

Hal Toliver

Professors Prinsky, Schwartz, and Shotwell

Humn. 2001G

13 October 2007

The Relation between Human and Divine or Supernatural in Six Ancient Cultures

The relation between the human and divine (or supernatural) may be seen in the art, music, and literature of the ancient cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, the ancient Jews, India, China, and Greece. For example, Fred Kleiner and Christin Mamiya in *Gardner's Art Through the Ages (GATA)* that the oldest Egyptian art, an ancient wall painting that has stick figures contains boats that are "symbolic of the journey down the river of life and death" (44), showing the Egyptians' concern with achieving life after death. Further, King Narmer's "palette" has on its back an image of a falcon with human arms, symbolizing Horus, the king's protector (pp. 45-46), one of a number of images equating the pharaoh with the divine. The famous pyramids -- those of Imhotep (pp. 48-50) and Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure (pp. 50-54) -- were designed to suggest not only the greatness (by their scale) of the pharaohs but also to guarantee immortality of the royal persons entombed by preservation of their divine spirits and bodies in the "ben-ben" or pyramidal structure associated with Re, the sun god (p. 51). Sculpture, as well as painting and architecture, suggests ancient Egyptian concern with the relation between the human and the divine or supernatural. Kleiner and Mimaya note that images of the deceased were sculpted "to serve as abodes for the ka should the mummies be destroyed" (p. 54). The statue of the seated Khafre (3-12) has the falcon-gold Horus carved at the back of Khafre's head, extending "his protective wings to shelter" Khafre and "indicating the pharaoh's divine status" and is given a flawless body to suggest divinity (p. 55). The standing statue of Menkaure and his queen (3-13), like the seated statue of Khafre, is sculpted to convey serenity, suggesting enduring power, as well as with "compactness and

solidity, with few projecting, breakable parts" in order to last for a life beyond human life -- eternity (p. 55). Both the standing statue and seated statue are posed frontally, rigidly, and bilaterally symmetrically in order to suppress movement and thus the elapse of time -- again projecting the royalty beyond human life into eternity (p. 55).

Dr. Shotwell in his supplement notes that ancient Egyptians thought music could either influence human beings by physical sensation or through the supernatural or divine -- the latter "created or sustained by a power known as *heka* or *ike* which was something like . . . what we understand by 'spell'" (258). Further, the name for sound, *herw*, had special associations in religious cults, and was associated with the gods Thoth and Isis. Part of the service in ancient Egyptian temples included a singer, carrying a symbol of music. Priests' daily duties involved praising one of the gods in song, which might have been done melodically or in chant (259). With the passing of time, the female temple musician began to make her appearance in the New Kingdom (c. 1570 BCE), an office taken by women of high station. The woman was known as the "wife of the god" or one of the "chief singers of the god Amun" or the "songstress of Amun." The instrument used to bridge human and divine in the temple was the *sistra*, a sort of shaker, ideal because its "voice" like clappers and tambourines, also used in the service, was monotone, and felt to be nearer to "the womb of things" or the boundary between human life and a plane beyond. A variety of other instruments were used in the religious service to connect human and divine, according to Dr. Shotwell, including the harp, pandore (like a guitar), and flute. The office of "chief of the singers of Pharaoh" in the New Kingdom was the "nominal head" of all musicians, and was designated "chief of the singers of all the gods," indicating the constant motif of reaching beyond the human to the supernatural or divine (pp. 260-261).

Bernard Knox and Jerome Clinton in NAWME note that poems from the

pyramids in the Old Kingdom (c. 2575-2130 BCE) were connected to projecting the human into eternity, since the poems included "narratives, incantations, and invocations designed to help the pharaoh's soul on its journey to the other world" (p. 43). The Leiden Hymns (c. 1238 BCE) have the divine or supernatural as their subject -- especially the sun god, called Horus, Amun, and Amun-Re (p. 43). Many other gods are mentioned in the Hymns, but Amun either appears as an incarnation of those gods or their master. This multiplicity shows a division or gulf between human and divine since, as Hymns translator John Foster points out, Amun "'moves in unfathomable ways and takes many forms to human comprehension . . . [and] he is hidden from human sight'" (p. 43). The sun god's divinity is described in these poems' metaphors "to evoke the being who created all" (p. 43), clearly intended to convey humanity's awe of the divine or supernatural. In "How splendid you ferry the skyways," the Horus is the great supplier -- providing "The needs of each new day" (line 4) and "not a bypath escapes your affection" (line 19); also, the god has transcendent power that must evoke awe from humanity, since he is the one "who fashion[s] the years" (line 4) and "weave[s] months into order" (line 5). Hints of equation in divinity between the sun god and Pharaoh are suggested by the sun's transcendence over time (the god not only fashions the years, weaves the months, and rules days, nights, and hours, but circles the earth "in an instant" [line 23]). Also, as the Pharaoh in his power creates order, so does Horus, who "weave[s] months into order" (line 6) and who is humanity's protector or overseer (the word "oversee," recalling terms for the Egyptians in the Hebrew Bible) through watching over it: "sleep is for mortals,/ Who go to rest grateful:/ your eyes oversee" (lines 14-16). Humanity should be grateful and express gratitude to the god since, as stated in the poem in addressing Horus, "You deign to walk daily with men" (line 27). Indeed other gods as well as human beings should express gratitude at the beginning of each day: "The faces of all are upturned to you, /As mankind and gods/ alike lift

their morningsong: 'Lord of the daybreak,/ Welcome'" (lines 28-32). [Here would follow examples and analysis from the other two poems: "God is a master craftsman" and "When Being began back in the days of genesis" (p. 45).]