

COSMIC SPACE AND ARCHETYPAL TIME: DEPICTIONS OF THE SKY–GODDESS NUT IN THREE ROYAL TOMBS OF THE NEW KINGDOM AND HER RELATION TO THE MILKY WAY*

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ABSTRACT

Nut was considered the sky–goddess *par excellence* in ancient Egypt. Unlike other Mediterranean civilizations the sky was conceived as a female divinity by the Nile dwellers. She was thought of as an amniotic cocoon inside which the pharaohs would regain life and immortality in the hereafter. Hence, being perceived as a *Universal Mother* archetype, she would bestow rebirth in the afterlife to the dead kings, who were considered her children. In her virtual identification with the sarcophagus, Nut was considered a nursery and nurse, and was depicted inside sarcophagi and anthropoid coffins alike, stretching her body protectively over the corpse of the deceased. Joining with her would mean return to the womb of eternal space–time continuum and passing victoriously through immortality. The mural and ceiling paintings of the sky–goddess Nut in some royal tombs of the NK in the Valley of the Kings are renowned for their chromatic forms (mainly blue for the sky, golden yellow for the stars and red for the solar disc), as well as for their religiously aesthetic conceptions (cosmogony, theogony and their artistic liturgical expression). In this paper we discuss the relation between cosmic space and archetypal time, as those were viewed under the prism of ancient Egyptian mythological perceptions and were represented by the former depictions of Nut. The tombs of Pharaohs Ramesses IV, Ramesses VI and Ramesses IX are examined. The inherent cosmovisional symbolism, together with the mythological background of these paintings are discussed, in order to assess the relation between the creation of sacred space and the imaginary in ancient Egypt. Both of them dwell on the archetypal memories of the collective unconscious. Finally, a brief account is given of the probable identification of Nut with the Galaxy (Milky Way) by the Egyptians, where some points of an older paper by Arielle Kozloff are discussed with the deserved astronomical precision.

KEY WORDS: Nut, Sky–Goddess, Late Ramesside Tombs, Ramesses IV, Ramesses VI, Ramesses IX, *Books of Heaven (Book of Nut, Books of Day and Night)*, Conceptions of Time, Jungian Archetypes, Sky, Milky Way (Galaxy).

I. A BRIEF ACCOUNT ON THE MYTHOLOGY AND DIVINE PROPERTIES OF NUT

Unlike other nations in general¹ and the Chinese² in particular, ancient Egyptians were considering their sky–divinity as female in gender³. Actually, the Egyptian sky–goddess Nut⁴

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¹ *SYMBOLS*, 1996: 486.

² LOCHER, 2003: 3-6.

³ See for instance MARTINELLI, 1994: 61-80.

was one of the personifications of the cosmic elements evolved by the priesthood of Heliopolis in order to present a viable cosmovisional model of the Universe [see Fig. 1]. Nut (*Nw.t*) was the daughter of goddess Tefnut (*Tfnw.t*) personifying the primordial moisture, and of god Shu (*Šw*) personifying the luminiferous æther, hence the empty space of the atmosphere and light. Ancient Egyptians visualized her mainly as human in form, but she was also depicted as a divine bovine, namely a heavenly cow⁵, or even as a bee wielding great power over the gods⁶. The celestial goddess united with her brother and husband Geb (*Gb*), personifying the Earth, in a supesubstantial hierogamy [see Fig. 5], giving birth to four divine children, coupled in two pairs: Isis (*Is.t*) and Osiris (*Wsir*), Nephthys (*Nb.t-Hw.t*) and Seth (*Stḥ*), belonging all together to the Osirian mythological cycle, conceptualizing the principles of Kingship and Nature's periodical regeneration. Nut was also conceived as a personification of the Milky Way, stretching a glowing band of faint stars over the Earth, which is a principal feature of the firmament. In this aspect her symbolic depiction as a swimming girl holding a goose has to be understood as a virtual allusion to the Galaxy and Cygnus constellation, as they seem projected on the celestial sphere⁷. However, Nut is more frequently depicted as a young goddess arching her body over the Earth (represented by the recumbent god Geb), separated from him by Shu [see Fig. 1 & Fig. 2(A)]. Although the Egyptian iconographical customs were representing Nut stretching her body over the Earth, her arms and legs being depicted tightly together, the actual conception of her is that both her fingers and toes touch the four cardinal points on the horizon, thus conceptualizing the four pillars of heaven⁸ (*shn.wt n.t p.t 4*). The mythological separation⁹ of Nut and Geb by Shu, alluding to the appearance of more ordered cosmic structures, after the creation of the planetary system (cosmogony and relative myths), is the probable source of the Hellenic interpretation¹⁰ of the painful delivery of her divine babies. It was probably from the Egyptian idea that Nut swallowed the solar god and his entourage, in order to give them birth again next dawn, the notion arose that Geb became upset with his wife, for having eaten her children. In the cenotaph of Pharaoh Sety I at Abydos¹¹ Nut's swallowing of celestial deities was likened to a sow devouring her piglets.

The relationship between Nut and the solar god Rē' (*R'*) was an important feature of the celestial goddess' mythology¹²: Nut was devouring the solar disc daily at sunset, in order to give birth to him again the next dawn; meanwhile the Sun was crossing her body in his divine solar boat, illuminating the Earth; after his sunset he was bringing light to the realm of

⁴ For Nut, see mainly LÄ, IV, 1982, 535-41: art. «Nut»; LURKER, 1986, 90: art. «Nut»; HART, 1987, 143-47: art. «Nut»; POSENER, 1992, 192: art. «Nout»; BMD, 1996, 207-08: art. «Nut». For a thorough study, see BERGMAN, 1979: 53-69. Cf. also GRAPOW, 1924: 9, 24-28, especially 27, 32; HORNUNG, 1982: *passim*; LASKOWSKA-KUSZTAL, 1984: 82-88 (on the astral role of Opet–Nut); MEEKS & FAVARD–MEEKS, 1993: 166-72 & 283-89.

⁵ For the funerary synthesis known as the *Book of the Celestial Cow* and the concomitant mythology, see MAYSTRE, 1941: 53-115; PIANKOFF, 1977: 26-37 & 142-43; GUILHOU, 1984: 87-93; HORNUNG, 1999: 148-51.

⁶ HART, 1987: 143.

⁷ A first hint on this topic, although with some astronomical errors that we are going to discuss later in this paper (see § IV, *infra*), can be found in KOZLOFF, 1992: 331-48 & KOZLOFF, 1993: 169-76.

⁸ See for instance *Urk.*, IV, 620: 16, for a relevant reference on the *Poetical Stela* of Tuthmosis III.

⁹ For a thorough account, see TE VELDE, 1977: 161-70. Cf. also *CT*, II, 78: § 19.

¹⁰ Referred to by Ploutarchos (see *De Iside et Osiride*, 12: 355^D-356^A).

