

SELECTED MID-EAST MYTHS PROVIDE BASIS FOR COMMON ORIGIN MYTH RECONSTRUCTION

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There is reason to believe that five earliest mid-east civilizations (Sumerians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Hindus, and Chinese, in their distant past, were related. Ruhlen (1994), Cavalli-Sforza (1994), Renfrew (1987), and others showed common linguistic origins for all of these peoples. Waddell (1929) indicated there was evidence that the Sumerians had an extensive empire that provided writing and traditions in addition to political control. Assuming this is true, that relation implies a likely commonality in their earliest traditions. Based on this earliest relationship, there is reason to believe the origin myths of the cultures have common elements which could be used to reconstruct an earliest (but currently unavailable) myth of the beginning. This survey provides a collection of the origin myths used in a comparison that led to a reconstruction of a hypothetical common origin myth.

1. THE SUMERIAN TRADITIONS

The mythology of the Tigris-Euphrates valley area is, in large part, Sumerian in origin. The clay tablets that have survived are fragmented and incomplete, making construction of their cosmogonic story difficult to decipher. A detailed story of the creation has not been unearthed to date as a unified record; though, some fragmented hints of the story do exist (Kramer, 1972). The written tablets date to about 2000 BCE, but the construction of the stories is believed to date a hundred or so years before that. Later writings, from the first millennium BCE, in the Akkadian language (for example, the Semitic Babylonian and Assyrian dialects (Dalley, 1989)) contain classics such as the Epics of Creation

and Gilgamesh that show signs of clearly being borrowed from the earlier Sumerian literature. It is found that several versions of the same story are used to complement one another and fill in detail that all of the versions individually lack. This is a recognized feature of the Sumerian literature.

Since the Sumerian mythology personifies the aspects of creation in named gods, a brief diversion (before proceeding to the readings) can be helpful to minimize confusion by putting the named in perspective relative to one another and to a few theological concepts. According to Kramer (1963, Chapt. 4), the Sumerian concept of the cosmos, and all its manifest phenomena was believed to be supervised by immortal living beings in human form. They were designated as "dingir", translated as the word "god". Sumerian theology had a concept known as "me" (divine decrees) that kept the cosmic entities operating continuously and harmoniously in accordance with the pre-defined plan of the creating deity. There were seven decreeing gods and 50 great gods (although all of the names are not clear). The process of creation was one of decree, that is, pronouncing the name of that which is to be created. The order of the bringing into being of the gods is summarized as follows (Dalley, 1989, p. 74). The first god was Nammu, the primeval sea personified. Nammu gave birth to An (the heaven god) and Ki (the earth goddess). An and Ki then produced Enlil (the air god), who then proceeded to separate heaven from the earth. At this point Enlil was living in the darkness of the abyss, so he begat Nanna (the moon god), who then begat Utu (the sun god). Nammu and Enlil then produced Enki (the water god). Then, in some unspecified order, 1) Enki helps Enlil and Ki create all the vegetation and life on earth including man, and 2) An brings the Anunnaki (his followers who are the great gods) into being. Ultimately, Enki is declared to be the leader of the great gods.

The following Readings contain excerpts from the identified myths. The more complete versions are found in the referenced material.

1.1. Introduction to "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Nether World" (Kramer, 1972, p. 37)

According to Kramer, the major source of the Sumerian creation picture comes from the introduction to a poem found in the Epic of Gilgamesh, which is titled "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Nether World". After a gallant deed in her service, the goddess Innana gave Gilgamesh a prize, which for undecipherable reasons he lost to the nether world. Warned against going to retrieve it, Enkidu, Gilgamesh's friend, went and died. The introduction, which seems unrelated to the events of the poem, however, contains the description of creation related events.

After heaven had been moved away from earth.

*After earth had been separated from heaven, After the name of man had
been fixed;*

After An had carried off heaven, After Enlil had carried off earth,

After Ereshkigal had been carried off into Kur as its prize;

After he had set sail, after he had set sail,

After the father for Kur had set sail, After Enki for Kur had set sail;

Against the king the small ones it (Kur) hurled,

Against Enki, the large ones it hurled;

Its small ones, stones of the hand, Its large ones, stones of . . . reeds,

The keel of the boat of Enki, In battle, like the attacking storm,

overwhelms;

Against the king, the water at the head of the boat, Like a wolf devours,

Against Enki, the water at the rear of the boat, Like a lion strikes down.

