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Silvia Zago

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A Cosmography of the Unknown
The *qbḥw* (*nṯrw*) Region of the Outer Sky in the Book of Nut

SILVIA ZAGO*

ABSTRACT

In the Book of Nut, the terms *qbḥw* and *qbḥw nṯrw* appear to designate a portion of the outermost fringes of the cosmos, to the north/north-west, where an opening of the Duat was located. This paper aims to explore the characterisation of that region, a topographical and cosmographical entity lying on the verge of this world and the next, by comparing the finds from the Book of Nut with the evidence from a Late period "map of cosmos", on which a similar enigmatic label appears. This will provide a chance to reassess the characterisation of the cosmic boundaries of the world at the threshold of the Duat and the various regenerative scenarios conveyed by later cosmographic texts and representations.

Keywords: *qbḥw* region, Duat, Book of Nut, Yale Map of Cosmos, Sarcophagus of Wereshnefer, Cosmos, Cosmography, Late period.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans le *Livre de Nout*, les mots *qbḥw* et *qbḥw nṯrw* semblent désigner une partie des franges les plus extérieures du cosmos, au nord/nord-ouest, où se trouvait une ouverture de la Douat. L'objet de cet article consiste à présenter les caractéristiques de cette région, une entité topo-

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graphique et cosmographique située aux confins du monde et de l'au-delà, en comparant les informations données dans le *Livre de Nout* avec les témoignages issus d'une "carte du cosmos" de la Basse Époque, qui contient une étiquette énigmatique similaire. Le but est de redéfinir les limites cosmiques du monde au seuil de la Douat et d'envisager les différents scénarios régénératifs véhiculés par les textes et les représentations cosmographiques tardives.

Mots-clés : *qbḥw* region, Douat, Livre de Nout, carte du monde de Yale, sarcophage de Ourechnefer, cosmos, cosmographie, Basse Époque.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Book of Nut, whose original title was "Fundamentals of the Course of the Stars," is a cosmographical composition, which aimed at providing the religious background to the topography of the sky and to various celestial phenomena, including the course of the stars, the sun, the moon, and possibly also the planets.[1] The core of this composition is almost certainly older than its first monumental attestation, in the Osireion of Seti I at Abydos (13th century BCE), and may have its roots in the Middle Kingdom, if not even in the Old Kingdom.[2] The importance of this treatise as a "handbook of religious astronomy"[3] was most likely instrumental in its later transmission, as attested by various hieratic papyri, which were found in the temple archives of Tebtynis, and which are all datable to the 2nd century AD.[4] The most important of such documents are pCarlsberg I and pCarlsberg Ia, both of which were written by the same scribe and contain demotic commentaries to the text.[5]

1 The standard edition is VON LIEVEN 2007. About the original title of this text, see there, pp. 48–49 § 1, pp. 125–126. The possibility that the Book of Nut may include a "chapter" on the planets has been disputed in LEITZ 2008/2009, pp. 17–19, but cf. VON LIEVEN 2012. A useful edition of the text is NEUGEBAUER, PARKER 1960, pp. 36–94 and pl. 30–54, presenting the subdivision of the annotations into chapters and sub-chapters, which is still used nowadays, and which is referred throughout the present paper.

2 Discussion in VON LIEVEN 2007, pp. 223–254, especially pp. 252–254. The hypothesis of a possible Old Kingdom origin of the Book of Nut and of the Books of the Sky has been proposed in QUACK 1997 and refuted in, e.g., KLOTZ 2011 and WERNING 2013. The only other monumental – and abridged – copy of the Book of Nut attested in the New Kingdom is found on the ceiling of the burial chamber of Ramses IV (KV 2); VON LIEVEN 2007, pl. 1–5. Additional, fragmentary versions of the initial part of this composition are known from some 25th and 26th Dynasty tombs in the Asasif necropolis, those of Padiamenope (TT 33), Montuemhat (TT 34), Pabasa (TT 279), and Mutirdis (TT 410) (RÉGEN 2015; RÉGEN 2018). Yet more fragments of the Book of Nut were discovered in 2016 by the team of the University of Tübingen working in the Ptolemaic temple of the lion-goddess Repit at Athribis, on which see *infra*.

3 Discussion and additional references in VON LIEVEN 2007, pp. 296–299. Cf. KLOTZ 2011, pp. 490–491. The demotic translation and commentary (see *infra*) appear to have relied on a number of possibly more recent Egyptian treatises on astronomy, which would provide the Book of Nut with additional authority regarding religious and astronomical knowledge. See the discussion in VON LIEVEN 2007, pp. 284–290.

4 Regarding the library of the temple of Tebtynis, see, e.g., RYHOLT 2005.

5 LANGE, NEUGEBAUER 1940; VON LIEVEN 2010. Additional fragments of the Book of Nut found on papyri from Tebtynis are now in the collections of the Carlsberg Institute in Copenhagen and in London, Berlin, Berkeley (formerly Oxford), and Florence. See VON LIEVEN 2007, pp. 16–19.

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The focal element of the Book of Nut is the giant image of the celestial goddess Nut, who dominates the ceiling of the monuments where it is attested, naked and arching over the ground (fig. 1).[6] Owing to the Egyptian mythological explanation of the course of the sun, according to which Nut swallows the sun (her son) at sunset and gives birth to him again every morning,[7] the goddess is represented while she supports herself with her arms in the west (sunset), and her legs and feet in the east (sunrise).[8] The god Shu, her father, helps lift her up, and is therefore depicted with his arms raised to hold her weight. The annotations to the image explain its various portions, what they mean in cosmographic and astronomical terms, and their connection to the cycles of the universe. Minor pictorial motifs appear around Nut's figure, among which a nest of birds next to her arms on the ceiling of the Osireion, an image that is paralleled in a recently discovered fragmentary block from the temple of Repit at Athribis.[9] It is on the texts accompanying this section of the Nut picture that this paper will focus, as these contain the description of the outermost stretches of the cosmos, beyond the limits of the created universe and the visible sky.

2. THE OUTERMOST AREAS OF THE COSMOS AND THE *QBḤW* REGION

The vault of the sky, represented in the Book of Nut by the arched body of the celestial goddess, separated the world of human experience from what lay outside, an unfathomable, dark, cold, empty, and infinite watery expanse known as Nun. This was the primordial ocean, the Abyss, from which the world had emerged at the first time (*sp tpy*) of creation.[10] The sky functioned as an interface between the atmosphere of this world and the surface of the outer cosmic ocean that surrounded the earth on all sides, and thus keept its waters from flooding the earth. This is the reason underlying the watery nature of the sky, which is attested consistently in sources from as early as the Pyramid Texts.[11] In religious texts, several terms convey

6 Originally published in Frankfort 1933, pl. LXXXI.

7 While this explanation of the daily course of the sun was alluded to already in the Pyramid Texts (e.g. *Pyr.* 1416c-1417d), the motif is relayed explicitly only much later, in the Book of Nut. There, several texts describe the solar cycle, from the moment of sunset through Nut's mouth, when he enters the Duat (texts Aa, Bb), to the moment when he is reborn at the eastern horizon (texts E, F, G, J, M, N, O). Texts and translations in von Lieven 2007, pp. 72–74 and 403–405 with §§ 55–58, 60–64; pp. 51, 53–57 and 375, 377–381 with §§ 8–12, 16–27.