¹¹ FRANKFORT, 1933, I: 72-86 & II: pls. LXXXI-LXXXV. For the dramatic text in the cenotaph of Sety I, see also *EAT*, I, 1960: chap. 2 & tabs. 44-51. Additionally, Nut is depicted on the interior of the calcite sarcophagus box of Sety I (see for instance REEVES & WILKINSON, 1997: 137).

¹² See POSENER, 1992: 192.



FIGURE 1: Separation of the sky–goddess Nut (vaulting the heavens) from the earth god Geb (recumbent) by their father Shu, god of light, air and the atmosphere (who extends his arms to support the star–dashed body of the former). Various ram–headed genies are helping Shu and are also shown in an adoration gesture. Vignette from a later papyrus of the *Book of the Dead* of Djedkhonsuief'ankh (*Dd-Hnsw-^{iw}=f-nh*), kept at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (detail).

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the dead¹³, where he was fighting victoriously the chaotic forces, bringing life and light to the deceased. Hence, the symbolism of Nut as a funerary deity¹⁴ is also explicable and understandable in this mythological context, in terms of her vital relationship to the Sun. As a funerary deity she either: (i) represents the sarcophagus¹⁵, which is conceptualized as an amniotic cocoon that bears new virtual life into existence; or (ii) is considered as a tree–goddess¹⁶ that pours watery libations refreshing the deceased in the hereafter. In her role of cosmic divine *mater deorum hominumque*, she is the universal cradle for the resurrection after death, protecting, nursing and bearing the deceased humans, as can be seen by the texts and depictions of her with protective wings on numerous sarcophagi dating from various periods¹⁷. Additionally, in the *corpora* of various funerary texts¹⁸, like the *Pyramid Texts* the *Coffin Texts* and the *Book of the Dead*, Nut is said to be the enfolding and hugging mother of the deceased pharaoh, the union of whom to her (in «her name of the sarcophagus») denies euphemistically death, transferring the king's existence from the terrestrial mortal world to the celestial divine realm of gods, whose mother (*mw.t ntr.w*) was considered Nut. Thus, the sky–goddess was the allegorical virtual «ladder»¹⁹, transporting every deceased human from the *below* (*inferius*) to the *above* (*superius*). The depictions of Nut, following the general trends of the above mythological and cosmovisional ideas, can also be found in various temple ceilings²⁰ dating from the Ptolemaic Period, as well as in the ceilings of royal tombs of the New Kingdom, namely from certain tombs dating from the XX Dynasty situated in the Valley of the Kings (*Wādī Bibān 'el-Mulūk*) at Thebes West²¹. Usually, these tomb depictions are accompanied by the iconographical and textual representation of the solar journey through the Netherworld during the night, which forms the subject of various funerary compositions, like the *Book of Hours* and the *Book of Im-Dw3.t*, while the *Book of the Day*²², the *Book of the Night*²³ and the *Book of Nut*²⁴ are also very common contextual elements of these ceiling depictions.

¹³ See for instance PIANKOFF, 1934: 57–61.

¹⁴ For the funerary role of Nut, see RUSCH, 1922.

¹⁵ LURKER, 1986: 90.

¹⁶ For Nut as the sycamore–goddess and for tree–goddesses in general, see BUHL, 1947: 80–97.

¹⁷ See for instance: (i) the stone inscribed sarcophagus of Princess 'Ankhesneferibre' (*ḥh-ns-nfr-ib-Rḥ*), in SANDER–HANSEN, 1937; (ii) the elaborate sarcophagus of Irethoreru (*Ir.t-Hr-r-w*), in SADEK, 1990: 85–98; (iii) the Ptolemaic anthropoid coffins of Tjau (*T3w*) and Takheredmin (*T3-hrd-Mnw*), in MARAVELIA & KLADAKI–MANOLI, 2004, 5–20 (cf. NAM AIG 3342 & NAM AIG 3348).

¹⁸ See for instance, *PT*, 1: § 1; 6: § 4; 222: § 208; 427: § 777; 446: § 825; 447: §§ 834–36; 485: §§ 1025 ff; 588: §§ 1607–08; 690: §§ 2106–07; & c. See also *CT*, I, 44: § 191; *CT*, I, 60: § 248; *CT*, VI, 644: § 264; *CT*, VII, 792: § 3; *CT*, VII, 920: § 125; & c. *BD*: 15, 59, 181–82; & c. Cf. also ALTENMÜLLER, 1972. For some spatial properties of Nut in the *PT*, see BILLING, 2003: 129–36.

¹⁹ A theological conception that presumably has passed slightly changed in the Christian iconography (especially Orthodox and Coptic Churches), showing monks entering the heavenly paradise by mounting a colossal ladder, the *heavenly ladder* of John of Klimax [see for instance CORRIGAN, 1997: 376–77 & fig. 247 (front)]. The icon shows a procession of monks advancing prayerfully along a ladder, from Earth towards Heavens, which reminds Jacob's dream described in *Genesis*, xxviii: 11–13 (cf. 12: «Viditque in somnio scalam stantem super terram [...]»). For some selected literal Egyptian analogues, see *PT*, 271: § 390; *CT*, I, 62: § 270; *CT*, V, 470: § 399.

²⁰ See for instance, DAUMAS, 1951: 373–400.

²¹ See mainly *PM*, P. For an introduction to the Valley of the Kings, see HORNING, 1990a; REEVES & WILKINSON, 1997; SILIOTTI, 1999 (for a plan of the area with the positions of royal tombs, see *op. cit.*: 14–15). There are also wall representations of Nut, following the typology of other funerary goddesses, welcoming and purifying the deceased in the hereafter, like that in the burial chamber of Tut'ankhamūn (see for instance REEVES, 1990: 73).

²² See PIANKOFF, 1942; HORNING, 1999: 116–22.

²³ See PIANKOFF, 1942; HORNING, 1999: 122–35.

II. DEPICTIONS OF NUT IN THREE LATE RAMESSIDE TOMBS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

The Egyptians of Antiquity were painting the royal tombs, at the Valley of the Kings, with scenes of two discrepant myths about the disappearance of the sun at night. The tomb walls show the sun's journey through the Netherworld, while their ceilings depict the diurnal crossing of the firmament by Rē', hence reflect the mythical belief of his swallowing by Nut. The two versions of the path of the Sun were not regarded by Egyptians as contradictory, a fact which reflects their open–mindness in metaphysical perceptions and syncretic tendencies. These depictions, masterworks full of vivid colours and emanating a certain metaphysical aroma, were not conceived as aesthetically significant *per se*, although they do offer us a chromatic variety of high artistic standards. And this is because art with the later and/or modern term of the word was not the case for their creators. Art, in the sense in which is employed today did not exist in Egypt²⁵. If the ancient Egyptian was aware of «art», it could not have been above the consciousness of her/his religious experience, and that indeed was enough to encompass almost every human activity. This provides a first clue in understanding these depictions of the sky–goddess in the royal Egyptian tombs of Ramesses IV, Ramesses VI and Ramesses IX. All the three tombs were built during a period of decline and political upheaval, towards the end of Dynasty XX, when Egypt's glory started to fade, a fact which is visible (at least indirectly) in their architecture, as well as in the inclusion of pessimistic funerary texts in their decorative programme, like the *Book of Caverns*²⁶ for instance.