According to Kramer, the poem indicates that originally, heaven and earth were united. After their separation, and the creation of man was ordained (though not necessarily accomplished), Kur, a monster or dragon, hurled stones against Enki's boat while the primeval waters attacked it. Kramer does not interpret

further; but, the poem could be considered as describing the earth's earliest birth and development when it was continually bombarded by comets (between 1 and 5 billion years ago).

1.2. "The Journey of the Water-God to Nippur" (Kramer, 1972, p. 62)

The poem, "The Journey of the Water-God to Nippur", describes Enki's building of the revered city of Eridu followed by his journey to Nippur to ask the blessings of his father, Enlil. The water-god Enki is also known as Nudimmud.

*After the water of creation had been decreed,
 After the name hegal (abundance), born in heaven,
 Like plant and herb had clothed the land,
 The lord of the abyss, the king Enki, Enki, the lord who decrees the fates,
 Built his house of silver and lapis lazuli; Its silver and lapis lazuli, like
 sparkling light,
 The father fashioned fittingly in the abyss.
 The (creatures of) bright countenance and wise, coming forth from the
 abyss,
 Stood all about the lord Nudimmud;
 The pure house he built, he adorned it with lapis lazuli,
 He ornamented it greatly with gold, In Eridu, he builds the house of the
 water-bank,*

The poem goes on to describe the Enki's filling the gardens with birds, fish, and fruit bearing trees; before he takes his boat to Nippur. Kramer does not speculate about the nature of the "creatures of bright countenance". It could be a description of the appearance of the earliest gods who were intelligent but different in appearance from the species "Man" that came later. On the other hand,

it is most likely an anthropomorphic reference to the heavenly bodies – the sun, moon, and stars.

1.3. Introduction to "Cattle and Grain" (Kramer, 1972, p. 72)

The reading is from the introduction to the myth "Cattle and Grain". It describes how the great gods did not yet know how to grow food or make clothes until the cattle god and the grain goddess were created, and, that the purpose of the creation of man was to provide for the needs of the gods.

*After on the mountain of heaven and earth,
An (the heaven god) had caused the Anunnaki (his followers) to be born,
Because the name Ashnan (the grain goddess) had not been born, had not
been fashioned,
Because Uttu (the goddess of plants) had not been fashioned, . . .
Because the name of Ashnam, the wise, and Lahar (the cattle god), [had
not been born] . . .
The small grains, the grain of the mountain, the grain of the pure living
creatures did not exist.
Because Uttu had not been born, because the crown [of vegetation?] had
not been raised, . . .
Because Sumugan, the god of the plain, had not come forth,
Like mankind when first created, They (the Anunnaki) knew not the eating
of bread,
Knew not the dressing of garments, Ate plants with their mouth like
sheep,
Drank water from the ditch.
In those days, in the creation chamber of the gods,
In their house Dulkug, Lahar and Ashnan were fashioned;*

*The produce of Lahar and Ashna, The Anunnaki of the Dulkug eat, but
remain unsated;
In their pure sheepfolds milk, . . . and good things,
The Anunnaki of the Dulkug drink, but remain unsated;
For the sake of the good things in their pure sheepfolds, Man was given
breath.*

Kramer does not speculate on the meaning of this. However, this poem seems to describe the earliest state of man as a species (~2,500,000 BCE with Homo Habilis and Homo Erectus, to ~250,000 BCE with early Homo Sapiens and Homo Neanderthalis, and finally to ~150,000 BCE with modern humans when thinking Man was given “*breath*” – a concept seen in the other cultures). It described the purpose for creating Man – tending to the garden with the domestication of animals and the first farming (~10,000 BCE) in the Levant.