8 This is also made explicit in one of the captions occurring in the Osireion, Text Jj, which specifies: *ꜥ=s ỉmn m gs mḥty-ỉmnty [ꜥ=s ỉ3btt] m gs rsy-ỉ3bty*, "Her right portion is on the north-western side, [her left portion] is on the south-eastern side" (translation mine); text in von Lieven 2007, p. 408, § 72. Compare *infra*, text Dd.

9 This block (no. 8061) is inscribed with the part of the text concerned with the migration of birds, which is part of the Nut picture in the Osireion, corresponding to §§ 73–79 (but not § 77a) in von Lieven 2007. This passage from the Book of Nut was located originally behind the representation of the head of one of two figures of Nut (this one lifted by Shu) on fragmentary blocks, which once belonged to the ceiling of the rear part of the ambulatory of the temple (L1, L2, L3), and which were carved and painted in yellow against a bright blue background. I am indebted to Christian Leitz and Daniela Mendel-Leitz for providing me with this information regarding the attestations of the Book of Nut on the dislodged blocks of the temple of Repit, which are mentioned again below.

10 Allen 1988, pp. 1–7; Bickel 1994, pp. 23–31.

11 E.g. Allen 1989, pp. 6–10; Zago, forthcoming, § 2.3.

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its aquatic essence, but two in particular stand out: *bỉȝ*, "basin" or "firmament"[12] and *qbḥw*, "cool waters."[13]

The Book of Nut is the first composition to deal with the regions beyond the created world in detail, describing the location of the primordial ocean Nun. Text L, inscribed above the body of Nut in the New Kingdom monuments, and therefore (metaphorically) located in the outer cosmos beyond the visible sky, describes it as follows:



wnn ḫrt pt tn m kkw-smȝw
n rḫ ḏrw[*=s rsy mḥty ỉmnty ỉȝbty*]
s[*mn nn m Nnw*] *m nnw* […]
n[*n ḥḏwt*] *ỉm*
ỉr grt bw nb šw n pt šw n tȝ dwȝt pȝ r-ḏr=s

How what is above this sky exists is in complete darkness;
[its] limits [south, north, west and east] are not known.
F[ixed are these in the Nun], in inertness […]
There is no [light] there.
As for any place free of sky and free of earth, it is the entire Duat.[14]

The darkness of the inscrutable expanse existing beyond the world of human experience is plunged into the utmost darkness (*kkw-smȝw*), which hides its true extent – an allusion to its effective infinity.[15] We find here also an interesting allusion to the nature of the Duat, the Egyptian otherworld, whose conceptualization has so far eluded an unambiguous definition, since it was usually embedded in a nest of multifaceted layers, which could shift according

12 On this term and what it denoted, see Graefe 1971. The aquatic nature of the sky was encapsulated in the determinative of the word *bỉȝ*, namely the sign representing a well full of water 𓎛 (N41). The same ideogram could also be used to classify the homophone term *bỉȝ*, considered traditionally a designation of meteoric iron. It has been demonstrated that *bỉȝ* was connected with the sky as the surface of the primeval ocean, and that the determinative N41 may point not only to its watery nature, but also to the fact that it contained iron, hence the possible translation of this term as "starry sky." See Almansa-Villatoro 2020. Similar conclusions may apply also to the term *qbḥw*, for which see *infra*.

13 See *infra*. The parallelism in the uses of the words *bỉȝ* and *qbḥw* was already noted in Mercer 1952, vol. 4, p. 53.

14 Translation mine; synoptic edition of the text in von Lieven 2007, pp. 382–384 with §§ 31–33, 36–38. Both monumental versions are heavily damaged in this section. The excerpt provided here was restored putting together the various surviving parts of those copies and relying additionally on the hieratic version in pCarlsberg I, 2, ll. 20–26, 30–35 (marked by square brackets). See the discussion in Allen 1988, pp. 1–2 and commentary; von Lieven 2007, pp. 59–60; Zago, forthcoming, § 6.2.2.

15 The phrase *kkw-smȝw* denotes the undivided darkness, in which the cosmos was immersed before creation, and is therefore one of the features of the primordial waters. See, e.g., Betrò 2018, pp. 53–54.

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to changing contexts and purposes and evolved during the millennia.[16] This realm, clearly placed beyond human cognition, was imagined to be traversed by the sun at night, when he travelled through the body of the sky goddess – inside which the Duat was located, according to the Books of the Sky.

Other texts of the Book of Nut refer to a portion of the outer cosmos as *qbḥw*, a term of difficult translation, not least because of its often-abbreviated writing, featuring merely the sign representing a tall water-jug with liquid pouring from it,  (W15) or (W16). This word is generally rendered literally as "cool waters," and is usually connected to afterlife scenarios,[17] surely also because libations were an essential component of mortuary cult and rituals in general.[18] Since, as briefly mentioned above, this term could also be used as a designation of the celestial vault, pointing to its watery nature, sometimes the translation "firmament" is found, especially when it occurs in religious and cosmographic texts.[19] At the root of both these translations lies the notion of the sky as the liquid surface between the atmosphere and outer space, on which the celestial bodies were imagined to navigate during the day and the night, which justifies yet another rendering of this term as "starry sky" or "starry firmament".[20] Additionally, the word *qbḥw* alone could indicate the source of inundation and groundwater, which issued directly from the Nun, and thus the liminal aquatic regions situated at the borders of Egypt or just outside, including those wherefrom the Egyptians believed the Nile originated.[21] The fact that all these elements were related to the chaotic waters of the primordial ocean is probably the reason why the Book of Nut designates the outer areas of the cosmos as *qbḥw*. Furthermore, due to the association between *qbḥw* and boundaries – geographical and metaphorical – the copies of the text on papyri use the determinative for foreign lands (N25) to classify such

16 Zago 2018; Zago forthcoming.

17 *Wb* V, 28, 1; Hannig 1995, p. 854. In later periods, *qbḥw* is also attested in contexts where it designates the necropolis, due to the latter's liminal collocation between the domains of life and death; *AnLex* 79.3122.

