that is illustrated with images presented to Horus by Ptolemy X Alexander. To the east of the panoramic relief is a passage of text that deals with the coronation ceremony of Alexander to become Ptolemy X. This passage is not part of this paper.

I have divided the creation story into six segments (Figure 6) to clarify the thematic structure, whose import is otherwise complicated by the sequential mention of many names, epithets, and divine beings. This structure is based on my own reading of the text and is not formally recognized as such by the German Edfu Project. Another thematic structure of this passage in sixteen sections has been proposed by Reymond incorporating it into, what she calls, the First Cosmogonical Record, part, in turn, of what she reconstructs as the *Sacred Book of the Early Primaeval Age of Gods* (Reymond, 1969: pp. 12-28).

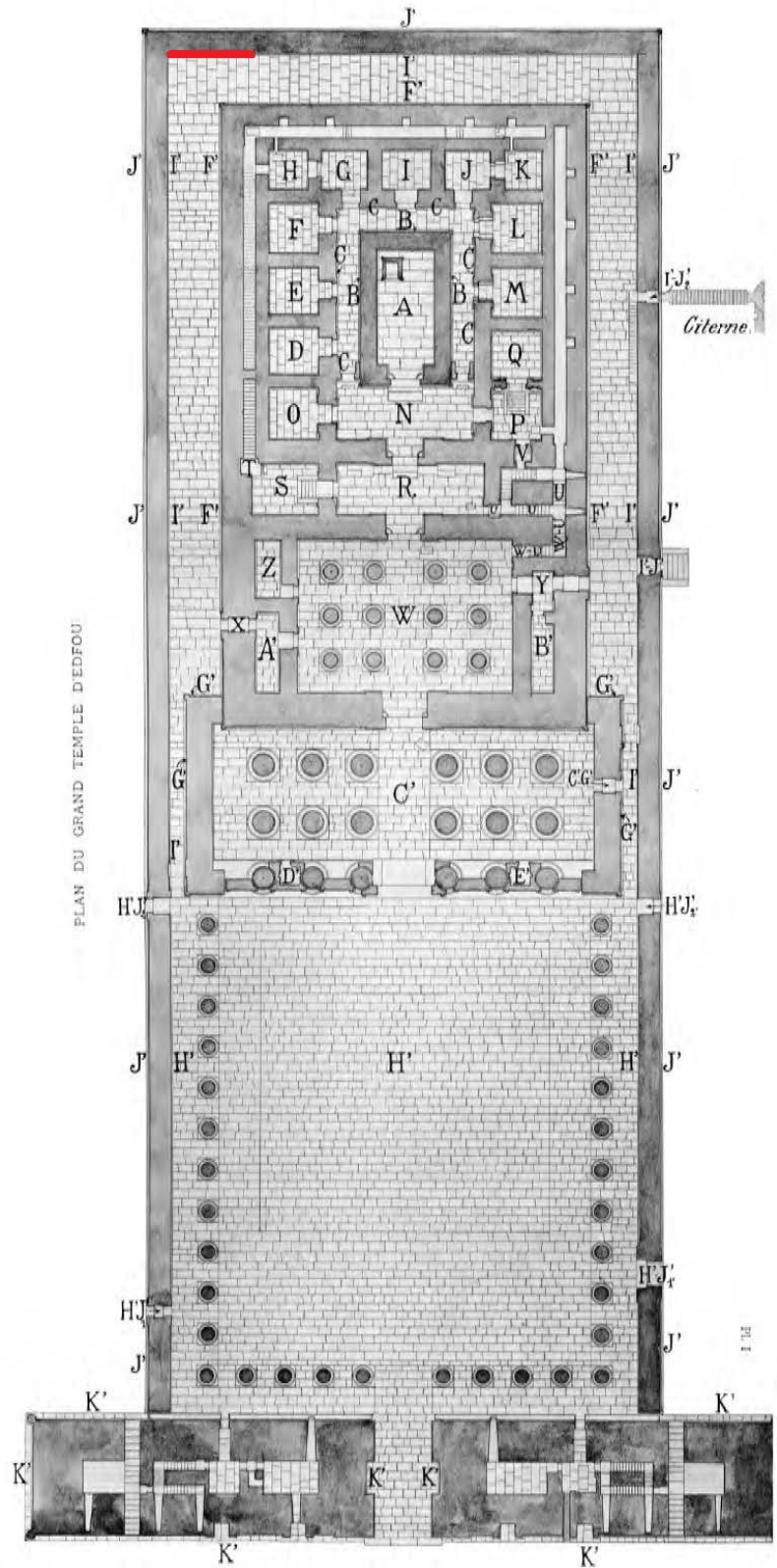


Figure 3. Schematic overview of the Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt. The location of the creation story at the northwest corner of the enclosure wall is marked in red. Modified from Table I, *Le temple d'Edfou 9* (first Edition 1929, second Edition 2009) by Émile Chassinat. © Institut français d'archéologie orientale.



Figure 4. Interior face of the north side of the enclosure wall of the Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt. Shown here is the western half. The creation story is inscribed on the uppermost, third register. © agsaz/Alamy Stock Photo.

The story follows an introductory homage to Horus of the First Time *zp tpj* [zep tepi] by Ptolemy X Alexander (Column 1, **Figure 6**). The story themes are labeled with Roman numerals I - VI, column numbers in parentheses:

I (42 - 43 upper halves above the right arm of Thoth, horizontal line, extreme edge column, originally labelled “divine edge column”): Thoth is introduced. He delivers the preface of the story addressing Horus.

II (2, upper half): The story title.

III (2, lower half, 3 - 15, upper two-third): An account of the creation of the KA-realm.

IV (15, lower third, 16 - 30, upper half): A threat to the KA-realm presents and Ptah-Tatenen comes to the rescue.