1. *The Tomb of Ramesses IV*. Ramesses IV (1163–1156 BCE) built his large but basically simplistic monument (KV 2), which was open since late Antiquity, in the Valley of the Kings²⁷. The decoration of this tomb [see Fig. 2(A) & 2(B)], with the beginning of which the *Books of Heavens* replace the older astronomical depictions on the vaulted ceiling, is virtually intact and reveals the original use of several elements. Decan lists appear at the sides, framing the twin figures of the sky–goddess Nut, stretched out as a canopy above the royal burial. The ceiling of the burial chamber is decorated with a twin representation of Nut. Her body is painted golden–yellow and the stars and decan names upon it are depicted in black. The solar disc is not depicted on the body of the goddess at all, with the exception of her vulva; it is also shown as a small winged scarab near her knees and as a huge winged scarab near her mouth. Instead, the names of decans are represented on the one part, and a double row of stars on the other part. Shu is shown supporting the celestial vault with upraised arms. Nekhbet, heraldic goddess of Upper Egypt is also depicted upon a *nb*-hieroglyph towards the rear part of Nut and near her thighs. The background is painted dark sky–blue, with golden–yellow vertical lines forming a frame, presumably alluding to the primeval marsh of creation. It is here that the mystery of daily creation and regeneration of the deceased pharaoh would take place and his assimilation to the Sun; it is here that the mystery of the diurnal cosmic convergence of magic forces would repeat the creation of the Universe *in perpetuum*. The decans, keepers of time and of its calculation, are depicted as anthropomorphic stellar divinities

²⁴ For a complete edition with commentaries and translation, see *EAT*, I, 1960: chap. 2 & tabs. 44–51; cf. also HORNUNG, 1999: 113–16. For the nocturnal journey of the solar god and Nut, see PIANKOFF, 1934: 57–61.

²⁵ ALDRED, ²1988: 11.

²⁶ Beginning with the tomb of Ramesses IV (see REEVES & WILKINSON, ²1997: 163; HORNUNG, 1999: 83).

²⁷ See *PM*, I², 497–500: KV 2. See also REEVES & WILKINSON, ²1997: 162–63. For an epigraphic documentation, see HORNUNG, 1990b.

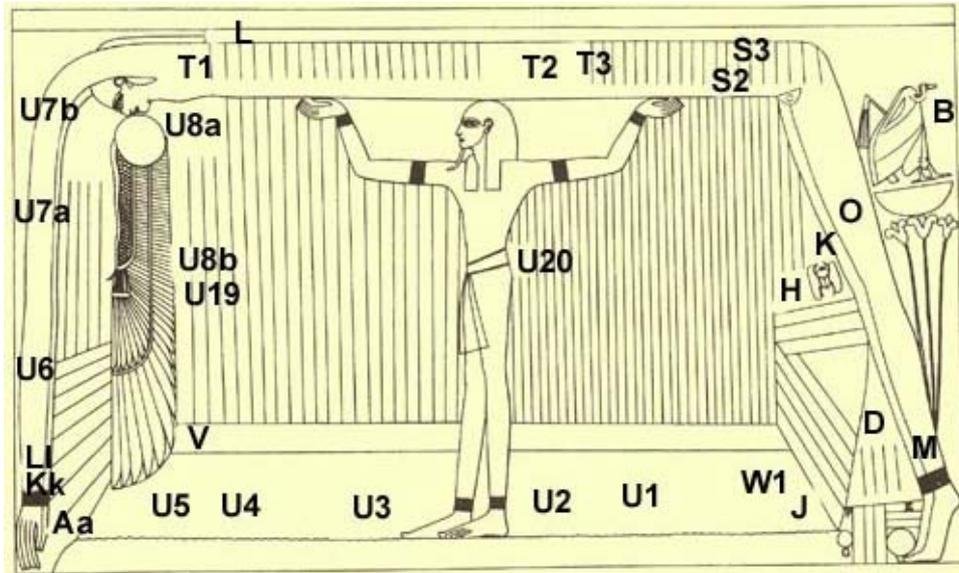


FIGURE 2(A): The depiction of Nut and the support of the celestial vault by Shu, found in the tomb of Ramesses IV (KV2, Ceiling of Hall E). Adapted linear drawing, showing the cosmovisional text studied in *EAT*, I, 36 ff (cf. fig. 21), marked with Latin letters for reasons of classification.

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FIGURE 2(B): Detail of the same scene, showing the hinder part of Nut and the upper part of Shu, as well as part of the text (*Book of Nut* and *Book of the Night*). Shown also is the catoptric depiction of the hinder part of the sky–goddess bearing stars. The hieroglyphic names of Sōthis (Sirius) and Sah (Orion) are shown near the *anus* and the pubic area of the goddess. Note the vivid colours: golden yellow for Nut’s body, alluding to the solar light; and sky–blue for the background, alluding to the primeval watery ocean (Nun), virtual source of energy and creation.

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(golden–yellow on a dark sky–blue background), assisting the sky–goddess in her cosmic role of safeguarding the Sun and maintaining order in the Cosmos.

2. *The Tomb of Ramesses VI.* Ramesses VI (1151-1143 BCE) built a splendid tomb (KV 9), which was open since late Antiquity, in the Valley of the Kings²⁸. In this tomb the *Book of the Earth* occurs for the first time, while the astronomical ceiling combines images from the *Book of the Day* and the *Book of the Night*, together with the outstretched diurnal and nocturnal figures of Nut [see Fig. 3(A)]. Here we can find a detailed representation on the ceiling of the sarcophagus chamber. Nut is painted twice on a colossal scale, depicting the day and the night sky [see Fig. 3(A) & Fig. 3(B)]. The body of Nut is painted golden–yellow, and her facial characteristics and hair are depicted black, as well as the stars on her body. The solar disc is painted in red. The solar god sails in his barge along the exaggeratingly elongated body of Nut until evening, when the solar disc approaches the mouth of the heavenly goddess to be swallowed, being depicted bigger near her mouth. A multitude of stars are also depicted flanking the diurnal course of the sun. The sun travels safely with the stars through the hours of the night inside the body of the goddess. At dawn, the red glow of which was called the *Daughter of Nut* by the Egyptians (*z3.t Nw.t*), the solar disc emerges anew as a winged scarab from her vulva to bring light and the promise of regeneration to the world. The background is depicted in dark blue, bearing on both sides astral deities and decans painted in golden–yellow, together with numerous columns of hieroglyphic inscriptions. The imagery operates at differing levels, showing the sun as a disc being swallowed and reborn from the womb of the goddess, and as a god in the solar barque sailing upon the heavenly waters of the firmament.