2. THE EGYPTIAN TRADITIONS

Like the Sumerian tradition, the goal is to consider the myths of the beginning that can be compared with the myths of the other cultures. Since the Sumerian and Egyptian cultures are so intertwined, a brief look at a major difference in their views is valuable. That difference comes from their visions of the kings. The Sumerians believed that the kingship was bestowed by the gods, and the kings were the representatives of those gods. So, the Sumerian kings in the earliest periods were the super heroes with, at best, only partial parentage by the gods. The Egyptians, however, viewed their kings as gods, complete with god names in addition to their human names. For them, the earliest prehistory periods before Menes (their first historic king) had dynasties of gods and demi-gods that ruled Egypt. Their mythologies, as stories of the attributes of the gods, were at the same time stories of the activities of the god-kings. The reading, "the History of

Creation", brings that into focus at the end by describing the bringing forth of the next generation of gods.

2.1. The History of Creation Myth (Budge, 1912, p. 1-13)

The text of the Egyptian History of Creation is found in the Papyrus of Nes-Menu preserved in the British Museum, under the number 10,188. By its appearance, it may be assigned to a time between the 26th Dynasty and the Ptolemaic Period (647-30 BCE), and it bears a date being, the "first day of the fourth month of the twelfth year of Pharaoh Alexander, the son of Alexander," i.e., 311 BCE. The History of Creation (- A) is the third work on the papyrus with a longer version (- B) inserted later on the same papyrus. The story is told by the god Neb-er-tcher, meaning "Lord to the uttermost limit (of time and space)" - the almighty and invisible power which filled all space. He assumed the form of the god Khepera to carry out the acts of creation. Following, is The History of Creation -A (the short version) with [additions from version -B (the long form)].

¹ *The Book of Knowing the Evolutions of Ra, and of Overthrowing Apep. [These are] the words that the god Neb-er-tcherspake after he had come into being: "I am he who came into being in the form of the god Khepera, and I am the creator of that which came into being, [-B adds: I formed myself out of the substance which existed in primeval times, I brought my*

⁶ *own name into my mouth as a word of power (i.e., I uttered my own name)] that is to say, I am the creator of everything which came into being; now the things which I created, and which came forth out of my mouth after that I had come into being myself were exceedingly many. The sky (or, heaven) had not come into being, the earth did not exist, and the children of*

¹¹ *the earth, and the creeping things, had not been made at that time. I myself raised them up from out of Nu from a state of helpless inertness. I found no*

place whereon I could stand. I worked a charm upon my own heart (or, will), I laid the foundation [of things] by Maat, and I made everything which had form. I was [then] one by myself, for I had not

¹⁶*emitted from myself the god Shu, and I had not spit out from myself the goddess Tefnut; and there existed no other who could work with me. I laid the foundations [of things] in my own heart, and there came into being multitudes of created things, which came into being from the created things which were born from the created things which arose from what they*

²¹*brought forth. I had union with my closed hand, and I embraced my shadow as a wife, and I poured seed into my own mouth, and I sent forth from myself issue in the form of the gods Shu and Tefnut. Saith my father Nu: - My Eye was covered up behind them (i.e., Shu and Tefnut), but after two hen periods had passed from the time when they departed from me,*

²⁶*from being one god I became three gods, and I came into being in the earth. Then Shu and Tefnut rejoiced from out of the inert watery mass wherein they were, and they brought to me my Eye (i.e., the sun). Now after these things I gathered together my members, and I wept over them, and men and women sprang into being from the tears which came forth*

³¹*from my Eye. And my Eye came to me, and found that I had made another [Eye] in place where it was (i.e., the moon), it was wroth with (or, raged at) me, whereupon I endowed it (i.e., the second Eye) with [some of] the splendor which I had made for the first [Eye], and I made it to occupy its place in my Face, and henceforth it ruled throughout all this earth.*

³⁶ *When there fell on them their moment through plant-like clouds, I restored what had been taken away from them, and I appeared from out of the plant-like clouds. I created creeping things of every kind, and every thing which came into being from them. Shu and Tefnut brought forth [Seb and] Nut; and Seb and Nut brought forth Osiris and Heru-khent-an-maati,*

⁴¹ *and Set, and Isis, and Nephthys at one birth, one after the other, and they produced their multitudinous offspring in this earth."*

According to Budge, Neb-er-tcher's description of creation as "*everything which came out of my mouth*" refers to the concept of creation by pronouncing the names. This appears to be the same concept of creation identified by Kramer (1972, p. 37) as a basis of the Sumerian tradition, that is, "*the name of man had been fixed*".