V (30, lower half 31 - 35): Embarkment for the settlement site of creation and preparation to create a material representation of the KA-realm.

VI (36 - 42, lower half below the right arm of Thoth): The creation of physical Earth and Edfu.

Thus, the story text begins in the western-most segment, jumps across to its eastern-most segment, and then reads continuously back towards the western end from east/right to west/left.

3. Translation

The German Edfu Project has published an improved epigraphic survey of the inscriptions correcting errors of the previous survey conducted by Émile Chassinat and has identified previously unreadable symbols allowing for a more accurate translation. While these improvements are marked in Kurth et al.’s transliteration

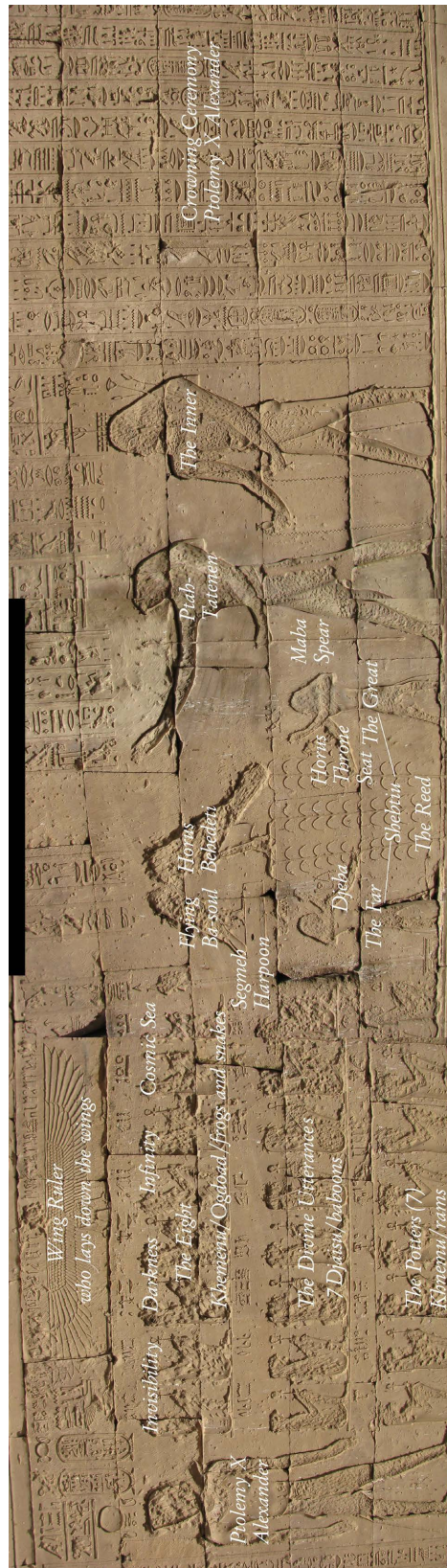


Figure 5. Relief of the major divinities mentioned in the creation story. Photo composite from images of the west side of the inner face of the enclosure wall of the Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt. Courtesy of Dieter Kurth and the German Edfu Project; modified.

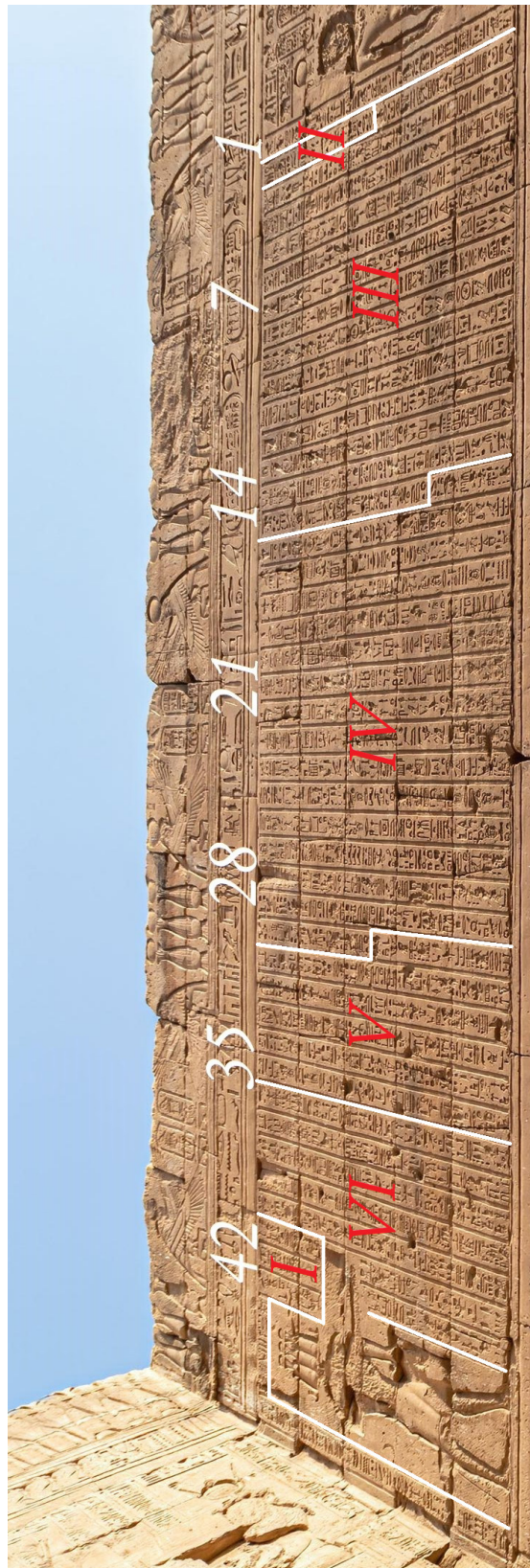


Figure 6. The thematic structure of the creation story. The Arabic numerals in white indicate column numbers. I: Preface. II: Title. III: KA-land. IV: Threat-Savior. V: Sea migration. VI: Earth. © agsaz/Alamy Stock Photo; modified.

and translation of the hieroglyphic original, I do not again highlight them here. To capture as much as possible the benefit of the German translators' extensive lexical and contextual cross-referencing not available to prior translators, I have largely adhered to their rendition of the text. However, to enhance the first pass reading experience, I have not inserted the added, parenthetical comments meant to explain or clarify the German translation by Kurth et al. I have not included this commentary to allow readers a freer associative experience based on only the direct import of what is written in hieroglyphic, and absent modern interpretation based on indirect information not conveyed by the original.