3. *The Tomb of Ramesses IX.* Ramesses IX (1131-1112 BCE) built his monument for eternity (KV 6), which was also open since late Antiquity, in the Valley of the Kings²⁹. The decorative programme of this tomb follows that established by Ramesses VI with some notable exceptions. On the ceiling of the burial chamber the *Book of the Day* and the *Book of the Night* are depicted in abbreviated versions. Here we have another double representation of Nut, personification of the celestial vault and *Mother of the Sun* (*Mw.t R^c*), going along the major architectural axis of the burial chamber [see Fig. 4]. Nut is depicted in pale yellow and the solar disc on her body in the usual red colour. Faded stars are represented on the body of the goddess, but the solar disc is painted on both the daily and the nightly heavens. The background is painted dark blue and bears in both sides the processions of heavenly divinities and astral deities, decans and the like, depicted in golden–yellow. In this instance, the face of Nut does not appear so strict and stylized as in the previous two cases, but one can perceive an upcoming discreet smile, pertaining to the allusion of metaphysical elation. Alternatively, it could also allude to the hidden joy of the goddess, as she is preparing to virtually engulf the Sun, in order to nurse and protect him during the dark hours of the night, until his next glorious rising. As is also the case in the previous two instances, here the faces of the goddess are depicted as slightly different for her diurnal and her nocturnal aspects.

²⁸ See *PM*, I², 511-17: KV 9. See also REEVES & WILKINSON, ²1997: 164-65; cf. also *ASAE*, 18, 1919: 270-74. For a wall documentation, see PIANKOFF & RAMBOVA, 1954. See also SILIOTTI, ⁴1999: 64-67.

²⁹ See *PM*, I², 501-05: KV 6. See also REEVES & WILKINSON, ²1997: 168-70; cf. also *ASAE*, 18, 1919: 270-74. For a wall documentation see GUILMANT, 1907. See also SILIOTTI, ⁴1999: 68-69.



FIGURE 3 (A): Aspect of a wall and part of the ceiling of the burial chamber at the tomb of Ramesses VI (KV9). The *Book of the Earth* is depicted on the wall, showing the solar disc rising gloriously, flanked by 12 stars (alluding to the nightly hours) and twelve small suns (alluding to the day hours), symbolising the passing of time. On the ceiling, parts of Nut's body and her head are visible in catoptric symmetry: on the left is shown the *Book of the Day*; on the right the *Book of the Night* is depicted. Various decans and other stellar divinities flank the goddess' body. Note the sky vault painted in dark–blue, alluding to the night sky; and the body of the heavenly goddess painted in golden–yellow, alluding to a solar symbolism; the solar disc is always depicted either red or dark–red.
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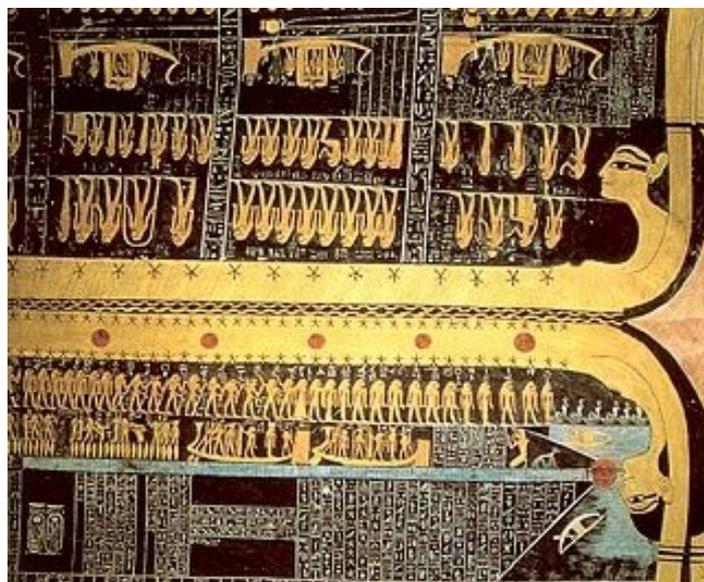


FIGURE 3 (B) Aspect of the ceiling of the burial chamber at the tomb of Ramesses VI (KV9). Nut's upper part of the body and her head are visible in catoptric symmetry: on the lower register is shown the *Book of the Day*; on the upper register the *Book of the Night* is depicted. The daily course of the solar god Rē is symbolically represented, as he is born from the divine *uterus* every morning at dawn, and is engulfed by the numinous mouth every afternoon at sunset. During the night the body of Nut bears the stellar divinities, who ferry across the firmament's expanses in divine heavenly boats.
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III. COSMIC SPACE AND ARCHETYPAL TIME: A CONTINUUM OF COSMOVISIONAL JUNGIAN SYMBOLISM

Heaven has been deservedly considered as a direct manifestation of transcendence, divine power, sacrality and everlastingness, which no terrestrial being could attain³⁰. The whole nature of the sky is an inexhaustible hierophany³¹, and subsequently everything that happens in the celestial expanses, especially the periodical and harmonious revolution of the stars and planets, directly connected to the measurement and intercalation of time (as well as to calendrical observances), constitute moments of this virtual epiphany. Heaven is the universal symbol of cosmic order and unfathomable space, revealed in the regular rotational motion and rhythms of the celestial bodies, hidden in the idea of invisible orders of existence that are superior to the phenomenal world, amalgamating the supersubstantial divine and the profane human orders³². Thus, the sky defines two distinct virtual entities: the *cosmic space* and the *archetypal time*.

Nut is a universal goddess, the equivalent of Isis, as a post mortem *mater lactans*; and of Hathor in her cosmic hypostasis, as directly related to the solar god [for the latter was his daughter (*filia solis*)]. She keeps the malevolent chaotic forces from breaking through the sky and devouring the world, thus contributing towards the celestial harmony and helping Ma'at in her cosmic role. Her body is the firmament, the celestial vault, the sky and the Galaxy (see § IV, *infra*). It divides the Cosmos, created in the very beginning (*zp tpy*) by Rē'–Atum according to his rules of universal harmony, from the amorphous, achromous, dark and infinite primeval matter, the merging with which should be tantamount to non–existence and catastrophe. It also divides the visible from the invisible celestial hemisphere, the high from the low. How Nut was maintaining this equilibrium was not examined by the Egyptians, who were always remaining on symbolic and allegorical explanations of the cosmic essence, and who considered this as a divine unfathomable and incomprehensible fact, summed up by the epithet *mysterious/secret* (*št3y.t*) attributed to their sky–goddess³³. The inherent cosmovisional symbolism, together with the mythological background of the paintings briefly presented above will be now discussed and commented.