18 Refreshing drinks were vital to the sustenance of the deceased in the next world, not least due to their connection to the annual inundation and the related mytho-religious symbolism (Aja Sánchez 2012, pp. 226–227). Additionally, water was extremely important in contexts of purification, renewal, and rebirth, and therefore libations play a major role in funerary rituals from the Pyramid Texts until the Graeco-Roman period. The aquatic element was linked to the Osirian tradition – as the efflux coming from the decomposing corpse of the god was a metaphor of renewal. As such, it was transmitted in ancient Egyptian (funerary) literature for the entire duration of the pharaonic civilization (Delia 1992; Winkler 2006). Moreover, a goddess *qbḥt* is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts, where she appears to personify the fresh libation waters and/or offers them to the deceased (e.g. *Pyr.* 1180b, *Pyr.* 1348a). See Mercer 1952, vol. 4, p. 53; Aja Sánchez 2012, pp. 228–229.

19 *Wb* V, 30, 1–2; Faulkner 1969, p. 92 (*Pyr.* 465a-b). This is the translation chosen in this paper, which is in no way meant to disregard the original meaning connected to cool waters.

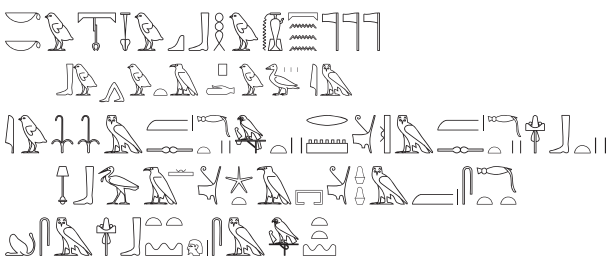
20 See, e.g., the stellar determinatives appearing after the word *qbḥw* in *Pyr.* 138b in the pyramid of Wenis (); compare Serrano 1999, p. 359 with n. 23. Alternately, the three stars could be read as a separate word, *sbꜣw*, meaning "stars" (e.g. Allen 2005 (ed. 2015), p. 34). The meaning and the broader implications remain unchanged, however. In early sources such as the Pyramid Texts, the celestial destiny of the king was tied inextricably to the so-called Imperishable Stars of the northern hemisphere, which are usually identified with the Circumpolar Stars. The starry night sky, therefore, occupies a preeminent role in that corpus. See Faulkner 1966; Krauss 1997.

21 *Wb* V, 29, 5–13; *AnLex* 78.4272, 79.3120–79.3121; Hannig 1995, 855; W*PL*, 1052; Aja Sánchez 2012. For an explicit representation of the relationship between the Nun and the inundation, see, for instance, Scene 45 of the Book of the Earth of Ramses III, discussed in Roberson 2012, pp. 232–234; compare Régen 2015, pp. 232–236. An identification of the *qbḥw* region with the area of the first cataract has been suggested, but it is uncertain; e.g. Leitz 2002, p. 150 with n. 132; compare Mercer 1952, vol. 4, pp. 53–54. Note, however, that the god Khnum, who was intimately associated with the origin of the Nile and the inundation in the region of the first cataract, could be called *ḫnty qbḥw*, "foremost of the cool waters" (Bickel 1991, pp. 55–56).

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occurrences in the passages discussed below, besides the usual water determinative 𓈖 (N35A). The sign ⊗ (O49) also occurs a few times in the papyrus copies to determine the word *qbḥw*, thus pointing to a circumscribed locale within the cosmos.[22]

The texts mentioning the *qbḥw* region in the Book of Nut (Dd, Ff, and Hh) occur solely on the ceiling of the Osireion, where they are located opposite Nut's head, behind – thus beyond – her shoulders and arms, on the top right portion of the Nut picture (fig. 1). Given the abovementioned symbolic orientation of the goddess, following the course of the sun from sunset (i.e. Nut's mouth in the west) until dawn (i.e. Nut's crotch in the east), such an area appears to represent specifically the north/north-western portion of the outer cosmos, lying outside the celestial vault, opposite the earth, and off the sun's daily course. In particular, in text Ff the word *qbḥw* occurs in conjunction with the term for nest (*sš*),[23] which points to two ovals that appear in the Osireion directly opposite Nut's head, in the caption labelled "Hh" (fig. 1). The top oval was left empty, but the other contains the partially damaged representation of three young birds: 𓅱. No annotations accompany this image in the Osireion, but the glosses of pCarlsberg I, 4, l. 25 specify that the birds' nest is in the *qbḥw* region.[24] If this representation were to be taken literally, then this area would seem to be a breeding ground for young marsh-birds.[25] Text Dd, located at the top right corner of the Nut picture, elaborates further on this region of the cosmos:



kkw-smɜw qbḥw nṯrw
bw ỉw{t} ɜpdw ỉm
ỉw nn m gs=s mḥty-ỉmnty r-mn m gs=s mḥty-ỉɜbty
wbɜ n dwɜt nty m gs=s mḥtt
pḥ=s m ỉɜbtt tp=s m ỉmntt

22 E.g. 𓈖𓅱 in pCarlsberg 496, 2, l. 5 (text Ff), 2, l. 9 (text Dd) and 𓈖⊗ in pCarlsberg I, 4, l. 26 (text Dd). On the cultural organization of ancient Egyptian topography (both real and mythical) conveyed by determinatives, see Loprieno 2003; Spalinger 2008; further references in Zago 2018, p. 211, n. 30.

23 *sšw ỉmyw qbḥw,* "The nests, which are in the *qbḥw* region;" text in von Lieven 2007, p. 407, § 70.

24 *sš m qbḥw ḏd [ỉỉr ḫr] ḫpr pɜ mḥ ḫn qbḥw […]*, "The nest in the *qbḥw* region, that is to say, the nest occurs in the *qbḥw* region" (translation mine). See the original text in von Lieven 2007, p. 409, § 79. Although here the demotic glosses speak of just one nest, the commentary of text Ff (pCarlsberg I, 4, l. 13) refers correctly to *nɜy=w [mḥw/sšyw?]*, "their [nests?]."

25 Egberts 1991, p. 64.

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Complete darkness, the firmament of the gods,
the place from which the birds come.
These are on her (i.e. Nut's) north-western side as far as her north-eastern side,
(which) is open (on)to the Duat, which is on her northern side.
Her (i.e. Nut's) rear part is in the east, her head in the west.[26]

The aquatic region called *qbḥw nṯrw* is described as a cosmic passageway between this world and the next, since it opens onto the Duat, on the northern rim of the outer space beyond Nut. Moreover, it is the place from which migratory birds were seen to fly to Egypt. In text Ee, such birds are described as having human faces but bird nature, and speaking to each other in human speech.[27] This matches one of the most well-known (later) iconographies of the *bas*, with which these birds could be identified.[28] Indeed, on a block from the temple of Repit at Athribis, said birds appearing inside an oval/nest are represented as human-headed: .[29] The association between migratory birds and the *qbḥw* region of the cosmos is well-attested in ancient Egyptian texts, as for instance in the "Hall of Seasons" of the solar temple of Niuserre at Abu Ghurob, dating to the 5th Dynasty.[30] The Report of Wenamun also includes a mention of migratory birds (*gȝšw*) going down to Egypt from their original home in a northern region called *qbḥw*.[31] The yearly migration of birds was witnessed since ancient times, when Egyptians were not yet aware of the existence of other lands north of their country. This may have prompted them to imagine that those birds were flying down to Egypt from outer space, and more specifically from the mythical region called *qbḥw nṯrw*, where an opening of the Duat was located. Because *bas* as well as migratory birds could "disappear" and "reappear" at regular intervals during the year, they became closely associated not only with each other, but also with the decans, namely the stars used in ancient Egypt for time-keeping purposes, which would be similarly invisible for a period of time during the year, when they set in the

26 Translation mine; synoptic text in VON LIEVEN 2007, pp. 410–411, §§ 80–84. On the position of Nut, see also *supra*, Text Jj.