I have not inserted my own reading of the original hieroglyphs, unless a literal translation from German into English would distort the import of the German rendition, or would make no sense, or a more literal translation is possible. In those few cases, I have translated the original hieroglyphic text into the best English rendition while heeding Kurth et al.'s transliteration, and their editorial comments both within the text and below in their footnotes.

For example, the German words "Zeitpunkt" and "Augenblick" literally translate into English "point in time", and the poetic phrase "blink of an eye", respectively. In translating them into English, we consider the linked concept "moment". This word is used several times in the passage at hand. In the first instance of its use, in Column 2, the hieroglyphic original uses the Eye-of-Horus symbol (Gardiner, 1927: p. 443) to spell the word *'nt*, translated by Kurth et al. as "Zeitpunkt". In Column 3, *'nt* is spelled out. In all the other instances afterwards, the original features the head of a hippo or a predator mammal, like a wolf encoding the sound *ʒt*, translated with German "Augenblick". English "moment" in all instances would not convey this distinction made by the composers of the hieroglyphic original, nor the German rendition. Thus, to capture the visuals of the Eye-of-Horus symbol highlighting the first instance of "moment" in the passage at hand, I have used the literal, poetic instead of the common English version rendering German "Augenblick", instead of "Zeitpunkt" since it nicely incorporates the German word for English "eye", i.e. "Auge".

In some instances, an original hieroglyphic word appears in transliterated form, followed by an approximate pronunciation in square brackets incorporating vowels. There are many descriptive names in the text like epithets and toponyms that give rise to KA-names during creation. Unlike proper names, these are marked in italics first, then capitalized once they become KA-names.

In Émile Chassinat's epigraphic survey, the text is reproduced in rows instead of the original columns in which it is recorded at Edfu. Chassinat's rows are read from left to right with the symbols facing left. To aid with cross-referencing, I, like Kurth et al., indicate Chassinat's page and row numbers as pre-posed superscripts. Text carry-overs from one column to the next are marked with arrows.

All punctuation marks, of course, are modern interpretations of syntactic structure the ancient Egyptian did not use. Readers are reminded that punctuation can only function as a modern aid to interpret how ancient sentences were meant to be contained and sub-structured. The punctuation used here helps with the un-

derstanding of the text. In that sense, it may indeed reflect the true structure of the intended syntax, but its justification rests solely on that pragmatic result and nothing more.

Ptolemy X Alexander's Homage to Horus (**Figure 7**)

Column 1: ^{181,9}I have come before you, great falcon, motley-plumed, Horus Behedetite, great god, sky lord. I bring to you my heart given its place. ^{181,10}I have inhaled life according to your path¹. You are the godliest god who came to be in the First Time. Gods kiss Earth before his majesty's fame.

Part I: Preface (**Figure 8 & Figure 9**)

Column 42 (upper half above the right arm of Thoth): ^{180,15}Words to be spoken by Thoth, twice great, Lord of Hermopolis, pleasant of tongue →

Column 43 → splendid of speech, gorgeous Ibis, sent for by the →

Row (above Thoth) → ^{181,1}*great ones*, who utters the orders of the one created before him.

Divine Edge Column Northwest Register 3 behind Thoth (Thoth speaking as king): “^{181,2}I have come to you, my father Behedetite, I, ^{181,3}your image that came forth from within you, to bring you this written copy of your province's glorification from the time of Tatenen until today; for you are the great god who came to be at the First Time, ^{181,4}with whose name this temple is inscribed.

Part II: Title (**Figure 7**)

Column 2: Facsimile of a text that Thoth has made according to the ^{181,11}sayings of the great Mehit's Djaisu. It is called Account of the Places of the first primeval Ones².



Figure 7. Composite photo showing the first 18 columns of the creation story. Based on images courtesy of the Dieter Kurth and German Edfu Project.

¹Kurth translates *r h f d l t h r k* as “auf deinem Prozessionsweg”; English, “your path of procession”.

²Kurth translates *n t p t t p l t* as “der ersten Urzeit;” English, “of the first primeval time”.



Figure 8. Text Columns 12 - 43 of the creation story. Photo courtesy of Charles Lancelotta.