Budge identifies the god Nu, in line 12, as the primeval watery mass - the substance from which the universe and all its contents were formed. This god appears to be the same as the Sumerian god, Nammu.

Budge identifies the concept of "*Maat*", in line 14, as meaning that Neb-er-tcher's "*foundation [of things] in my own heart*" was the exact and definite rules by which creation and the running of the universe would proceed where the "heart" was the act of his will. Though he does not speculate, this *Matt* could be the same concept of the Sumerians which speaks of the god "*Enki, the lord who decrees the fates*".

Budge identifies the gods "*Shu and Tefnut*" in line 23 as the personification of dryness and wetness. Though he does not speculate, this appears to be a concept seen later in the Chinese tradition of yin and yang. Budge does not speculate on the significance of lines 36 thru 38; however, it could be a description of the famous dinosaur-killing event 65 million years ago – when a comet impact ("*it*

fell on them their moment"), filled the atmosphere with dust, debris and hydrocarbon clouds that darkened the sky, blocking the sun ("*through plant-like clouds*"), and the aftermath when the sky cleared ("*I restored to them what had been taken away from them, and I appeared out of the plant-like clouds*").

One final note, according to Budge, the creating deity was viewed by the Egyptians as being so remote and exalted that He did not interfere with affairs of nature after He created them. The other gods that He created were more like men and were amenable to interfering. Three in particular that are mentioned at the end of the poem include Osiris, Set and Isis who listed among the Egyptian mythical god-kings.

3. THE HEBREW TRADITIONS

Comparison of the *Genesis* with the cultures can be placed in context given the relation of the Hebrew people with the Sumerians and the Egyptians. Since the Patriarch Abraham came from the Sumerian city of Ur, it is expected that the Sumerian and biblical traditions have much in common; and, in fact, it is generally agreed that the early biblical tradition (particularly the Flood story) finds its origins in the Sumerian tradition. Unlike the Egyptian and Sumerian traditions discussed above, the Hebrew tradition does not have a re-history of patriarchs or kings before Adam. Waddell (1929) concluded Adam was the same person as Unzi, the first historical Sumerian king. Therefore, from a dating point of view, the Hebrews offer no insight into the mythological period of the Egyptians or Sumerians for comparison purposes. The one thing that the Bible has, that the Egyptian and Sumerians do not, is a time table for the creation events from the beginning. The time table is given in "days" which many fundamentalists accept as 24 hour periods, but, the more scientifically accepting agree are clearly more than that. Giannini (2019) showed that by comparing the biblical Days events

described in Genesis with events in the scientific record, it is possible to calibrate the biblical Days to BCE years.

3.1. Genesis – Chapter 1: (The Jewish Publication Society, 2000)

Perhaps the best-known creation story comes from the book of Genesis in the Tanakh (The Jewish Publication Society, 2000) (c. 1240 BC). The Holy Bible (Thomas Nelson Pub., 1990) is the edited, Christian version of the Tanakh. There are some differences between the two; but, the stories are substantially the same. For the purposes of this discussion, the Tanakh wording is used, and only the non-repeated portions of the of the poem are reproduced:

¹When God began to create the heaven and the earth - the earth was unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water –

³And God said, "Let there be light"; . . . and God separated the light from the darkness . . . And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

⁶And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, that it may separate the water from the water." . . .

⁸And God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

⁹And God said, "Let the waters below the sky be gathered together unto one area, that dry land appear" . . .

¹⁰And God called the dry land Earth and the gathering of the waters He called the Seas . . .