27 *wnn nn ȝpdw ḫrw=sn m rmṯ qd=sn m ȝpdw wʿ ỉm mdw=f ḫft snw=f m mdw rmṯ*; text and full translation in VON LIEVEN 2007, pp. 76 and 408, §§ 73–75.

28 E.g. JANÁK 2016, with additional references cited there.

29 Block 8061. The limits of the known world, epitomized by the four cardinal points, are articulated in an esoteric topography of the sky in some cryptographic hymns included in the Book of the Day (MÜLLER-ROTH 2008) and the Book of the Night (ROULIN 1996), which appear in their entirety only in the tomb of Ramses VI (KV 9). See BETRÒ 2018, pp. 58–63. Although the Book of Nut does not identify explicitly the migratory birds, it is possible that they coincide with the *bas* of the north evoked in the namesake hymn in the Book of the Day, for which see MÜLLER-ROTH 2008, pp. 293–297.

30 PM III.2, 319–324; EDEL 1963, pp. 105–115. It is likely that, already at the time of the Pyramid Texts, these birds were seen as the *bas* of the deceased emerging into the world from a northern exit of the Duat (ALLEN 2003, pp. 27–28). The fact that the Old Kingdom pyramids inscribed with Pyramid Texts were oriented in such a way as to have the entrance/exit on their northern side may point to the observation of this phenomenon, together with the well-known importance of the northern (night) sky in said texts.

31 *Wenamun* 2, ll. 65–66; see EGBERTS 1991, pp. 62–67. On (migratory) birds and their association with *qbḥw*, see also SPIEGELBERG 1917, pp. 31–32; POSENER 1965, pp. 69–71; GOELET 1983; MEEKS 1990, pp. 38–43. Re himself could be called "migratory one" (*gšy*), as in Address 75 of the Litany of Re (HORNUNG 1975, p. 85), possibly owing to the solar deity's "wandering" across the sky and the cosmos, which is discussed below.

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Duat.[32] Being creatures able to transition between different realms and modes of existence – the earthly and the otherworldly – birds and *bas* alike could move between the known world and the unknown beyond it – two realities which, though separated, could still intersect in a few given points.[33] This may moreover justify a possible translation of *qbḥw* as "cold land," pointing to the watery and cold domain situated within the Nun, to the original home of migratory birds, and to the opening of the Duat itself. The latter could easily be regarded as "cold," for according to the Book of Nut it lay outside the world, immersed in the waters of the Nun, and it was the realm of the (cold) dead.[34]

Moreover, this description of the *qbḥw nṯrw*, stretching from north-west to north-east within the outer cosmos, may correspond to the geographic location of the Nile Delta. This, in turn, would match the two routes that migratory birds were known to take when flying to Egypt, one passing above the north-western area of the Delta and the other above the north-eastern one. D. Meeks further argues that such a region was associated on the one hand with the forces of chaos (i.e. potential invaders) that constantly threatened to throw the country into disarray, but on the other also with their richness and variety.[35] This made the birds harbingers of potential chaos, and yet also of potential abundance. The same twofold characterization – both (potentially) negative and positive – applied to the primeval ocean Nun, which could be dangerous and yet also contained unreserved potential for regeneration and (re)creation. As a geographical as well as a cosmographic entity existing at the threshold of this world and the next, *qbḥw nṯrw* was inextricably associated with the primordial waters, possibly existing in the Duat as the fount, out of which those very waters issued to revitalize the deceased.[36] Therefore, it seems safe to assume that the region called *qbḥw nṯrw* mentioned by the Book of Nut was believed to be located at the outermost fringes of the cosmos beyond the visible sky, more precisely in its northern portion, and that it may have functioned as a sort of conduit between different spheres – the outer space and the sky, the Duat, and the earth.

32 von Bomhard 2014, p. 83. One of the most elaborate explanations of the decanal cycle and its relation to the Duat is included in another section of the Book of Nut, namely texts T, U, and V; von Lieven 2007, pp. 61–71, §§ 39–51; Zago forthcoming, § 6.2.3. Moreover, the mythological account known as "Dramatic Text," which concludes the copy of the Book of Nut in the Osireion (Frankfort 1933, pp. 82–86 and pl. LXXXIV–LXXXV) and was copied in pCarlsberg I (4, ll. 35–44 to 7, ll. 1–27?) and other fragmentary manuscripts (pCarlsberg Ia, 228, 496, and 497), is concerned with the nature and the cycle of the decans, the moon, and possibly the planets, and echoes partially the content of the texts listed above (T, U, V). See von Lieven 2007, pp. 78–122, 157–201. On the decans and ancient Egyptian astronomy and time-keeping methods, see, e.g., Leitz 1995. One of the most explicit identifications of the *bas* with decans occurs in the Thirtieth Dynasty "Naos of the Decades" from Saft el-Henna, dealing with the (astronomical) behavior of the decanal stars, which are referred to as the *ba*-souls of the gods; von Bomhard 2011, especially pp. 114–117.

33 Assmann 1970, pp. 48–53, 64–66; Betrò 2018, pp. 58–59. By hatching the egg to be born, moreover, nestling birds were connected with regeneration symbolism, the liminal experience par excellence (e.g. Rashed 2015).

34 Goedicke 1995, p. 131.

35 Meeks 1990, pp. 42–43.

36 Koenig 2005, p. 97. See also Allen 1988, p. 1, where the phrase *qbḥw nṯrw* in Text Dd of the Book of Nut (examined above) is translated as "fount of the gods".