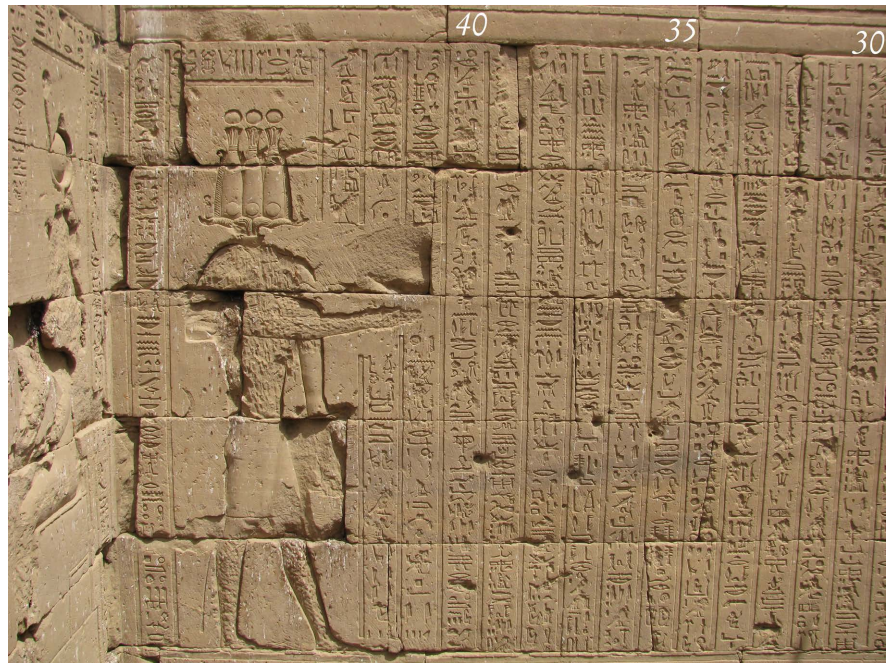


Figure 9. Westernmost extent of the creation story including the Divine Edge Column. Image courtesy of Dieter Kurth and the German Edfu Project; modified.

Part III: KA-Land (Figure 7)

As to trampling³ by the two *wide makers*⁴, in a blink of an eye⁵, falling.^{181,12} Water District is the KA-name of *flood, trample island, and battle island*.

Column 3: The border contestants⁶ are seen to come over, *divine heart* unites in peace, *peaceful island*. Beginning of the ^{181,13}Shebtu, Far is KA-name of the one, Great of the other. Moment of high tide.⁷ Flood Persists Around is KA-name with-in *persistent flood*. Come to be Trample Island, →

Column 4 → Battle Island, Peace Island, and ^{181,14}Persistent Flood in the name of Water District. Moment⁸ of imagining⁹ *nbjt* [ne-beet]¹⁰ reed by *above the flood*¹¹ as perception,¹² *stern stare* is on it, *wing*^{181,15} brushes against it. As to¹³ imagining nebit reed, →

³*tj tj* “trample, tread”, reminds of *tjh tjh* “disturbance”, from the Pyramid Texts (Unas, AC south, Column 43, “the gods of disturbance”).

⁴Kurth interprets these two as opposing forces that want to expand their sphere.

⁵The word is “moment”, but uniquely written in this one instance using the Eye of Horus Sign.

⁶The *wide makers*, in other words.

⁷“Moment” is spelled out as *nt*, corroborating the earlier reading of the same word spelled with the Eye of Horus Sign. Kurth reads *h'jt* as “Höchststandes”; English, “peak”, referring to flood or tide.

⁸Spelled here as *t* in contrast to the earlier *nt*.

⁹Kurth explains the meaning of *h'f* as creatively visualizing and thus bringing into existence.

¹⁰Henceforth, nebit.

¹¹Epithet of the creator.

¹²Kurth interprets the word *sj3*, literally “perception”, as “Schöpfungsgedanke”; English, “creative thought”. In the Memphite cosmogony, creation involves perception, imagining, and utterance. The Shebtu personify these divine facilities. Far is the distant thought, Great is the image of it when attention focuses on it. Uttering this imagination by naming it with Djaisu-creator words causes the KA-forces to exist that dwell inside of living and inanimate things. Material existence requires the shaping of physical creation matter around these KA's by the Khnum gods.

¹³Kurth translates *fr* as “Wenn”; English, “when”.

Column 5 → Far is called. As to growing at the site, Great strides over.^{181,16} One side is Water District land, one side is Water District water. When the two perfected ones arrive, nebit makes the border of the half presented to them who fasten *ḏbʿ* [dje-buh]¹⁴ reed and nebit reed amid the flood.

Column 6^{182,1} What Circling One's Wing Imagines is KA-name of nebit reed amid Djeba's flood waters. Guard making by the two.^{182,2} KA-Divinity reaches nebit reed. Driving out the hunger of this one, →

Column 7 → the falcon above. Fastened is nebit reed carrying the falcon. Djeba-Reed and Nebit-Reed are KA-names of^{182,3} Djeba within the throne seat of Horus. Djeba comes to be, and Throne Seat of Horus comes to be in the name of this town. "Great is Nedit¹⁵ around the reed district", spoke the falcon →

Column 8 →^{182,4} steadfast forever is the steadiness of the feet. As to the divine ruler's coming forth as *perception falcon*, the head is of beautiful likeness, the tail feathers truly precious,^{182,5} the two wings glimmering with laps lazuli, the breast from grains of gold.

Column 9: Praise by the three: "Who?" says the falcon. "BA", say the Shebtu. "What has coming forth?" "*ḏwst* [Doo-uh]"^{182,6} say the Shebtu. "*duat of BA* is this place" says the falcon. Duat of BA comes to be in the name of this town.

Column 10: Coming forth by who descended there, who comes, the great one, as^{182,7} *wing ruler*. Endlessly spreading as enduring creator's perception. First wing is opposite the second, north¹⁶ in exact sight. Thus flies^{182,8} Horus, Api¹⁷ comes to be.

Column 11: *Wing lander* arrives. Things are given into the throat of Djeba lord. Perception mounts in the site^{182,9} of unifying creation utterances¹⁸ that reach the hearing. Falcon of Panoramic Site is the KA-name within Api.¹⁹

Column 12: Thus, Horus Behedetite is Djeba Lord;^{182,10} Behedetite is *wing ruler*, Flying BA is KA-name of Behedetite. "Come onto it, primeval island", say the Shebtu, "arrival perfected".²⁰ ^{182,11} Horus praises. Perfected Island comes to be, →

Column 13 → Horus Praise comes to be in the name of this town. "Look, oh our Lord, what is where". Calling out creator words²¹ ^{182,12} and have them come

¹⁴Henceforth, djeba. Also, a name for Edfu.