Let us briefly assess the relation between the creation of sacred space and the imaginary in ancient Egypt, based on these depictions of the heavenly goddess. Nut, archetypal image of the devouring female, is also a source of life and regeneration. Not only she takes but also gives back life in a periodical repetitive eternal cycle, alluding to the human biological cycle as well as to the cosmic phenomena. She defines a virtual *space–time continuum*, which constitutes the scenery for cosmic activities. Sacred space becomes cosmic space and infinite time becomes archetypal time in the context of her representations. A unity of spatial and temporal dimensions is thought to take place in a miraculous manner, conceptualizing the affinity of celestial phenomena to the life of humans. The above becomes below, the high meets the low, the divine visits the human, the perpetual is unified to the mortal (and vice versa), in an irresistible alloy of harmony testified by these depictions. The conception of the sky as a female divinity agrees with the ancient Egyptian *forma mentis* and the modes of thought of ancient theologians, whose environment hinted to these conceptions. Thus, her soft, fluid and

³⁰ *SYMBOLS*, 1996: 484. For a brief synopsis of the celestial symbolism, see *op. cit.*: 484–89.

³¹ ELIADE, 1958: 39–40, *passim*.

³² For this hierogamic synthesis of the opposites (Over/Below, Sky/Earth, Female/Male), see *Tabula Smaragdina*, 8: «Ascendit a terra in coelum, iterumque descendit in terram»; see also *op. cit.*, 2: «Quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius» and cf. Hērakleitos, *Fragmenta*, 60: «ὀδὸς ἄνω κάτω, μία καὶ ὀυτὴ».

³³ HART, 1987: 146. For the root *št3*, see *Wb.*, IV: 551 ff [especially 553, I: (e)] & cf. *Urk.*, V, 55: 10.

variable characteristics as a goddess —a plausible archetypal projection of the terrestrial river’s fluidity onto the celestial sphere, where the Galaxy was considered by several ancient nations as a heavenly river³⁴— are comprehensible and justified. It is like time has stopped, when one looks Nut’s representations in the three royal tombs studied here. The pause of time means *eternity* (*dt*) and *everlastingness* (*nḥḥ*); both of these notions³⁵ being strongly connected to the afterlife beliefs of ancient Egyptians and their expected resurrection. The pause of time flow, relatively and subjectively meant for the deceased humans as the end of their (life)time could also well be interpreted in terms of their virtual unification to the eternal stop of time flow. Hence, if we think in metaphysical terms, this would mean their incorporation into the Great Beyond, the Divine Essence, which is found and meant out of any cosmic dimension and comprehension, transcendentally existing into everlastingness, out of space and out of time (*non cum tempore*). These (and several other) Egyptian tombs were thought of as virtual small universes, tiny cosmic theatres of unfathomable semantics and birth mansions for eternity. Nut plays a considerably important role towards this symbolism in her depictions as the sky vault, hosting the course of the Sun and of stellar bodies. It is there —on her body— that the cosmic activities take place. It is there —on her divine limbs— that the periodical changes of the firmament with its constellations, Sun, Moon and planets are dramatized and conceived as virtually significant for the terrestrial life and for humans. Day and night, space and time, good and evil, order and chaos are virtually fighting in an allegorical battle (*ὑσμίνη*), which keeps the Universe in life and sustains the Cosmos. Hence, the liturgical (and also aesthetically significant) creation of sacred space, corresponds to the consequent creation of a holy archetypal time, a time of cosmic symbolism that governs the plethora of periodic astronomical phenomena. Nut becomes the recipient of heavenly bodies, hence metaphorically of terrestrial beings *post mortem*. She constitutes the divine receptacle and fountain of both time and space, underlying in their fundamental unity as categories of the *space–time continuum*. The relation between cosmic space and archetypal time is certainly based on the semantics of heaven as an all–encompassing and global hypersphere, where time is defined by the periodical motion of the stars, Sun, Moon and planets, inherent to the firmament and its «miracles» that astonished the ancient nations. There is a significant relation of unity, clearly shown, in the examined depictions of Nut.

Space constitutes the scenery for the motion of cosmic bodies that generates the conception of time as an all–pervading parametre of continuous change. Time consists of the measure of transformation that happens in Nature, thus constitutes the virtual generator of space. All these notions are better understood on the basis of the Jungian approach of archetypes³⁶ and their quasi–existence in the collective unconscious and the underlying mythological patterns³⁷ that govern it. Female heavenly archetypes, like Nut, are symbols of a subconscious transformation³⁸, pertaining to the junction of a dream world to the real world of life;

³⁴ See ALLEN, ²1963: 474 ff. In Egypt, the correlation of Nut, the Galaxy and the Great Flood (*Mhy.t-Wr.t*) has been already discussed (see ALLEN, 1988: 19; KOZLOFF, 1993: 173). For the Copts the Milky Way was called ΠΑΡΩΤ ΝΤΕ ΠΑΡΩΖ (cf. ALLEN, ²1963: 481; CRUM, 1939: 453b, citing KIRCHER, A.: *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta*, Roma 1643: 50).

³⁵ For the notions of *eternity* and *everlastingness* in the ancient Egyptian thought, see for instance BAKIR, 1953: 110–11; BAKIR, 1974: 252–54; ALLEN, 1988: 26–27.

³⁶ See JUNG, 1959.

³⁷ See JUNG & KERÉNYI, ²1963.

³⁸ See for instance JUNG, 1956.



FIGURE 4: Aspect of the ceiling of the burial chamber at the tomb of Ramesses IX (KV6), showing the sky-goddess and parts of the *Book of the Night* with various decans and star gods. Nut, bearing a ceremonial wig and eye kohl, is depicted just before eating the sun, whose red disc is shown travelling on her golden and pale-yellow body. Note again the catoptric symmetry, possibly symbolic of the equilibrium between the opposing natural forces; observe also the extraordinary way that her head emerges from her extended body.