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3. THE LATE "MAPS" OF COSMOS AND THE BOOK OF NUT

These observations about the location of the region called *qbḥw nṯrw* in the Book of Nut find corroboration in a Late period "map of cosmos," which is carved on a fragmentary limestone slab belonging to the Map Collection of the Yale University Library and is arguably one of the first representations of the world as spherical (fig. 2).[37] In line with the orientation of Egypt towards the south, following the Nile's flow, the fragment depicts the north-western portion of the cosmos. This is represented as concentric rings or spheres symbolizing the various domains composing it. What is left of the tip of three pairs of wings – possibly belonging to Re or Horus as the winged solar deity at the center of the cosmos – may be seen in the center.[38] The next circle depicts Egypt symbolically through the standards of six of its north-western Delta nomes and three of the northernmost nomes of Upper Egypt, each alternating with the depictions of the Lower Egyptian *pr-nw* shrine and the Upper Egyptian *pr-wr* shrine, respectively. The outer ring bears the representation of foreign peoples, in this case Libyan tribes, as is made clear by the presence of the tutelary god of the Western desert, Ha, standing inside the hieroglyphic sign , *ḥwt*, meaning "enclosure" or "domain."

The original layout of this fragmentary depiction of the cosmos may be reconstructed thanks to the existence of a complete version of a similar circular map. This is carved on the lid of the massive granodiorite sarcophagus of the priest Wereshnefer (*Wrš-nfr*), dated to the 30th Dynasty (4th century BCE), which was found in his tomb at Saqqara and is now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (fig. 3).[39] The Wereshnefer map also depicts the Egyptian universe by means of concentric rings, with a winged solar disk in the middle, and is complemented by an image of a winged solar disk flanked by two *uraei*, lying atop a feminine figure with her arms open above the spherical core of the image.[40] The center appears to stand for the netherworld and the nethersky, since its lower portion is depicted upside down, and it is riddled with solar-Osirian symbolism.[41] In fact, we can recognize in the elongated figure lying flat on its belly and with its head raised – represented twice, in two different registers – the

37 Accession no. 61. This object may have belonged to a small building, now lost, and is actually made up of three contiguous fragments, which have been joined; overall dimensions c. 57 × 43 × 8 cm. See Clère 1958; von Lieven 2007, pp. 153–155; Manassa 2013, pp. 8–9; Calmettes 2017; *Echoes of Egypt Online Catalogue*, no. 61. I wish to thank John Darnell and Colleen Manassa Darnell for bringing this object to my attention back in April 2017 and for providing me with a high-resolution photograph that allowed me to study it in detail, respectively.

38 The wing of the now lost upper solar disk is depicted in the usual way, whereas the bottom one is upside down. Clère 1958, p. 46, argued that the center of the map is either a representation of the netherworld (Duat) or of the nether-sky (*Nnt*) mentioned already in the Pyramid Texts (e.g. *LGG* 4, p. 246). Alternately, the two fragmentary lines of water  in the center of the Yale map may be a symbolic representation of the primeval ocean Nun.

39 Accession no. 14.7.1b; *Met Museum Online Catalogue*, no. 14.7.1a, b; Clère 1958; Calmettes 2017.

40 Calmettes 2017, pp. 40–42, 46–50, suggests that this figure may be identified with Nut either being pregnant or giving birth to the cosmos, based on the occurrence of a similar representation in the first hour of the Book of the Day, featuring a typically *en face* feminine figure, who holds a sun disk or perhaps her own womb between her hands (Müller-Roth 2008, pp. 71–77). Beneath the spherical depiction of the world is an even more enigmatic image, showing raised arms on a pair of legs, at the center of which lies an eye. The raised arms may recall the role of cosmic arms, which are mentioned and represented so frequently in the Underworld Books and the Books of the Sky, especially in the concluding tableaux featured by some of these texts (Hornung 1981; Darnell 2004, pp. 391–397). On the other hand, they could also hint at the mythological episode of Shu lifting Nut to separate her from the earth-god Geb, who may be the entity behind this enigmatic figure (Calmettes 2017, pp. 42–44).

41 Calmettes 2017, pp. 36–39.

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scene of the awakening of Osiris, which is attested in a few Ramesside royal monuments and in Third Intermediate and Late periods royal and non-royal tombs.[42] The next sphere contains the emblems of the Egyptian nomes, arranged from south (top) to north (bottom) and east (left) and west (right). As in the Yale map, the outer ring depicts foreign peoples, together with the tutelary gods of the deserts and the goddesses of the East and the West, these latter marking the boundaries of the known world.[43] The whole tableau is framed by another feminine figure, this time Nut in her role of celestial vault, arched over the cosmos in her usual posture.

By logic, and by comparison with the Wereshnefer map, it may be assumed that the left side of the Yale fragment once carried the representation of the tutelary deity of the Eastern desert and its tribes, namely Sopdu.[44] This would have completed the symbolism of the outermost circle, pointing to the territorial boundaries of Egypt. What is more interesting for the purposes of this paper, however, is the enigmatic hieroglyphic label inscribed on the right bottom corner of this object. There, the phrase  *qbḥw Ḥrw*, "the cool waters/firmament of Horus," appears within a crenellated cartouche. As mentioned above, the portion of the cosmos depicted in this map is the north-western one, the same where the Book of Nut situates an opening of the Duat, and where the terms *qbḥw* and *qbḥw nṯrw* appear. As such, it stands to reason that *qbḥw Ḥrw* should coincide or overlap with the *qbḥw (nṯrw)* of the Book of Nut or a part thereof, and possibly with the *qbḥw* of earlier sources.[45]

As a geographical designation, *qbḥw Ḥrw* most likely referred to Lower Egypt. As such, it could be paired with the label *qbḥw Stḫ*, referring to Upper Egypt, and more specifically to the area around the first cataract.[46] This appears to be the case, for instance, in an inscription of Thutmosis III from the temple of Wadi Halfa, where the king is said to have seized the lands stretching from the region called *qbḥw Stḫ* in the south as far as the *qbḥw Ḥrw* in the north.[47] The reason behind these divine associations probably lies in Egypt's mythical past, and in particular in the tradition regarding the formation of the state between the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods, when Horus and his rival Seth emerged as the champions of Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt, respectively.[48] That the label *qbḥw Ḥrw* could indicate the northern part of the country is further confirmed by a 25th Dynasty text of Taharqa from the temple of Kawa – with a parallel in Tanis – in which the boundaries of the king's reign are defined by *qbḥw Ḥrw* in the north, a region called *rtḫ-qꜣbt* in the south, the area of sunrise in the east, and

42 Roberson 2013. This scene occurs also on the ceiling of the Osireion.

43 Calmettes 2017, pp. 30–35.

44 Calmettes 2017, pp. 33–34. On the god Sopdu, see Schumacher 1988.

45 *Pyr.* 1201d, for example, mentions the "cool waters (*qbḥw*) at the (celestial) region of the Imperishable Stars." Moreover, *Pyr.* 1278b and *Pyr.* 1327b mention a *ḥwt Ḥrw*, "Mansion of Horus", which is located in the *qbḥw* region of the sky. Further connections between Horus and the cool waters may be found, e.g. in *Pyr.* 22a, *Pyr.* 24a-b, *Pyr.* 765a-b, *Pyr.* 1877d, all of which are embedded in ritual contexts, whereby funerary offerings are presented and spells recited for the rebirth of the deceased (Osiris) king, in a few cases by an officiant who takes on the identity of Horus, i.e. the deceased's son. See *infra*, n. 53.