¹⁵Nedit the mythical zone where Osiris dies, who is not mentioned by name in the story. It is possible that Nedit should rather read *ntt*, i.e. "Great is that what is around the reed district" (Dieter Kurth, personal communication; but cf. Discussion as to a possibly insinuated context involving Osiri).

¹⁶In the original, the word *mshtjw* is used, typically equated with the circumpolar constellation Ursa major, but translated here with German "Norden" for English "north" by Kurth et al.

¹⁷The Horus name Api is rooted in the verb to fly, *apj*, used immediately before.

¹⁸Creator utterances (original: *ḏ3jsw*) are elsewhere personified by the seven baboon-like Djaisu. Here, the idea is the throat that has just been fed to still its hunger and is now ready to utter creation words.

¹⁹Kurth points out a phonetic play that explains the etymology of Horus the Behedetite. *ḥrw bḥdtj* = *bjk bw ḥdj*, Falcon of Panoramic Site. Panoramic Site is the sky.

²⁰Kurth at al. do not place quotation marks here, but the context suggests the Shebtu's speech continues with the proclamation to Horus that the creative deed has been perfected.

²¹Identical with creator utterances in the original (*ḏ3jsw*).

into sight: “Fastener of Sky Covers is called out as KA-name, and the KA-name Site Maker. A KA-name in Re, a KA-name in Horus Re”, →

Column 14 → say the ^{182,13}Shebtu. The Sun disk joins the sky. Beginning of the two lands. Sun Disk Joins comes to be, Beginning of the two Lands comes to be in the name of this town. “How is the site arrival?” Uttering in perception ^{182,14}*great primeval mound, place of enemy annihilation, begetter arrival site*, →

Column 15 → and *land of great strength*. Great Primeval Mound comes to be, ^{182,15}Place of Enemy Annihilation comes to be, Begetter Arrival Site comes to be, and Land of Great Strength comes to be in the name of this town.

Part IV: Threat-Savior (Figure 8)

Moment of imagining. Horus ^{182,16}trembles. “Why”, say the Shebtu.

Column 16: Calling upon the face of RA²² snake to appear. “Look, *shadow conjoiner* has landed. Drive him out, ^{182,17}for I am weak Turn to KA-divinity, pay homage. Calling *god who guards god* to come forth. A splendid image, the face of *stern stare*, with the *šm wj3* [shem oo-djuh]²³ spear whose arms →

Column 17 → ^{182,18}eliminate enemies, the living BA in *head lord*. The Temple God is the KA-name of *flood divider*,²⁴ of *terror-lord*. Comes to be Flood Divider, ^{183,1}Terror-Lord.²⁵ “Look at Divider”, says the falcon. As to setting free what is within, →

Column 18 → The Inner One is the divine waters’ KA-name, RA snake ^{183,2}having engulfed the pupil. As to *divine heart* that opens, it brings forth *lord opener*, it begets *raiser*. Divine Heart’s Waters comes to be, Opening Waters comes to be.

Column 19: ^{183,3}As to *raiser* brought forth in perception by the Shebtu, indeed it is Tatenen, the high-esteemed, who reaches the Reed Throne Seat of Horus, who lifts the best of the guarding arms, ^{183,4}indeed, *strong arm* in perception, and²⁶ *phallus* →

Column 20 → who begets the Ogdoad²⁷ that lays the foundation for Isden House.²⁸ The Temple God approaches *troublemaker*. When guardian reaches RA snake, the father says: “See the image of guarding.

Column 21: ^{183,6}The hook is Shem Udja Spear, a work of sure-fire targeting; the head is that of *stern stare* who has created *armless one*, and the staff with legs at the demarcated arrival site”. As to ^{183,7}the settling therein, *perceptive falcon* is perfected by the image of *strong arm*.²⁹

²²In contrast to Re, the name of the Sun god. RA snake is spelled with the Mouth Sign and a snake sign.

²³Henceforth, Shem Udja; the name of the spear held by Ptah shown to the east/right of Horus’ reed perch in the adjacent relief.

²⁴The verb *ptj* for “divide”, forms the etymology of the name of creator god Ptah.

²⁵Kurth et al. reconstruct these two KA-names as those of a body of water, the one whose dividing causes land to arise. Both are also epithets of the Memphite cosmogonic creator god Ptah.

²⁶“And” is not in Kurth’s translation. I add it to clarify that *raiser*, *high-esteemed*, *strong arm*, and *phallus* are all epithets and attributes of Tatenen.

²⁷An important statement that times the creation of the Ogdoad and Thoth after the creation of the KA-realm and Ptah-Tatenen.

²⁸Isden is an alternative name for the Moon-god Thoth.

²⁹*Strong arm* is Tatenen’s Segemeh harpoon shown in the relief.

Column 22: The Spying Falcon, Horus Mighty of Face is the KA-name of the staff, created by *raiser*, *the sgmh* [se-ge-meh]³⁰ of Horus Mighty of Face,^{183,8} created by Tatenen. “Why should Horus be sad?” says The Temple God.³¹

Column 23: ^{183,9}As to *strong arm* who was imagined forth, *great mace*, *jrḥ* [ayr-tuh]³² has used it for his son, Tatenen has brought forth *endurer*, in the likeness of Horus who is glad because *strong arm* is in front.³³ ^{183,10}The Temple God guards, the Shebtu praise.

