

The Manifestations of the Sky in Ancient Egypt in Light of the Literature of Story and Mythology

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Abstract: This research addresses one of the cosmic phenomena that had a significant impact on ancient Egyptian thought, which is the sky, Nut (nut). The sky was linked to the first creation, and it was considered the source of goodness for the people of Egypt. From it, rain descended, and on its body appeared the sun, the moon, and the stars. It was also the dwelling place of the gods who govern the affairs of the universe and nature. Due to its importance, intellectuals in ancient Egypt wrote about the sky and reflected its manifestations in the literature of stories and myths. In this research, we will attempt to shed light on this type of literature, focusing on how the manifestations of the sky were employed in the literature of mythology and storytelling.

Keywords: (Mythology, Osiris, Story)

First: The Sky in Mythology

1. Creation Myths

The sky¹ is considered one of the most prominent cosmic phenomena that influenced ancient Egyptian thought. It was closely tied to the first creation process. The ancient Egyptians began to contemplate the features of the surrounding universe through their daily observations. Therefore, the universe was divided into three sections: (the sky, the earth, and the underworld). All these phenomena and what exists within them had a profound effect on the ancient

¹ **The Sky:** The inhabitants of ancient Egypt used various forms or words to refer to the sky, and there was no fixed expression for it. Some of these words referred to the entire sky or parts of it. For example, (pt) referred to the entire sky, while (lsw) referred to a part of the sky, and (pdt) referred to an arch or dome. For more on these names, see: Al-Barbari, Ahmed Mohamed, *The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought*, 1st ed. (Egypt: Ain Shams University, Faculty of Arts, 2004), pp. 13-43.

Egyptians, leading them to create multiple theories to explain their views on these manifestations. Based on this, four main theories emerged, which are: (On, Ashmunein, Memphis, and Thebes). All these theories were connected to the first creation, and one of the most important of these theories or myths that depicted the sky's features is the myth of "On,"² also known as the myth of the Ennead, which involves nine gods. The proponents of this myth believed that the origin of the universe was an infinite water body called "Nun," in which there was neither land nor sky nor any sensation or feeling. Amid this ocean arose an eternal mound known as "Benben."³ On this mound appeared the spirit of the first God, Atum (Ra).⁴

According to the myth, the sky goddess Nut was a principal deity in the sacred Ennead, as stated in the text:

"O great Ennead in Heliopolis: Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys."⁵

It appears that the role and significance of the sky, as understood by the ancient Egyptians, were the result of direct observation of the visible and upper part of the cosmos. On its body, the Sun, Moon, and stars are located. In that high sky,

² **On:** It is one of the main cities in ancient Egypt, with its ruins located at the site currently known as "Ain Shams" in the Matariya area, north of Cairo. It is believed that the name "Ain Shams" is related to the ancient Egyptian name "On" with some alteration, and the word "Shams" was added because this city was the center of worship for the sun god (Ra). The ancient Egyptian word "On" means "tower," from which they observed the Sun and other planets. The Greeks called this city "Heliopolis," meaning "City of the Sun."

³ **Al-Barbari, The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought**, Pages 61-62.

⁴ **Waziri, Ayman Abdel-Fattah, and Abu Zaid, Iman Ahmed**, "The Manifestations of the Eternal Hill in Earthly, Heavenly, and Cosmic Beliefs" (A Study in the Methodology of Evolution Through Ages), *Journal of the Faculty of Archaeology*, Issue 5, (Cairo: South Valley University, 2010), Pages 349-350

⁵ **Al-Barbari, The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought**, Pages 63-64.

which holds cosmic secrets unknown to the Egyptians, the gods dwell and govern the universe.⁶