46 *GDG* V, p. 171; Clère 1958, p. 46; W*PL*, 1052.

47 Urk. IV, 807, 17–808, 1–2. A duplicate of this inscription was carved near the rock-cut temple of Ellesiya, built in Lower Nubia during the reign of Thutmosis III (Urk. IV, 813, 1–3).

48 E.g. Kemp 1989 (ed. 2018), pp. 66–70, with additional references.

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the sunset zone in the west.[49] The phrase *qbḥw Ḥrw*, however, ended up taking on mythical connotations. For instance, a passage of the Konosso stela of Amenhotep III mentions it in parallel with the four pillars of the sky, an image that evokes the well-known cosmographic representation of Nut as a cow being supported by the Heh gods, which is found in the Book of the Heavenly Cow.[50] Clearly, said label could be used to refer to a domain situated outside the created world, and as such it could be associated with the possibly chaotic yet regenerative potential of the Nun and the Duat alike.

Besides the abovementioned association of Horus with Lower Egypt, which may have been the chief reason behind a northern region of the cosmos being designated *qbḥw Ḥrw*, this god may have been chosen also in virtue of his connection with the waters of Nun, of which *qbḥw Ḥrw* formed but a part. In fact, the god personifying the primordial ocean could be at times identified with Osiris – a fact that is alluded to in the Books of the Sky, and especially in the Book of Nut, where the sun is said to purify himself in the arms of his father Osiris before being reborn.[51] The connection between Osiris and the regenerative powers of cool (*qbḥ*) and fresh (*rnpy*) waters, which can be traced back to as early as the Pyramid Texts, is reiterated countless times in funerary literature and is linked to solar rebirth,[52] as is the case also in the Book of Nut. Cosmographic texts in general stress the importance, for the sake of cosmic continuity, of the mutual exchange of vital powers encapsulated in the "father-son" constellation Osiris-Horus.[53] The role of lifting the sun out of the depths of the Duat/night, thereby completing his successful transfiguration, is usually attributed to Nun, and is present already in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, though it is encapsulated best in the concluding representation of the Book of Gates.[54] Therefore, besides the mytho-geographic connection between Horus and Lower Egypt, a further layer may be postulated to lie behind the label *qbḥw Ḥrw*, applied to the north-western portion of the outer cosmos. This sees Horus in his role of protector of his deceased father Osiris, who dwells in the Duat and in the Nun waters at the same time, and who is sometimes identified with the latter.

49 Macadam 1949, pp. 26 (K, l. ll. 15–16; T, l. 10), 28, 31, pl. 9–10; cited in von Lieven 2007, p. 126 with n. 745. The label *rtḥ-qꜣbt* – appearing also in the Book of Nut – seems to indicate the direction wherefrom the sun was seen to rise (to the south/south-east of Egypt), along with the pre-dawn region (belonging in the chaotic domain outside the word) where it was thought to travel at night, before rebirth (Régen 2015). It has been suggested that the opposite (missing) section of the Yale fragment may have borne the designation *rtḥ-qꜣbt*, since that is the part of the cosmos, in which said label would have belonged (von Lieven 2007, p. 154). This seems very likely, especially since *rtḥ-qꜣbt* may have also been connected to aquatic regions; discussion in Régen 2015, pp. 225–232; compare Betrò 2018, pp. 55–56.

50 Clère 1958, p. 46. The stela erected at Konosso, by the first cataract, commemorates the first Nubian campaign of Amenhotep III, and claims that the king "made his boundary as he desired as far as the four pillars supporting the sky, and he set up a victory stela as far as the *qbḥw Ḥrw*" (Urk. IV, 1662, 11–12; translation mine). For the central image of the Book of the Heavenly Cow, with Nut's legs coinciding with the four pillars of the sky, see Hornung 1982, p. 82, figs. 3–4.

51 Texts F; see von Lieven 2007, pp. 54, 377–378 with §§ 18–19, and discussion pp. 137–139. The demotic glosses in pCarlsberg I (1, l. 42) specify that Osiris is the *mw*-waters (presumably of the Nun), from which the sun re-emerges after spending the night in the Duat, namely inside Nut. To this regard, compare the passages in texts J and Aa in von Lieven 2007, pp. 55, 378–379 with §§ 21–24, pp. 74, 405 with § 61.

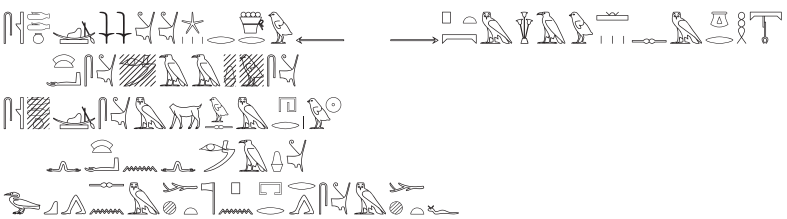
52 See *supra*.

53 As explained in Text F of the Book of Nut, for which see *supra*, n. 51. More references in Assmann 1970, pp. 45–46. Regarding the term "constellation" applied to groupings of gods encapsulating (mythical) relationships among them, see Assmann 1982.

54 Barta 1990. For the final image of the Book of Gates, see Hornung 1981, p. 218, fig. 1.

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The aquatic element was present simultaneously in the depths of the Duat and in outer space, where an opening of the Duat was located, according to text Dd of the Book of Nut, which was analyzed above. As said text specifies, the "firmament of the gods" (*qbḥw nṯrw*) lies at the outermost fringes of the cosmos, to the north. Based on the identification of the migratory birds with human *ba*-souls on the one hand and with decans on the other, it may be suggested that the "gods" in the label *qbḥw nṯrw* may be those decanal stars which, according to several ancient Egyptian sources, were also deities. As we have seen above, the fragment of the Yale map represents the north-western portion of the cosmos, and it is in that area that the label *qbḥw Ḥrw* is found. It may now be postulated that not only were these two areas – *qbḥw nṯrw* and *qbḥw Ḥrw* – correlated, but that the "firmament of Horus" may be, in fact, a part of the larger domain designated by the Book of Nut as "firmament of the gods." It may moreover be posited that, while this stretch of the cosmos corresponded to the place of regeneration, which the decans traversed during their period of invisibility through the year, the one named *qbḥw Ḥrw* was a more circumscribed area, travelled by the solar deity during his own annual path, which took him from the north-west to the south-east through the Duat, according to what the ancient Egyptian observer could see from the earth.[55] Further confirmation of this understanding of the cycle of the stars in the outer cosmos beyond Nut comes from the passage opening the Dramatic Text in the Osireion:



sqdd nn n{n} sbꜣw r ḏrw pt m ḫꜣwᵓs m grḥ
ḫᶜᵓsn [m]ꜣꜣ[.tw]ᵓsn
sq[dd]ᵓsn m-ḫnwᵓs m hrw
n ḫᶜ.n n mꜣ.t(w).n
ʿqᵓsn m-ḫt nṯr pn prrᵓsn m-ḫtᵓf

To the boundaries of the sky on her outer side they sail at night,
when they shine forth and are seen.
During the day, they sail inside her,
when they do not shine forth and they are not seen.
In the following of this god they enter and in his following they go forth.[56]

55 Throughout the year, the sun proceeds northwards starting from south-east on the day of the winter solstice, makes its way through the west and subsequently to the north of the ecliptic (summer solstice), and finally culminates in the south again, thus "traversing" all the cardinal points in its cyclical trajectory. See, e.g., VON BOMHARD 2014, where the explanation of the solar cycle is linked to the texts of the Book of Nut.