Column 24: “Beware of the settlement when you embark for the place of building”, The Temple God calls forth the two.³⁴ ^{183,11}*great strength* calls out: “See the potter’s wheel!” As to this, namely carrying out the building and seeking the creatively imagined, the ^{183,12}Shebtu →

Column 25 → bring it forth perpetually by uttering the things.³⁵ Moment when *strong arm* calls out Praises of Re because of Primeval Land: “splendid sites”—Splendid Sites comes to be in the name ^{183,13}of this town. “*Re island, stable earth*”—Re Island comes to be, Stable Earth comes to be →

Column 26 → in the name of this town. “*High mound, well kept, strong of KA*”—^{183,14}High Mound comes to be, Well Kept comes to be, Strong of KA comes to be in the name of this town. “*Flood born, pristine sites*”—Mesen comes to be, →

Column 27 → Pristine Sites comes to be ^{183,15} in the name of this town. “The throne seat³⁶ is there³⁷ for eternity, the capital of the sites where primeval gods dwell”—Behedet comes to be, Capital of Sites in the name of ^{183,16}this town, and the site of the enduring ones →

Column 28 → the foremost, to whom belong the Djaisu, rich in things.³⁸ “^{183,17}Strong you are, strong you are, Horus! Have no fear, he who surrounds *great seat*, who is there, he is the one who annihilates the enemies, who grips them” →

Column 29 → ^{183,18}Great Seat comes to be, Enemy Annihilation comes to be in the name of this town. “Flood, Land!”—Throne comes to be in the name of this town. Moment of Praises of Re: “*great primeval mound*, ^{184,1}*round arrival site, great site* →

Column 30 → has become green, grown as far as the Sun shines”—Great Primeval Mound comes to be, Round Arrival Site comes to be, ^{184,2}Great Site comes

³⁰Henceforth, Segemeh; the name of the harpoon held by Tatenen. The etymology is rooted in *p sḥw gmh*, “the spying falcon”. This is a nice example of a HEKA invocation using phonetic mimicry.

³¹This question relates back to the end of Column 15.

³²Hieroglyphic *jr t3*, “Earth Maker”. This may be another epithet of Tatenen who raises Earth above divided waters.

³³This can be seen in the adjacent relief. The Segemeh harpoon flanks Horus’ reed perch on the left/west.

³⁴The Shebtu.

³⁵This describes the two-stage creative process being composed of imagination and utterance.

³⁶Behedet in the original, i.e. Edfu.

³⁷The original uses a ship symbol to spell *jm* (from *jmw* for ship) rendered with German “dort” and English “there”. This suggests “there” is a place reached by ship.

³⁸Kurth notes that these things are the substance from which material existence is forged in creation.

to be in the name of this town.

Part V: Sea Migration (**Figure 8 & Figure 9**)

Embarking for the building site. Calling forth the Shebtu by Tatenen. The Shebtu indeed →

Column 31 → come and reach the ^{184,3}settlement site. “Look at the site, Far”, says Great, “*throne site*”—Throne Site comes to be in the name of this town. Hurrying off, ^{184,4}reaching the reeds. “Bring forth the things”, says strong arm, “and behold with joy perception of the site of building”.

Column 32: Arrival of the Khnums.³⁹ Bending the arm, ^{184,5}*raiser* jubilating over the protection by Horus Mighty of Face in its front. Beholding the greening reeds by the falcon. Raising Shem Udja Spear, ^{184,6}lifting →

Column 33 → to guard. Indeed, it is *great mace* that protects the leaves from damage. The falcon’s talon spreads, and good is the sinking down. The Site ^{184,7}Settler is the KA-name in The Segemeh, who protects the reed leaves. “Look at *strong arm* and →

Column 34 → ^{184,8}*reed neck*”, says the falcon—Strong Arm comes to be, Reed Neck comes to be. “The reed has greened and ^{184,9}grown around”—Reed comes to be, Greened comes to be, Grown-Around comes to be by the KA. Horus Mighty of Face →

Column 35 → is the first of manly strength, strong-armed”, says Horus—^{184,10}First of Manly Strength comes to be, Strong Arm comes to be, “see, effective protection comes from you”. Effective Protection is the KA-name of he who does what is to be done. As to the Enduring Ones,⁴⁰ ^{184,11}they imagine forth the seven Khnums.

Part VI: Earth (**Figure 8 & Figure 9**)

Column 36: Moment in which the Shebtu call out creator words in perception. Far and Great seek out what is given there as the site of the creation of the ^{184,12}things of Earth. Ebbing of the flood, emerging of the Primeval Island,⁴¹ sought by the crew of Horus, which wants to pay homage to the father.

Column 37: Reaching the ^{184,13}place of the flood.⁴² The Shebtu call out the demarcation of the shoreline of the site where the crew is. Stern Stare reaches the site, fastened ^{184,14}with Djeba and Nebit Reed. Horus Arrival and Raising Horus by the Reed is the KA name of →

Column 38 → Primeval Island that raises Horus. Perception of the site of mixing⁴³ where ^{184,15}RA snake is. “Its Lord Is What’s” is the KA-name within the Shebtu who own existence,⁴⁴ who come near and fasten the reed there.⁴⁵ As

³⁹Potter gods who shape the material substrate “things” into the material substance of creation.

⁴⁰*gdw* in the original, spelled with two Djet-pillars Signs.

⁴¹Compare with Re Island in Column 25, also flood born, named Mesen and Behedet in 26 and 27.

⁴²Referring to Horus’ crew.

⁴³Kurth notes that the word *šbj* for English “mixing”, details the act of material creation. Note the phonetic connection to the Shebtu as in “consorts/mixers.”

⁴⁴The Shebtu are the ultimate creative facilities that cause things to exist by mixing the substrate of creation once perception brings forth the imagination of what is to be created.