¹¹. *And God said "Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind". . . . And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.*

¹⁴. *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times - the days and the years" . . .*

¹⁶. *God made two great lights; the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. . . . And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.*

²⁰. *And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky". . . . And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.*

²⁴. *And God said "Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind." . . .*

²⁶. *And God said "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" . . . And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.*

The King James version of the Bible translates "*a wind from God*" as "*the Spirit of God*". This "*wind*" of creation appears to be a concept seen later in the Hindu tradition. It translates "*an expanse*" as "*the firmament*", and "*the Sky*" as "*Heaven*". The concept of the "*waters*" as the basis of existence is seen in the Sumerian tradition, and the Egyptian god Nu, the primeval watery mass, and later in the Hindu tradition. King James translates *vegetation* as "grass". The apparent creation of the sun and moon, out of geological order, after the earth and vegetation were already created appears to be the same period in the Egyptian

tradition after the mass extinction 65 million years ago. Finally, King James describes the “*swarms of living creatures*” as the “*abundance of moving creatures*”. The Tanakh includes in the living creatures, the great sea monsters, which King James calls whales.

3.2. Genesis – Chapter 2: (The Jewish Publication Society, 2000)

⁷. . . *the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He bled into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being. . . .*

¹⁵. *The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.*

The concept that man's purpose was “*to till and tend the garden*” appears consistent with the Sumerian tradition of providing for the gods. Note that is not until verse 18 when God gave "man" a helpmate that he is referred to as the individual, Adam rather than "man" the species. From the passage, it is not clear how long it is after the “*breath of life*” was given to the “*man*” that God placed him in the garden – possibly marking the beginning of agriculture ~10,000 BCE.

4. THE HINDU TRADITIONS

Like the Egyptians and the Hebrews, the Hindu traditions can be compared with the Sumerians and the other cultures, in part, because of their political relations with the Sumerians. As the other traditions discussed, the Hindu tradition traces its heritage back to the Sumerian king line (Waddell, 1929), sharing common elements with Sumerian, Egyptian and Hebrew mythological concepts. The myths presented here come from the Rig Veda.

4.1. The Creation, hymn (x.129) (Radhakrishnan, 1957, p. 23)

The Rig Veda of Hindu tradition is considered to be the oldest text in an Indo-European language (c. 1300 BCE). Hymn x.129 addresses the Hindu vision of creation:

1. *Non-being then existed not nor being;
There was no air, nor sky that was beyond it.
What was concealed? Wherein? In whose protection?
And was there deep unfathomable water?*
2. *Death then existed not nor life immortal;
Of neither night nor day was any token.
By its inherent force the One breathed windless;
No other thing than that beyond existed.*
3. *Darkness there was at first by darkness hidden;
Without distinctive marks, this all was water.
That which, becoming, by the void was covered,
That One by force of heat came into being.*
4. *Desire entered the One in the beginning;
It was the earliest seed, of thought the product.
The sages search their hearts with wisdom,
Found out the bond of being in non-being.*
5. *Their ray extended light across the darkness;
But was the One above or was it under?
Creative force was there, and fertile power;
Below was energy, above was impulse.*
6. *Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?
Whence it was born, and whence came this creation?
The gods were born after this world's creation;
Then who can know from whence it has arisen?*

7. *None knoweth whence creation has arisen;
And whether he has or has not produced it;
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
He only knows, or haply he may know not.*

Doniger (1981, p. 25) translates “*token*”, in verse 2, as “*distinguishing sign*”; and, “*bond*”, in verse 4, as “*ability to create*”; and, “*world's*”, in verse 6, as “*universe*”; and, line 2 of verse 7 as perhaps it formed itself or perhaps it did not. Though Doniger does not speculate, it is clear that the more metaphysical nature of this reading gives it more in common with the Chinese picture, seen later than with the previous discussions which had more of a personified "god" orientation. In verse 6, one obvious agreement between the Egyptians and the Hindus is that the gods were created after the creation of the world. Like the Egyptian and the Hebrew traditions, the Hindu hymn speaks of the void before creation and the breath ("*the One*" here, the Egyptian god Neb-er-tcher, and the Hebrew "God") that gave rise to the creation out of the (primeval) waters.

4.2. The Cosmic Heat, hymn (x.190) (Radhakrishnan, 1957, p. 25)

Hymn x.190 addresses subsequent creation events.