56 Seti I, cols. 1-2 = pCarlsberg I, 5, ll. 27–30. Translation mine; synoptic text in VON LIEVEN 2007, pp. 411–412 with §§ 85–90.

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The stars and the sun alike needed a place-time for their own regeneration before coming back to the sky of this world: the aquatic regions *qbḥw nṯrw* and *qbḥw Ḥrw* provided such a space, while at the same time being connected with the two regenerative entities par excellence, namely, the primeval waters of the ocean Nun and the Duat. The latter, which in its multifaceted and multimillennial history had come to indicate both the sky and the netherworld, is turned here into an astronomical gestational environment, and at the same time a conduit between this world and what lies beyond, and outside, it: the divine-like firmament of the deep, outer space.

4. CONCLUSION

In ancient Egypt, the sky was imagined as a body of water, an interface between the outer cosmos and this world. Early on in funerary literature, the aquatic nature of the celestial vault, personified by the goddess Nut, was encapsulated in the words used to designate it, among which *qbḥw* occupied a preeminent role. As was shown above, this enigmatic designation, usually translated as "cool waters", does not simply indicate the sky, but also the cosmic waters of the firmament lying outside the created world, and belonging in the primordial ocean Nun. In the Book of Nut, the term *qbḥw*, along with the more specific *qbḥw nṯrw*, is applied to a specific portion of the outermost fringes of the cosmos, the north/north-western ones, where an opening of the Duat was located. This remote region was understood through the lens of solar cosmography and was associated with the beginning of the sun's nocturnal voyage into the darkness as well as with the transit of the decanal stars through the depths of the Duat, lying at the threshold of – and partially overlapping with – the rim of the distant celestial expanse existing beyond the visible sky of this world. According to the Book of Nut, the regeneration of the celestial bodies took place along two different cycles. The nocturnal path of regeneration of the sun and of the diurnal celestial bodies unfolded inside Nut, from west to east. This directionality also matched the annual cycle of the sun, which starts in the south at the winter solstice and goes through the north at the summer solstice. In this part of the universe, the sun and the stars transit across a region called *qbḥw nṯrw*, "the firmament of the gods," whose existence finds corroboration in the fragmentary Yale map of cosmos, which designates the north-western outer space as *qbḥw Ḥrw*. As the foregoing analysis has illustrated, these two cosmographical labels may overlap to a certain extent. In turn, they are also intertwined with the notion of Duat, the Egyptian otherworld, which the Book of Nut indicates specifically as the stretch of cosmos, into which the celestial bodies disappear during their annual period of invisibility, thus an astronomical horizon of sorts. Therefore, the modes of existence and the location of the firmament of the gods, the firmament of Horus, and the Duat are interlaced more explicitly in later sources, where they are all shown to share in the celestial gestational and regeneration process, which happened simultaneously every night and throughout the year.

BIFAO 121 (2021), p. 511-529 Silvia Zago
A Cosmography of the Unknown. The qbḥw (nṯrw) Region of the Outer Sky in the Book of Nut
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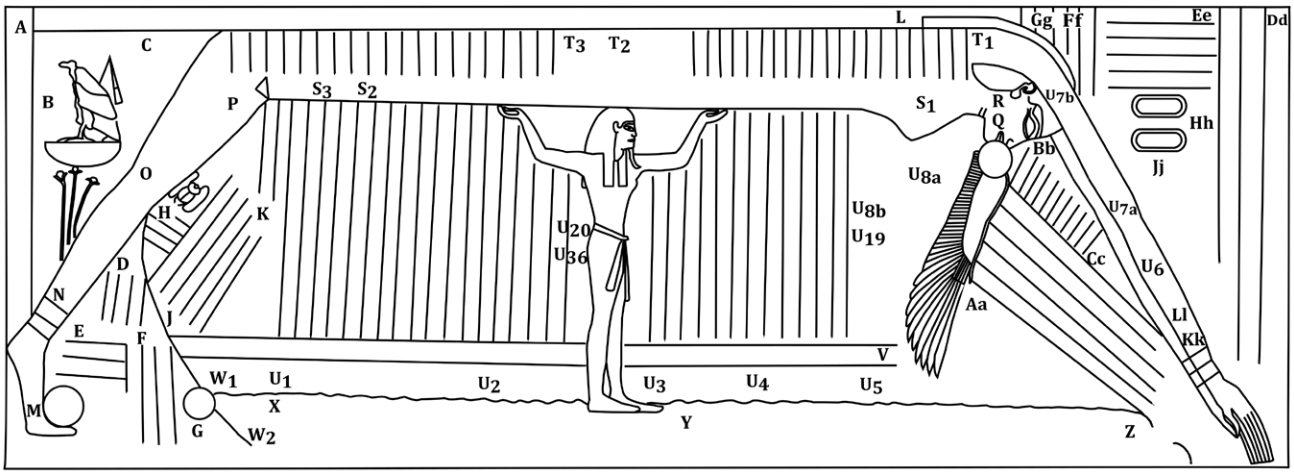


Fig. 1. The Book of Nut on the ceiling of the Osireion (Seti I), showing the arrangement and labels of the texts. Drawing by S. Zago, after Neugebauer, Parker 1960, p. 39, fig. 20.