⁴⁵German “dort” and English “there” in the original again is spelled with the ship symbol suggesting this place is reached by ship.

to the sanctuary,^{184,16} Dwelling Place of Horus,⁴⁶ Place of the Ennead, His Majesty's Seat →

Column 39 → for Eternity is the KA name of the one who made himself equal^{184,17} there⁴⁷ as he, who keeps afar the fear of Horus, as companion, when RA snake nears, as savior truly. Strong Arm's weapon, too, is there and the crew. The Shebtu thrust^{184,18} back the flood, and the four crews of Horus arrive.

Column 40: Horus sees Primeval Island and the shadow of *light expeller*. But he is Horus, the image of Stern Stare.^{185,1} The reed is fastened, *light expeller* is felled in the refuge of the wind over which he rules. Bending the arm in jubilation by the crew: "Come, will you not, and settle, oh our lord^{185,2} Horakhty; →

Column 41 → you are Re. This site fashioned beneath you KA-divinity decreed to you".^{181,1} "I shall", calls out Re, "settle the piece of land of the heart's joy. "Look at Primeval Island, →

Column 42 (lower half below lacuna and below the right arm of Thoth) →^{181,2} Djeba⁴⁸ is the KA name where our lord Horus settles", calls out the crew.

4. Discussion

Most English-speaking visitors to Egypt and researchers will never be able to firsthand observe most of the Edfu Texts, nor be able to access the specialized German literature in book format published by the German Edfu Project under Dieter Kurth. This is what prompted me to make more accessible an important passage from the out-of-reach top register on the north side of the enclosure wall that deals with creation as the ancient Egyptians imagined it.

The Benefit of German Edfu Project's Contribution. In this paper, my goal is to focus on merely reproducing this difficult text for English-speaking audiences, and not interpret its deep imports such as was attempted by, for example, E. A. E. Reymond. The translation by the Edfu Project itself is, of course, a linguistic interpretation subject to limits—for example presented by the fact that even the Ptolemaic scribes who copied the Edfu texts more than two millennia ago themselves had to interpret hieratic originals from four millennia ago written in a language and manner they no longer used, and therefore had to invent a new version of hieroglyphic to bring their complexities back to life. The German translators had to deal with several difficult passages, this one perhaps one of the most difficult of the entire volume of the greater and lesser building texts inscribed into the walls of the Edfu Temple.

However, the translation is based on a new, far more encompassing lexical context the Edfu Project was able to establish using fast-access, computerized cross-referencing of words and phrases used in this passage against a compendium built from of all other Edfu texts, and contemporary texts from other temples. This context facilitated insights into the import of words, the grammar used

⁴⁶This name is spelled using the ship symbol, as above.

⁴⁷The entity to which this passage refers is The Temple God who personifies Edfu Temple, appears as Horus, and protects the temple gods. Based on Kurth et al. (2014: p. 336, footnote 2).

⁴⁸Compare this name to Mesen and Behedet mentioned in Columns 26 and 27.

to string them together, and the phraseology, metaphors, and poetic expressions to enhance the composition. Thus, Dieter Kurth and his colleagues have been able to at least narrow down the intended meaning of passages like the one I present in this paper. The benefit of this new linguistic treatment of the Edfu text was not available to earlier interpreters who, confronted with a wider range of possible meanings and a more limited ability to cross-reference lexical entries, may have been led astray based on earlier errors in transcription, transliteration, and translation.

The World View represented by the Creation Story. Like the Memphite Cosmogony recorded on the 25th Dynasty Shabaka Stone, this passage professes to be a copy of older texts. Based on its grammar, it can be dated as far back as at least the Middle Kingdom when Middle Egyptian was spoken. It corroborates the essential method of creation mentioned on the Shabaka Stone, i.e. commands of the tongue conceived by thoughts of the heart to conceive material existence. At Edfu, this creative process amounts to perceiving, imagining, and bringing forth KA-names that form the blueprint for the mixing of raw creation matter into the world of humans. The main actors who perform this feat of creation are the 1), KA-divinity, 2), Shebtu, 3) Horus, guarded by Ptah and Tatenen who avert the threat to creation embodied by RA-snake the light-expeller, 4), Djaisu who personify the recorded and archived creative utterances making possible acts of repeated creation copying original creation, and 5), Khnum who fashion material existence on their potter wheels. The four primordial principles that represent the canvas onto which this creation story creation is painted, so to speak, are the *hmnw* [khemenu]/The Ogdoad/The Eight, the primeval four pairs of male frogs and female snakes who form a bridge from the original, primordial cosmogony of Hermopolis via the Earth Raiser Tatenen to the later, perhaps second age cosmogony of Memphis featured at Edfu.

Stylistic Enhancements to Convey the Creation Story's Complexity. The overall style of the creation story may convey the idea that it was written as a theatrical script of stage instructions for a Greek play, rather than a coherent story with beginning and end. Also, one gets the impression that the passage is assembled from a more extensive body of text, from which this may represent an excerpt as noted by Reymond (1969: pp. 6-7). For example, only a brief recall seems to be presented at the beginning of the story hinting at a yet older, now lost world on which a struggle between two foes ended with its destruction (Reymond, 1969: pp. 106-127). This primordial world of the Ogdoad in existence prior to the time of the creation story is mentioned, for example, on the west side of the naos in the fourth register, and again on the eastern half of the north wall in the third register, during the lotus blossom offering ritual (Kurth, 2021: pp: 258-262; Kurth et al., 2014: p. 614). The creation story proper begins with a peace between these two feuding forces, interpreted to be the Shebtu by the German Edfu Project (Kurth et al., 2014: p. 323, footnote 1).

It is also important to remember Dieter Kurth's observation, corroborating that of E. A. E. Reymond, that text fragments mentioning the mythical origin of

the Edfu Temple can be found in various of its parts. This observation supports the idea that the creation story came from a longer original, excerpts of which were used in different parts of the temple to enhance its architecture and to link architectural units. These different parts may thus bring together architectural forms and textual themes to express a larger world view or to a complex idea that could not or should not be explicitly written.

