

and spices with wax and shaped the wax into cones. They then placed these cones atop the wigs on their heads, and over the course of the evening the cones would gradually melt and release their scent into a room while making the wig shiny. **See also** Deir el-Medina; hair.

## Creation myths

The ancient Egyptians had various myths of how their world began. Which myths held sway depended on location, and Egyptologists disagree on whether any one of these myths became more widespread than the others. However, there were similarities among them. For example, in all Egyptian Creation myths, one god created himself and then created all others. In addition, natural elements that sustain life—sunlight, water, air—had to appear before Creation could begin, and it was the creator god’s purpose to bring order out of chaos.

The four main Creation myths came out of the cult centers of Heliopolis, Memphis, Elephantine, and Hermopolis, respectively. Heliopolis mythology says that in the beginning there was water, the essence of the goddess Nun, and that from this water arose a primordial mound of mud. (Such imagery is understandable given that as the annual floodwaters of the Nile River receded such mounds often appeared, and during the Nile’s inundation everything was underwater except for the highest ground.) On the primordial mound, the god Atum created himself and then created the god of air, Shu, and the goddess of moisture, Tefnut. These two deities soon conceived the god of the earth, Geb, and the goddess of the sky, Nut. Geb and Nut immediately became lovers, creating the deities Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys, but shortly thereafter their father separated them, pushing Nut into the sky to create the heavens.

In the Creation myth of Memphis, the creator god was not Atum but Ptah, and

whereas Atum made two deities who then made the others, Ptah directly made all life. All other deities, towns, people, animals, and everything else in existence formed first within his heart, whereupon he spoke their names to call them into being. This myth was undoubtedly connected to the ancient Egyptian belief that the heart was the center of all human thought and emotion.

In the Creation myth of Elephantine, the ram-headed creator god Khnum also made all beings, but instead of creating them within his heart, he fashioned them on a potter’s wheel using Nile River clay. One of the first goddesses he created, Heket, similarly fashioned children within their mothers’ wombs. Heket had the head of a frog because the animal was associated with fertility, due to the abundance of frogs when the Nile flooded.

The frog is also featured in the Creation myth of Hermopolis, which held that four frog-headed gods (Nun, Amun, Kuk, and Huh) and four snake-headed goddesses (Naunet, Amaunet, Kauket, and Hauhet) had to unite for Creation to take place. Paired together, these couples represented water, air, darkness, and infinity, respectively. Once they joined, one of two things happened (because the myth had at least two versions): Either a mound formed within the primordial waters or a lotus flower formed on the surface of the primordial waters. In the myth with the lotus flower, the petals opened to release the sun, in the form of the solar deity Horus. In the myth without the lotus flower, an ibis appeared on the mound as a manifestation of the god Thoth, laid an egg, and hatched out the sun. Because the sun was the focus of both versions of the myth, illustrations of both sometimes depicted the eight deities as baboons; these animals were strongly associated with the sun because of the way their screeches and antics seemed to greet the dawn. **See also** cult centers; deities; religion.