It is notable in this myth that the ancient Egyptians viewed the sky differently from most of the peoples of the ancient Near East, who made the sky a male deity and the earth a female deity. In Egyptian mythology, the sky was considered the feminine element, represented by the goddess "Nut," while the earth was the masculine element, represented by the god "Geb." In fact, the god "Geb" is depicted lying under his wife, the goddess of the sky. This difference in perception is likely related to the geographical environment. In other ancient Near Eastern civilizations, the sky was seen as masculine because it brought rain, and rain was symbolized as the male seeds that fertilized the earth, the feminine element. However, since rain was very scarce in Egypt, the sky lost its masculine fertility attribute, and this role was transferred to the earth, which is nourished by the Nile River, the lifeblood of Egypt. Thus, the Egyptians made the earth masculine and the sky feminine, containing light and the giver of life, responsible for the birth of the moon, the sun, and the stars.⁷

The goddess Nut was considered one of the principal deities, even earning the title of "Lady of the Sky" (Nbt) or "Goddess of the Sky" from the beginning of creation. This is reflected in her role in the Heliopolitan myth (On), where she is depicted as the sky goddess and the wife of the god Geb. Initially, Nut and Geb were fused together in one physical form, until the god Shu separated them. As a result, the sky was positioned above, while the earth remained below.⁸

⁶ Al-Barbari, *The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought*, Page 64. For more, refer to: Loulait, *Sacred and Secular Texts from Ancient Egypt*, translated by Maher Juwajati (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr for Studies, Publishing, and Distribution, 1984), Volume 2, Page 32.

⁷ El-Barbary, *The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought...*, p. 64. For further details, see: Lullait, *Sacred and Secular Texts...*, vol. 2, p. 32.

⁸ El-Barbary, *The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought...*, p. 63.

The ancient Egyptians depicted Nut on the walls of several tombs, most notably in the tomb of Tutankhamun. In these depictions, Nut is shown as a goddess standing with her arms extended toward the king.⁹

As a result of the sky's importance in daily life, the ancient Egyptians allocated a significant amount of thought to it, often comparing it to many surrounding things that represented or carried aspects of femininity¹. One such comparison was depicting the sky as a woman or female figure, or even as a fruitful tree. This latter analogy indicated that, like a tree, the sky is a source of goodness, providing the fruits of life and nurturing existence through the cosmic elements it carries upon its surface, as well as the rain it gives, though it was very little.¹

The sky was also compared to the face of a human, which symbolizes elevation, as the face is located at the highest part of the human body. The eyes of a human were compared to the sun and moon in the sky, as the sky is high, and thus it was given the name "Hrt" (Hrt), meaning "the high" or "the elevated."¹

The sky was also compared to a cow, with the stars representing its horns, symbolizing fertility and growth. The stars were associated with the gods "Shu" and "Ra."¹ Additionally, there is another interpretation of the comparison of the sky to a cow, where its four limbs are likened to the four pillars of the sky. The ancient Egyptians imagined the sky resting on four pillars (see Figure 1). Furthermore, this comparison was also connected to the four sons of Horus.¹

⁹ The same source, p. 110.

¹ The same source, p. 93.

¹ Erman, Adolf, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt: Its Origin, Development, and End in Four Thousand Years*, translated by Abdel-Moneim Abu Bakr (Cairo: Mustafa El-Babi Al-Halabi & Co., 1917), p. 16; Al-Barbari, *The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought*, p. 96.

¹ Al-Barbari, *The Sky in Ancient Egyptian Thought*, p. 98.

¹ The same source, p. 98; Shaib, Mona Zohair, *Astronomical Depictions in Royal Tombs Until the End of the New Kingdom*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Cairo: Faculty of Archaeology, 2008), pp. 90-91.

¹ Waziry & Abu Zaid, *The Manifestations of the Primeval Mound*, p. 391.