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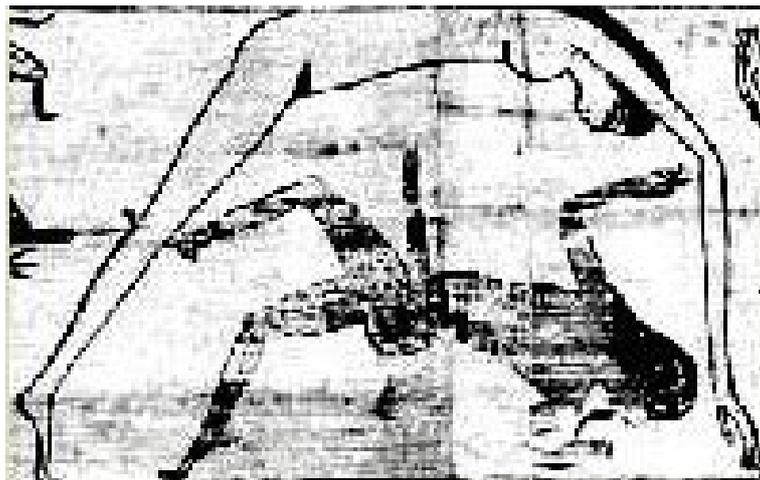


FIGURE 5: The *coitio divina* between the heavenly Nut and the earthly Geb, which gave birth to the final pairs of divinities, according to the Heliopolitan theogony: Isis and Osiris; Nephthys and Seth. Archetypal representation of a divine pair, creating new divinities/personifications of natural elements. Depiction from a TIP papyrus (*pBM 10008*) at the British Museum (detail).

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powerful *signifiants* that were considered detrimental to the fear of death and perishing. Their relation to the heavenly abodes is evident, when one realizes that the underlying assumption was the following: as the firmament –personified by Nut– was immutable and eternal, ever-existent and immortal, so the fate of the just and pure humans would be the same after their death. Nut, archetype of devouring and protecting *Universal Mother*, would thus safeguard their rebirth and transfiguration into *beatified spirits* (*3h.w*), closely connected to the realm of *stars* (*sb3.w*), which were considered as her numerous children being also related to the conception of the Milky Way whose name was also *Thousands are her Souls/Spirits* (*h3 b3=s / h3 3h=s*)³⁹. Joining with her would mean return to the womb of eternal space–time continuum and passing victoriously through immortality. Hence, the sky would become a nursery for the deceased⁴⁰, initially for the king and later on for the nobles and the laypersons.

Some comparisons with modern cosmological and astrophysical theories –*mutatis mutandis*– will now be given, denoting that this is done only for epistemological reasons and in no way does it mean that the ancient Egyptians were aware of any advanced mathematical knowledge, since they never detached themselves from practical methods and were never cultivating pure Science *per se*⁴¹. In modern Astrophysics time seems to freeze at the event horizon of a black hole, where light signals become motionless and clocks stop to count time⁴². From this aspect, black holes (as material future mathematical singularities) in the four dimensional spacetime are bizarre or maybe magnificent objects, stellar corpses of high mass stars that collapsed under the trigger of their own gravity. In M–Theory and the p–branes’ context they may appear as non–dimensionless (extended) objects on a multi–dimensional space of some hidden or condensed dimensions⁴³, alluding to a parallel although invisible state of existence in the *space–time continuum*. The pause of time flow, or allegorically the passage into another world is an intriguing theme, which is not only discussed in modern scientific theories concerned with black holes (like Quantum Gravity and General Relativity), but was also haunting the Egyptians of Antiquity whose religious and funerary observances were focused towards gaining immortality and entering eternal life. Thus, the pause of time or the incorporation of the deceased into the cosmic flow of time is well attested in the depictions of Nut studied here. These testify the harmonious amalgamation of both heavenly and terrestrial elements, making of Nut the convergence point of the ephemeral and the eternal.

IV. NUT AND THE (MILKY WAY) GALAXY

Let us briefly assess the relation of Nut to the Milky Way. This issue has been discussed by Arielle Kozloff in two papers. In the first one⁴⁴ she discussed the celestial archetypal symbolism of the *swimming girl type spoons* to Nut and she gave a brief account of the possible conception of Nut by the Egyptians as identical to the luminous stellar band of the Milky Way. In her second paper⁴⁵ Dr Kozloff extended her initial thoughts and discussed the very conce-

³⁹ Between several instances we point out two: (i) *CT*, VI, 507: § 93; and (ii) *sBM 101* [the stele of Nebipusesostris (*Nb=i-pw-S-n-Wsr.t*)], for which see BLACKMAN, 1935: 1-9 & pl. 1. Cf. also *Wb.*, III: 220.

⁴⁰ Dr Roth has correctly shown the symbolic interconnection of the *opening of the mouth* ceremony to the medical practices used for newly born babies, as well as its astral connotation (see ROTH, 1992; ROTH, 1993).

⁴¹ NEUGEBAUER, 1975: 559.

⁴² See for instance HAWKING, 1988: chap. 6-7, *passim*.

⁴³ See for example HAWKING, 2001: 193.

⁴⁴ See KOZLOFF, 1992: 331-48.

⁴⁵ See KOZLOFF, 1993: 169-76.

ption of Nut as identical to our Galaxy. We should like to comment on some erroneous points of her papers, with which otherwise we generally agree and consider as useful efforts.

In p. 336 of her initial paper the author refers to the *precession and «mutation»* of the terrestrial axis of rotation. We should like to point out that the correct term is not *mutation* (which refers to the science of Biology, and describes the stimulated cellular transformations after exposure to radioactivity or carcinogenic factors), but *nutation* (which refers to the periodical wobbling of the terrestrial axis of rotation, due mainly to the strong tidal action of the Moon and secondarily of the Sun upon the Earth). Nutation⁴⁶ is the result of superposition of the periodic oscillations (of short period and of weak amplitudes), causing perturbation to the motion of the Earth around itself, as explained by the three body theory of motion in a gravitational field (namely Sun, Earth and Moon). Because of nutation, the resulting pattern of the virtual shape drawn on the celestial sphere due to precession by the projection of the imaginary extension of the terrestrial axis onto the celestial sphere is not circular but wavy circular, hence the celestial pole oscillates $\pm 9''$ with a period of 18.6 years. The centre of the imaginary circle is the North Pole of the Ecliptic. The same error is found in her n. 35 in p. 342, where she also comments on Neugebauer's & Parker's *EAT*⁴⁷. Let it be noted that it was not the main purpose of the late eminent scholars (who offered Egyptology a monumental study on the Egyptian astronomical texts) to identify constellations or study the relation of Nut to various celestial phenomena or astral configurations. In the same note, we point out her omission to pinpoint the discovery, first scientific study and mathematical account of precession to the Greek Astronomer Hipparchos⁴⁸ (c. 130 BCE). In p. 337 of Dr Kozloff's initial paper, there are some more points that deserve further discussion: (i) We don't understand on what grounds she confounds the *nightly solar bark*⁴⁹ (*msk.ti*) to the expression *Milky Way* (?) / *Street of Stars* (?)⁵⁰ [*msk.t(-shd.w)*], which could be probably identical to the Milky Way, although we agree with her main point that Nut has to be identified to the Milky Way *too*, as she was personifying *both* the celestial vault (*p.t*, *pd.t*, *hr.t*) *and* the Galaxy; (ii) Although we consider her Figure XI.8 at the same page as showing the general trend that the main star and dust zones of the Milky Way had on the sky during Antiquity, we cannot be sure of its accuracy, a fact which is not discussed (as it should deserve to be in such a study) in her n. 35 (see p. 342). We think that (contra Neugebauer & Parker⁵¹) the text of *pCarlsberg I* does not prove unequivocally that *msk.t* is not the Milky Way. In our Fig. 6(B), where East and West almost apparently coincide with its «begining» and «end» on the horizon, it is obvious that it could *also* be considered as an entrance/exit (respectively) to Hades (*Dw3.t*). We think that the correct meaning of the text (ll. 4-6) is that some stars rise at the same point as the Sun, very near the Milky Way on the horizon, wherefrom they seem to be revived. Finally, accepting that the Milky Way was considered as another form of Nut seems a useful working hypothesis.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, SMART, ⁶1980: 231 ff.