1. *From fervour kindled to its height Eternal Law and Truth were born;
Thence was night produced, and thence the billowy flood of sea
arose.*
2. *From the same billowy flood of sea the year was afterwards
produced,
Ordainer of the days and nights, Lord over all who close the eye.*
3. *Dhatar, the great creator, then formed in due order sun and moon,
He formed in order heaven and earth, the regions of the air, and
light.*

Doniger (1981, p. 34) translates line 1 as “*(Cosmic) order and truth were born from heat as it blazed up*”. She does not speculate, but, this cosmic order or “*Eternal Law*” appears to be the same concept as expressed in the Egyptian tradition “*I laid the foundation [of things] by Maat*”. She identifies “*all who close the eye*”, in verse 2, as “*all living creatures*”.

4.3. The Unknown God, hymn (x.121) (Doniger, 1981, p. 27)

1. *In the beginning the Golden Embryo arose. Once he was born, he was the one lord of creation. He held in place the earth and this sky. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?*
2. *He who gives life, who gives strength, whose command all the gods, his own, obey; his shadow is immortality – and death. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?*

Though Doniger does not speculate, the Golden Embryo appears to be the creator god who is the same as the Egyptian Neb-er-tcher and the Sumerian An.

4.4. The Origin of Sacred Speech, hymn (x.71) (Doniger, 1981, p. 61)

1. *Brhaspati! When they (the first sages) set in motion the first beginning of speech, giving names, their most pure and perfectly guarded secret was revealed through love.*

Doniger does not speculate; but, this seems to be a reference to the beginning of awareness and intelligence in the human species. This could be interpreted as the time of the development of complex language in “early man”.

4.5. The Hymn to Indra, hymn (1.130) (Renfrew, 1987, p. 179)

1. *COME to us, Indra, from afar, conduction us even as a lord of heroes to the gatherings, home, like a King, his heroes lord. . . .*
3. *He found the treasure brought from heaven that lay concealed, close-hidden, like the nestling of a bird, in rock, enclosed in never-ending rock. . . .*
8. *Indra in battles help his Aryan worshipper, he who hath hundred helps at hand in every fray, in frays that win the light of heaven. . . .*

This hymn gives hints of the coming of the Sumerian (Aryan) invaders to India, recognizing the hero leader as a king. It is possibly an identification of the Sumerian Sargon I with Indra – similar to the Egyptian concept of the god-kings in their mythological period. Waddell (1929) indicates the Sumerian, as they expanded their empire brought their culture and writing with them – it is this transfer of culture that connects the traditions of the Egyptians, the Hebrews, the Hindus and the Chinese.

5. THE CHINESE TRADITIONS

Unlike the earlier traditions, the recorded Chinese tradition is younger than than all but the Hindu's. The Chinese tradition does trace its heritage back to the Sumerian king line (Waddell, 1929; DeLacouperie, 1894), sharing common elements with the Sumerian and Egyptian mythological concepts; but, there is a striking similarity between the Tao Te Ching and the Vedic hymns (in some of the more mysterious phrases). The mythological readings come from the Taoist philosophy (c. 550 BCE) and the cosmogonic myths (dating as early as the 4th century).

5.1. Verse one of the Tao Te Ching (Feng,1972)

The *Tao Te Ching* is a book of Taoist philosophy dating to c. 550 BCE.

Verse one addresses the creation.

*The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
 The name that can be named is not the eternal name
 The nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth.
 The named is the mother of ten thousand things.
 Ever desire less, one can see the mystery.
 Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.
 These two spring from the same source but differ in name;
 They both may be called deep and profound.
 Darkness within darkness. The gate to all mystery.*

Wilhelm (1989) translates “nameless” as “non-existence”; “named” as “existence”; and, “manifestations” he called “spatial limitations”. In the Hindu Creation Hymn, the phrase “Darkness there was at first by darkness hidden” seems to refer to the mystery of the nameless One, indicating the same meaning and almost identical phraseology as here in the Chinese verse referring to the Tao.