In another comparison, "Nut" was likened to a fierce, protective animal defending its offspring from enemies. Similarly, the sky was believed to protect the people of Egypt.¹ 5

"...Do not ask: Is there a mother who devours her children? Is there a woman who sharpens her knife against that which came from within her...?"¹ 6

In another metaphor for the goddess "Nut," she is depicted as a woman whose body touches the earth, and her four limbs represent the pillars of the sky, symbolizing Nut's birth of her four children: Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys (see Figure 2).¹ 7

It is worth noting that in addition to the goddess Nut, who represented the sky, religious texts and other sources also referred to several other deities associated with the sky. Among the most prominent of these are: **Mut**¹ and **NbT-Ht (Nbt-Ht)**.¹ 8 9

Second: Other Myths:

2. The Osiris Myth

According to archaeological evidence (both written and material) about daily life in ancient Egypt, this myth is considered one of the most magnificent and oldest myths that were closely connected to the life of society. It was the most relatable

¹ Shaib, *Astronomical Depictions*,⁵p. 109.

¹ The same source, p. 110. 6

¹ Same source, p. 109. 7

¹ Mut: She is one of the goddesses associated with several attributes of the sky. She has been depicted as a lioness head, as well as an eagle soaring in the sky, and also as a queen adorned with a crown. She was called the mother of the rising sun. See: Ahmed, Soha Mahmoud, *Analytical Study of the Names, Titles, and Epithets of the Gods in Ancient Egypt*, Unpublished Master's Thesis (Alexandria: Faculty of Arts, 2008), p. 173.

¹ Nbt-Ht: (nbt-ht) She is another goddess associated with the sky, whose name means "Lady of the House." She has been depicted in various scenes, most notably as the wife of the god "Set" and the mother of the god "Anubis." She participated with the goddess Isis in collecting the limbs of the god Osiris. See: Al-Barbari, *The Sky...*, p. 135; Ahmed, *Analytical Study of the Names, Titles, and Epithets of the Gods...*, p. 51.

to the people, and it continued to be passed down through generations in ancient Egypt. Parts of the myth were found distributed across funerary texts, magical spells, and short stories. The first appearance of these mythological parts was in the Pyramid Texts². Some of these sections reflect the ancient Egyptians' views of the sky.

Here, it must be clarified that, in addition to the texts of the Osiris myth, we will refer to the texts from the Pyramid Texts due to the overlap of parts of the events in the Osiris myth with the Pyramid Texts. The latter consists of various spells, prayers, and religious rituals inscribed on the walls of the Old Kingdom pyramids. These texts served as guarantees or aids for the deceased king to pass through the stages of the underworld, protecting him from the evils he would encounter until he crosses that realm, attains eternal life, and becomes sacred like the gods in the afterlife.²

1

Regarding the overlap between the Pyramid Texts and the Osiris myth, one researcher notes that the deceased king is present within the fabric of the myth (the Osiris myth), almost as if he is one of its heroes. He states that the myth does not appear in the Pyramid Texts as a narrative structure with a chronological sequence of events, but rather in the form of an intertwining of roles that reflects the disintegration of the death knot in both its material and social aspects. In this disintegration lies the achievement and true meaning of the myth, making death a matter that can be treated or resolved². According to this, the researcher justifies the presence of the Osiris myth and the scattering of its parts among the Pyramid Texts in order to integrate the king into the fabric of the myth, thus linking the fate of the deceased king with that of Osiris. In this way, the king becomes a part

² Mehran, *The Egyptian Civilization...*, vol. 1, p. 20.

² Saber, Hassan, *Pyramid Texts*, 1st edition (Cairo: National Translation Project, 2002), pp. 9-11.

² Al-Sayfi, Sherif, *Pyramid Texts* (Cairo: Development Library, 2020), p. 2.

of the Osiris myth and one of its heroes². This overlap appears in dozens of Pyramid Texts, and we read from them:

"O Osiris, the king, Horus has come searching for you.

Thoth has made the followers of Set retreat for your sake.

He has brought them all to you; he has taken the heart of Set for you because you are greater than him.

You have appeared before him, and your nature is higher than his.

Geb saw your nature and placed you in your place.

And Geb has brought your sisters to your side for your sake, Isis and Nephthys.

Horus has made the goddess follow you.

Perhaps they will be your siblings in your name: the hall of brotherhood.