⁴⁷ NEUGEBAUER & PARKER, 1960-69.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, DREYER, ²1953: 202-03, for Hipparchos' comparisons of Timocharis' star's coordinates dating 150 years earlier than his era with the ones obtained from his own observations.

⁴⁹ *Wb.*, II: 150 & *CD*: 118. See for instance *Urk.*, IV, 366: 6 & 1549: 4; *BD*, 125; & c. See also JONES, 1995: 14, 35 & LURKER, ⁴1986, 113: art. «Solar Barque». For the correct etymology, see also QUIRKE, 2001: 46.

⁵⁰ *Wb.*, II: 149 & *CD*: 118. See for instance *PT*, 254: § 279; *PT*, 262: § 334; *PT*, 475: § 949; *CT*, III, 198: § 376; *CT*, IV, 335: §§ 324-25; *CT*, IV, 336: § 330, *CT*, V, 383: § 45; *CT*, V, 395: § 70; *CT*, V, 404: § 198; *CT*, VI, 619: § 231; *CT*, VI, 622: § 236; *CT*, VI, 782: § 412; *CT*, VII, 789: § 2; *BD*, 17; *BD*, 66; *BD*, 72; *BD*, 99; *BD*, 176; *Urk.*, V, 79: 17; & c. Cf. also *LÄ*, I, 1975, 511: # 1. Note also a use of *shd.w* with taxogram N1 as an equivalent to *p.t* (see *Wb.*, IV: 224, # 14).

⁵¹ Cf. *EAT*, I: 50 & nn. 4-6. This text describes a certain astronomical configuration and *not* what always happens.

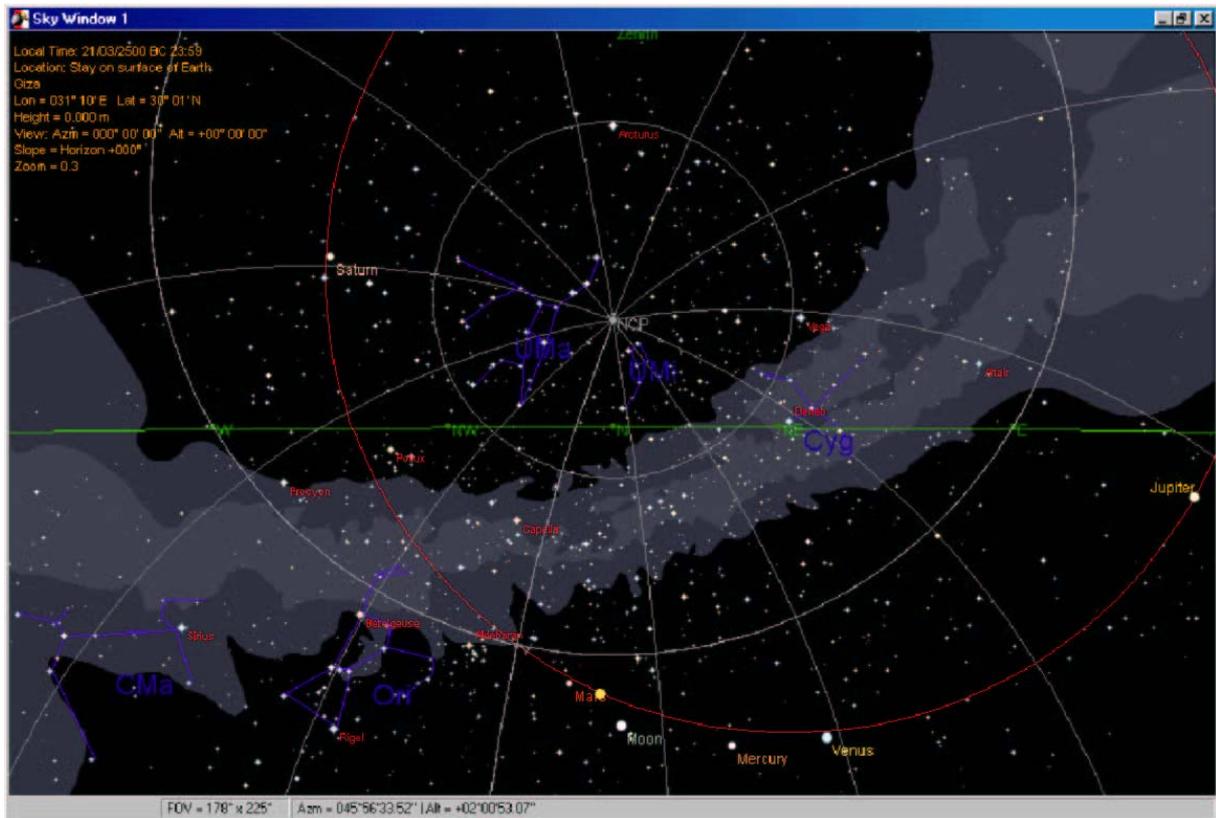


FIGURE 6 (A): Mapping of the Milky Way and the relation of its position on the celestial sphere to the constellations of *Orion*, *Cygnus*, *Ursa Major* and *Ursa Minor* (as these are conceived today and do not necessarily coincide with their ancient conception by the Egyptians) for the year 2500 BCE. The grey-shaded area features the accurate characteristics of the Milky Way as they were projected on the corresponding celestial area during that remote astronomical epoch, after corrections for precession, nutation, & c. have been applied. We have also superposed a network of celestial coordinates, as well as the proper names of the stars down to an apparent visual magnitude of + 6^m.0, which comprises all the stars visible to the naked eye. Here we present the celestial configuration on 21-III-2500 BCE (JD = 0808378.37431) at 23:59' local time, as seen from Giza ($\lambda = 31^{\circ}10' E$, $\phi = 30^{\circ}01' N$).

To be compared with Kozloff's figure 4 (see KOZLOFF, 1993: 175).