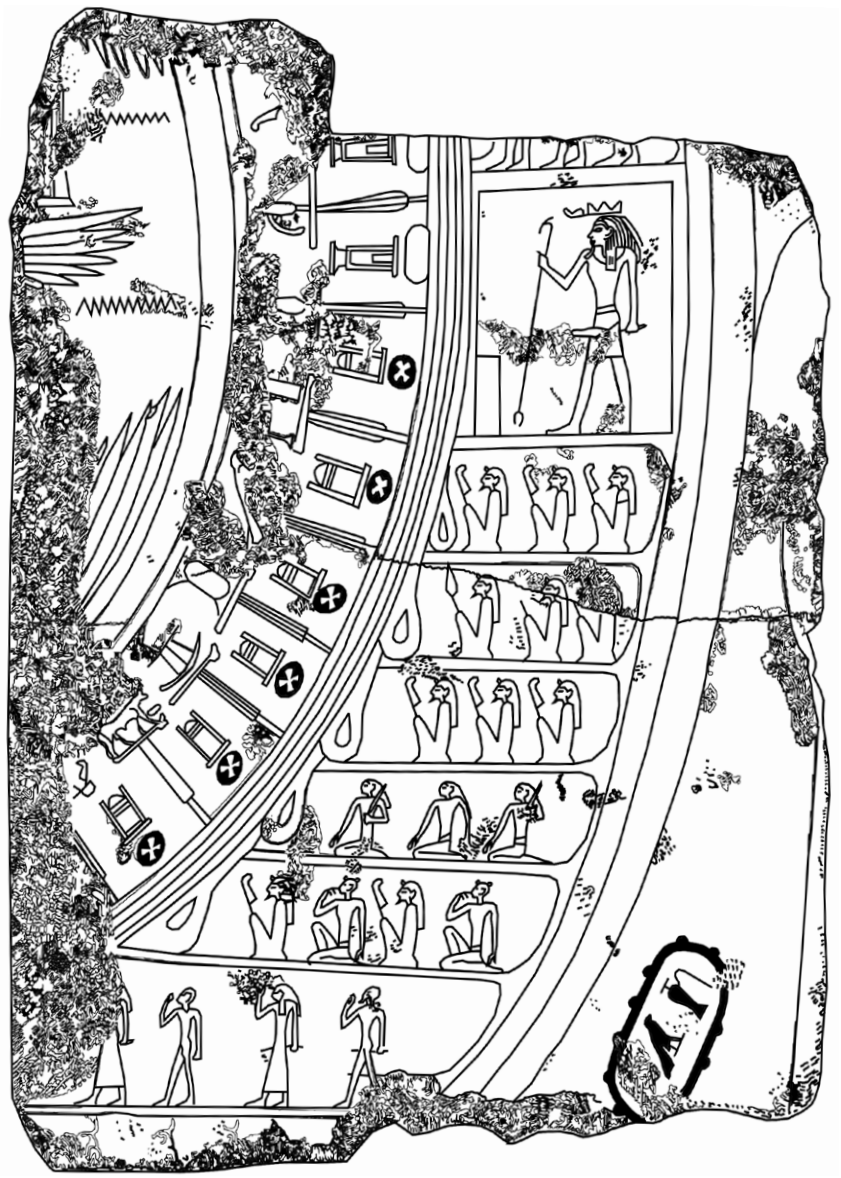


Fig. 2. Fragment of a map of the cosmos, Late Period. The Map Collection, Yale University Library *61. Drawing by S. Zago, after Clère 1958, p. 52, fig. 2.

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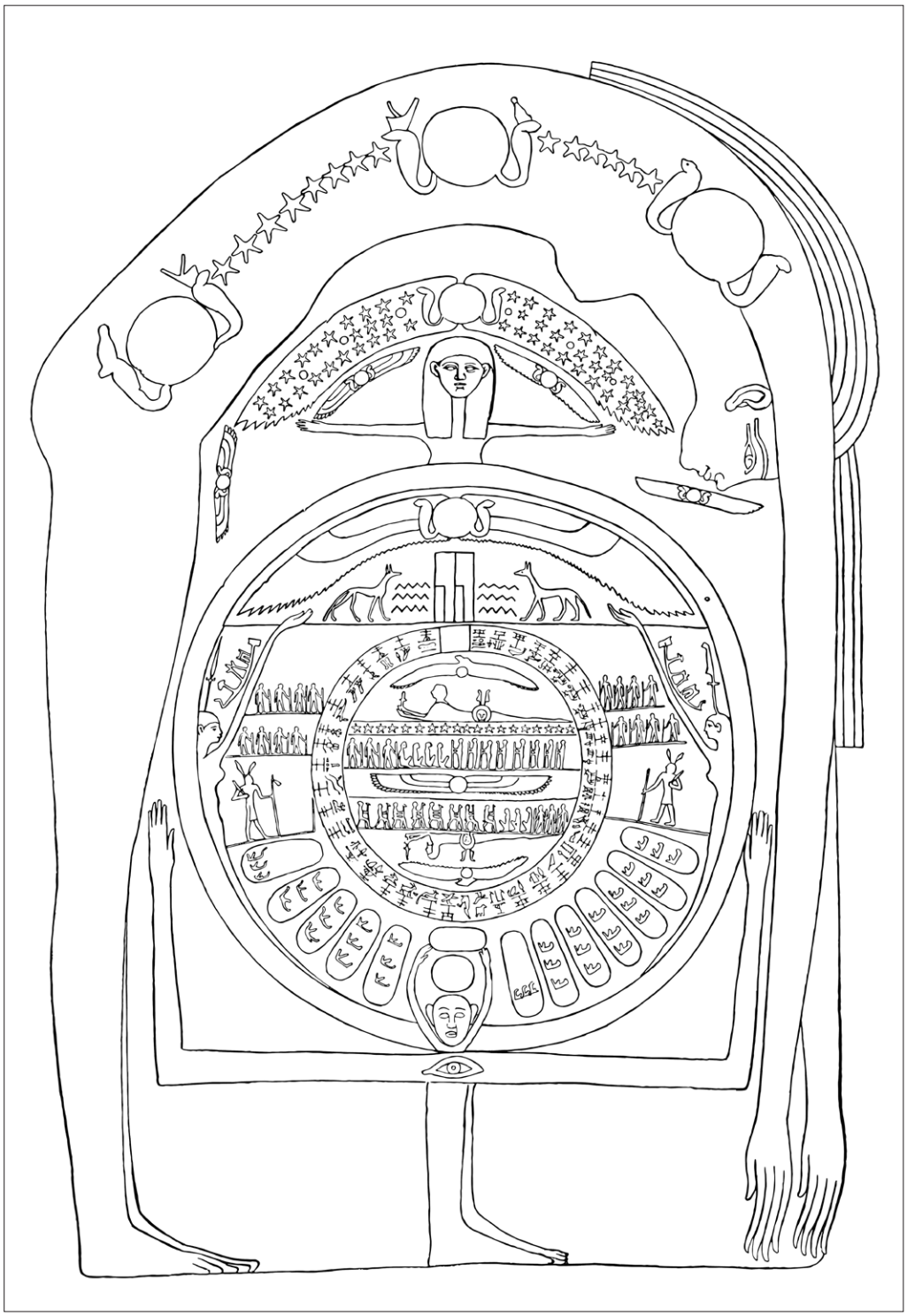


Fig. 3. Map of the cosmos from the lid of the sarcophagus of Wereshnefer (30th Dynasty). The Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.7.1b. Drawing by A. Urcia.

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