5.2. Verse twenty-five of the Tao Te Ching (Feng,1972)

*Something mysteriously formed, Born before heaven and earth.
 In the silence and the void, Standing alone and unchanged.
 Ever present and in motion.
 Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things.
 I do not know its name. Call it Tao.
 For lack of a better word, I call it great.
 Being great it flows. It flows far away.
 Having gone far, it returns. . . .*

The Egyptian Creation myth addresses the beginning in much the same way as it is expressed here. The creator god is described as existing when '*The sky had not come into being, the earth did not exist*' and he was '*[then] one by myself*'. The concept here of being "*ever present and in motion*" is indicated in the Egyptian myth by his description of being raised up (brought into existence) "*from out of Nu (the primeval sea) from a state of helpless inertness*".

5.3. Verse forty-two of the Tao Te Ching (Feng,1972)

*The Tao begot one. One begot two. Two begot three.
And three begot the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang.
They achieve harmony by combining these forces. . . .*

In Wilhelm (1989), "*combining these forces*" is translated as "*flowing power*". Though Wilhelm did not speculate, this could represent modern cosmology's picture of the first moments after the Big Bang creation event when first there was a single unified field, followed by a series of symmetry breaking events that finally gave the three fields observed today. Further, the idea is expressed in the Egyptian tradition in similar words "*from being one god I became three gods*" – the creator god (Neb-er-tcher) created two gods ("*Shu and Tefnut*") who then separated from him to become three gods.

5.4. The first reading from the Chinese cosmogonic myths (Birrell, 1993, p.31)

This first reading of the cosmogonic myths (of the origin) is taken from the *Tao Yuan* – a 4th century BCE text describing the chaos prior to creation.

In the beginning of the eternal past,

*When all was ultimate sameness in vast empty space,
Empty and same, all was one,
One eternally at rest, Moist-wet and murky-dim,
Before there were darkness and light.*

The “*vast empty space*” before the beginning is not inconsistent with the concepts of modern cosmology of the likely time before the Big Bang and is addressed in the other traditions. Genesis speaks of the “*unformed earth and void*”, and, the Hindus describe it as “*that which becoming by the void was covered*”. The concept of ‘*moist-wet*’ or primeval sea or vast waster is seen in the Sumerian tradition “*the water of creation*”, of the Hebrews “*wind of God sweeping over the water*”, and of the Hindus “*and was there deep unfathomable water*”.

5.5. The second reading from the Chinese cosmogonic myths (Birrell, 1993, p. 32)

This reading comes from the *Huai-nan Tzu*, an eclectic work compiled c. 139 BCE by Liu An, king of Huai-nan.

Before Heaven and earth were formed, there was a shapeless, dark expanse, a gaping mass; thus it was called Great Glory. The Way [Tao] first came from vacant space, vacant space gave birth to the cosmos, the cosmos gave birth to the Breath, and the Breath had its limits. . . .

If expressed in terms of modern cosmology, “*the Breath*” could be an expression of the explosive energy of the Big Bang.

5.6. The third reading from the Chinese cosmogonic myths (Birrell, 1993, p. 35)

This reading is a compilation, by Ying Shao c. 140-206 CE, of explanations of the origins of social concerns. It briefly describes how the mythical figure Nu Kua created human beings.

People say that when Heaven and earth opened and unfolded, humankind did not yet exist. Nu Kua kneaded yellow earth and fashioned human beings. . . .

5.7. Verse forty from the Tao Te Ching (Feng, 1972)

Returning is the motion of the Tao.

Yielding is the way of the Tao.

The ten thousand things are born of being.

Being is born of non being.

Ho-Shang-Kung (Erkes , 1950) translates “*motion*” as “*movement generates all things*”; “*yielding*” as “*tenderness and weakness are what the Tao always uses*”; and “*being*” as “*born of non being as 'existence originates from non-existence*”. The Hindus describe the time before as when “*non-being then existed not nor being*” indicating a description of created matter vs. the unborn pre-creation state.

6. SUMMARY

The five cultures have striking similarities in the language and concepts to describe the beginning of the universe through the creation of the human race. The perspective of the myths generally is a goal-oriented account of god activities, but with some differences. For the Sumerians, features of nature were personified in the gods, while the Taoist accounts are framed in a more philosophical and mystic sense. But, in general, the similarities form the basis of comparisons that imply a common origin myth for the region (Giannini, 2021).

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