For example, there is no mention of the Heliopolitean Osiris in this Memphite creation story even though the story features orthographic and lexical hints of an Osirian character and deals with the (re)making of a world from a dormant, submerged, and flooded state. These subtle hints amount to an aura of resurrection further enhanced by the fact that the Osiris Chamber H (**Figure 3**) in the northwest corner of the naos at ground level is diagonally across the alley and below the part of the wall where the story is inscribed, i.e. high-up near the sky at the northwest corner of the enclosure wall.⁴⁹

For the benefit of the many secondary interpretations that this translation may lead to I would also like to point out three factors a literal translation without the benefit of the original hieroglyphic text may conceal. First, the visuals conveyed by the orthography and some word choices subliminally enhance the main theme of the creation story, i.e. a lost world of the original gods revived conceptually by the next generation of gods and then physically copied to make the material world of humans. Besides these visual and literal hieroglyphic clues that convey an Osirian character, even the lay-out of the text in forty-two columns spent to tell the story proper imbues the text with an Osirian structure that becomes its very columnar backbone.⁵⁰

This sublime Osirian undercurrent to the creation story with architecture, orthography, word choices, and lay-out may, as suspected by Reymond, convey the idea that the creation story is really a *recreation story* about the remaking of the original realm of the gods that was lost made possible by the capture and archiving of the Djaisu-personified creation words brought back to life from the Great-Mehit-Flood by a new creative force of divine origin.

Second, the structure of the story divided into six themes, as I have suggested here, may aid in a better understanding of what the story is telling amounts to the motivation underlying the manner of creation. For example, there are distinct plot points like the sudden appearance of RA snake, and Ptah-Tatenen that seem to be the cause for the need to make an Earthly copy of an original KA realm.

Third, the relief adjacent to the passage clarifies the multitude of actors, their various epithets, and the relationships between them. For example, the perched

⁴⁹The interplay between world view, architecture, and text at Edfu is the subject of a lecture presented by Dieter Kurth in October of 2023 and can be viewed on the YouTube channel of the northern California chapter of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE).
URL: <https://youtu.be/EYkeCFltgk?si=o2jskq1KnhN3oj0Q>.

⁵⁰Columns 1 - 42. This is reminiscent of the number of parts into which Seth cut the dead body of Osiris before he tossed them into his watery grave, according to the Edfu version of the myth. Column 1 is not technically part of the story because it is a dedication text presented by Ptolemy X Alexander.

Horus is facing his own BA, supported by the reeds and the Shebtu, and flanked by the Segemeh Harpoon and the Shem Udja Spear. Above is the Wing Ruler and outside of this core imagery are Ptah and The Inner One on the east side, and the eight of the Ogdoad, seven Djaisu, seven and Khnum on the west side.

Ultimately, the creation story featured here must be seen as an expression of an idea that needed a combination of hieroglyphic text, illustrative images, and architecture to fully blossom from the depths of the temple's foundation. Only when seen as the whole of all its parts can one begin to see the Temple of Horus at Edfu become alive from a stony creation in material substance fashioned out of an uttered idea about the sky and the cosmos at large.

5. Conclusion

Interpreting ancient texts requires a faithful translation. To broaden access by English-speaking audiences to such a translation into German, I translated into English an important passage from the Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt. This passage deals with the mythical origin of the land of the ancient Egyptians as they believed it at least four millennia ago. Reading the English version alone may however not be enough in the absence of knowing how the text was written and where in the temple it was placed. To assist readers with this needed context, I also wanted to highlight its orthography by showing rarely-seen photos of the passage and its topography within the temple. Using all three, literal translation, orthography, and text topography, I hope that those who attempt to understand what this passage was meant to mean are now better equipped.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the chief of the German Edfu Project Professor Dr. Phil. Dieter Kurth for reviewing the manuscript of this paper and for graciously extending his permission to show photos in this paper taken by the German Edfu Project.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Allen, J. P. (2014). *Middle Egyptian. An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107283930>
- Chassinat, É. (1931). *Le Temple d'Edfou* (Tome Sixième). Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale. <https://archive.org/details/MMAF23/mode/2up>
- Effland, A., von Falck, M., & Graeff, J. P. (2009). *Inschriften des Ptolemäerzeitlichen Temples von Edfu—Das Edfu Projekt*. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen.
https://www.academia.edu/326697/Inschriften_des_ptolem%C3%A4erzeitlichen_Tempels_von_Edfu

- Gardiner, A. H. (1927). *Egyptian Grammar*. Clarendon Press.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015047473916&view=1up&seq=479>
- German Edfu Project (2002-2017). *Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140502032632/http://adw-goe.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte-akademienprogramm/edfu-projekt/>
- Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire (IFAO) (1985, 1987, 2008).
<https://www.ifao.egnet.net/publications/catalogue/?coll=MMAF&page=2&total=16&nb=10&nv=0>
- Kurth, D. (2009). *Einführung ins Ptolemäische* (Teil 1). Backe-Verlag.
- Kurth, D. (2021). *Die Inschriften des Tempels von Edfu. Abteilung I Übersetzungen* (Band 5.1, Edfou IV). Backe-Verlag.
- Kurth, D., Behrmann, A., Block, A., Brech, R., Budde, D., Effland, A., von Falck, M., Felber, H., Graeff, J.-P., Koepke, S., Martinssen-von Falck, S., Pardey, E., Rüter, St., Waitkus, W., & Woodhouse, S. (2014). *Die Inschriften des Tempels von Edfu. Abteilung I Übersetzungen* (Band 3, Edfou VI). PeWe-Verlag.
- Reymond, E. A. E. (1969). *The Mythical Origin of the Egyptian Temple*. Manchester University Press.