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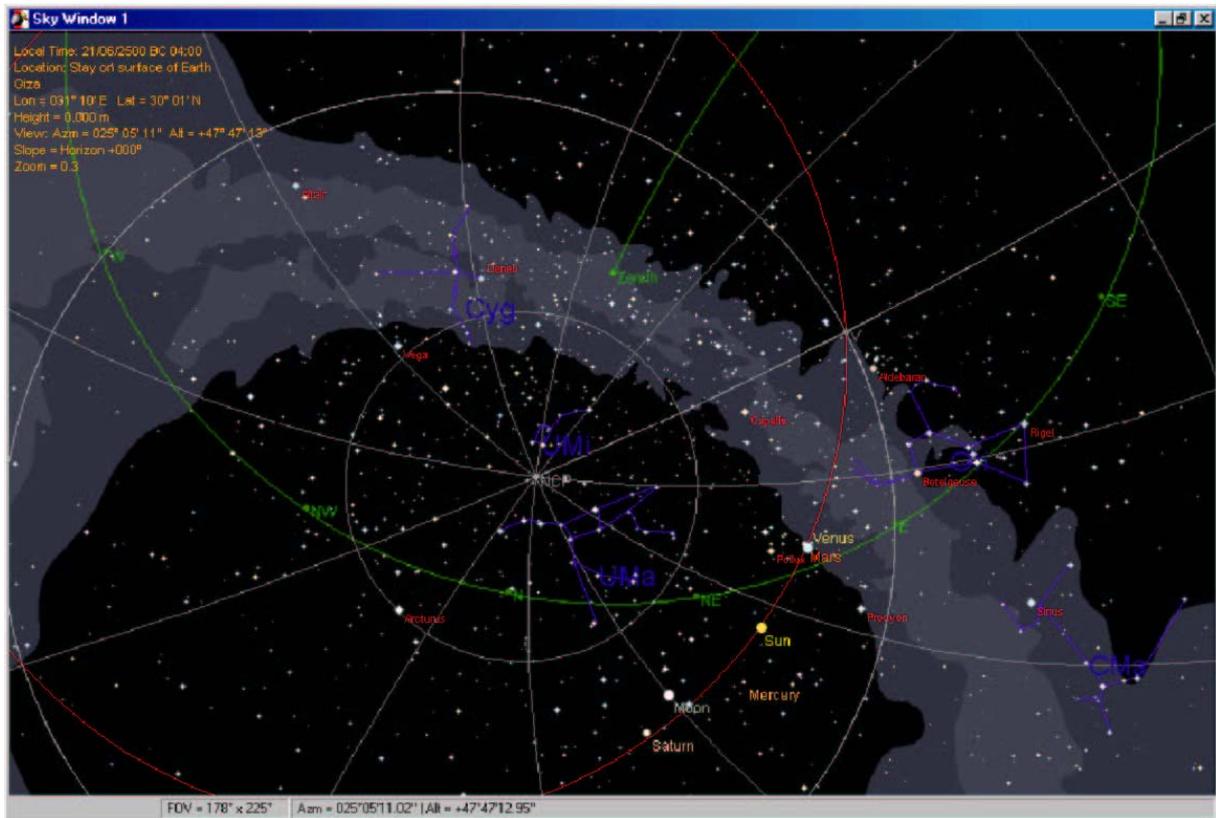


FIGURE 6(B): Mapping of the Milky Way and the relation of its position on the celestial sphere to certain constellations, same as in the previous figure. We note that neither this nor the previous figure take into account the calendar conversion from Gregorian to Julian, as it is not significant for our study. The Ecliptic in both figures is shown as the imaginary line where the planets and the Moon are concentrated; it intersects the Milky Way but does not coincide with it. Here we present the celestial configuration on 21-VI-2500 BCE (JD = 0808469.54167) at 04:00' local time, as seen from Giza. To be compared with Kozloff's figure 5 (see KOZLOFF, 1993: 175), from which it is definitely different.
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In p. 170 of her second paper Arielle Kozloff refers again to the work of Neugebauer & Parker, although we think it was irrelevant to do so (see previous paragraph, *supra*). In the caption of her figure 2 at p. 171 she uses the inexistent word «lunipolar», instead of the correct word *luni–solar*, in order to characterize the precession of Equinoxes. In p. 172 she considers the representation of Nut on the lids of the MK coffins featuring the *diagonal star clocks* always between *Ursa Major* (*Mshtyw*) and *Orion* (*S3h*) as significant; although this seems a good guess, unfortunately it cannot be explicitly proved if it was deliberately made by the Egyptians. We used a highly accurate modern astronomical software⁵², in order to reconstruct ancient skies during c. 2500 BCE, and show the relative positions of the Milky Way, Orion and the Great Bear [see our Fig. 6(A) & Fig. 6(B)], just to compare with Dr Kozloff's figures 3-6, which are too undetailed and even gross, not to take into account their inaccuracy (cf. her remark in p. 176 on modern technology used by planetaria, which is not accompanied as it should be by even a short comment on the specific accuracy of the programme to obtain her figures 3-6). For instance the projected angular distance on the celestial sphere between the Milky Way and *Ursa Major* is considerably significant (~40° from α -*UMA*), while Dr Kozloff in her figures 4 and 5 (see p. 175) presents this constellation as «touching» the outskirts of the Milky Way. And again, on the same figures, she does not consider the fact that Orion and the Milky Way were projected as «touching» each other during that remote era. The actual and astronomically correct shape of the Milky Way is that presented in our figures. As for the relation of Cygnus to the Milky Way, we have already presented it in a former paper and briefly commented on it⁵³, anticipating on the inaccuracy of figure 6 by Dr Kozloff. In p. 173 of her second paper Kozloff erroneously refers again to the supposed identification of the *nightly solar bark* to *msk.t*, as we already commented in the previous paragraph. Her opinion at the same page «I would suggest that the Milky Way was the celestial form of Nut» has to be transformed as: «[...] the Milky Way was one of the celestial forms of Nut» (the other being the celestial vault itself). Finally let us point out that the Sun (as apparently seen from the Earth due to the synthesis of motions of our planet and the Sun, as well as due to projection effects) was just apparently crossing the Milky Way at certain times of the year [as can be seen in our Fig. 6(A) & Fig 6(B)], but it was never moving all the time upon the Milky Way. The Ecliptic was never coinciding with the Milky Way during the ancient Egyptian history. Of course the sunset near West and the sunrise near East, close to the Milky Way, could plausibly lead to the archetypal myth of Rē' being daily engulfed by Nut in the evening and consequently being reborn during the next morning from the Netherworld.

Let us note once more that basically we agree with Dr Kozloff. May we also point out that Egyptologists dealing with astronomical terms should seek collaboration with Astronomers, especially scholars that have studied both Astronomy and Egyptology, and are more relevant in this fascinating interdisciplinary field of modern research.

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⁵² See *REDSHIFT* 4, 2000; see also *REDSHIFT* 2, 31995. For a discussion on its excellent precision see MARAVELIA, 2003: 55-74, especially 62: n. 56.

⁵³ See MARAVELIA, 2003: 59, Fig. 1.

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