Do not refuse in your name: the two councils..."²

4

"And also in another text we read:

'O Osiris, the king, arise, Horus has come and calls you among the gods,

For Horus loves you and has given you his eye,

And Horus has made his eye firm for you,

And he split your eye for you, so you may see with it.

And the gods have firmed your face for you because they love you,

And you have been made whole by Isis and Nephthys.

And Horus is not far from you, for you are his soul – Ka..."²

5

The origin of writing this myth is linked to a part of natural or cosmic phenomena, represented by the sky and the earth. As we saw in the myth of On, the ancient Egyptians believed that the sky and the earth were once in a single material state, and then they were separated by the god "Shu." Before their separation, and

² Al-Sayfi, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 3. ³

² Saber, *Pyramid Texts*, p. 190. ⁴

² Saber, *Texts of the Pyramids*, p. 196.

because of their union, two male gods were born: Osiris and Set, and two female gods: Isis² and Nephthys.² 6 7

It happened that hatred and animosity arose between the two gods (Osiris and Set) due to the role assigned to Osiris. The latter took his father's place and became a symbol of good, from which people benefited. He taught people agriculture, food, love for goodness, justice, law, and the worship of the goddess². This was not only revealed in Egypt, but these principles and teachings were spread throughout the rest of the world. Eventually, all of Egypt devoted itself in great reverence to this god, which stirred jealousy and resentment in the heart of his brother, the god "Set." Set attempted to kill Osiris and eventually succeeded, becoming a symbol of evil. The story then unfolds, detailing how Set devised a plot to murder his brother Osiris, hide his body, and later dismember it into forty-two pieces. However, his sister "Isis" managed to find the pieces and restore him to life. Despite this, Set managed to kill him again, dismembering his body once more, but Isis again managed to gather the pieces and bring him back to life. Then, Isis lay beside him and miraculously conceived, giving birth to the god "Horus," whose name became linked to the sky. He was known as the falcon, the lord of the sky. Afterward, Horus decided to take revenge for his father, defeating his uncle Set and claiming the throne of his father to rule Egypt.² 8 9

Regardless of the meanings carried by the myth, what concerns us here are the manifestations of the sky and its perceptions according to the events of this myth.

² Isis: She is one of the Egyptian deities associated with the sky. She was not only the sister of the god Osiris but also became his wife and the mother of the god Horus. She bore the symbol of the throne, signifying her ascension to the throne in the sky, as well as her magical powers, which were manifested in protecting her son Horus from dangers. Isis appeared in various forms, both animal and plant-based, the most important of which were (scorpion, cow, bird). Some of her main symbols include a bird, a sycamore tree, a cobra, and a falcon. (See Figure 3). See: Ahmed, *Analytical Study of Names, Titles, and Epithets of the Gods...*, pp. 123-124, Weaver, Stephan, *Egyptian Mythology: Gods, Pharaohs, and the Book of Egyptian Mythology* (2015), pp. 13-14.

² Mehran, *Egyptian Civilization...*, Vol. 1, p. 21.

² K.H.S, *The Man Element of the Osiris Legend with Reference to Plutarch and Certain Folk Tales*, p. 5.

² For the details of this legend, see: Mehran, *The Egyptian Civilization...*, Vol. 1, pp. 21-24.

The manifestations of the sky in the Osiris myth came as a symbol of elevation and greatness when Osiris ascended his father's throne, which was characterized by justice in ruling Egypt. He rid the land of the evil and injustice that had dominated Egypt, defeated his enemies, and proved to the gods that he possessed authority and power in ruling. After the god "Geb" witnessed his son's bravery, might, and wise decisions, he granted him the rule of Egypt. This was the cause of Osiris' joy and happiness, as Egypt thrived in peace and prosperity during his reign. Thus, the people of Egypt described his crown as piercing the sky, signifying his power and greatness, as we read in one of the Pyramid Texts:

"He established justice on both sides (of the Nile River)

And placed the son in his father's place...

He rid himself of his opponents with strength and might...

When the earth saw the greatness of his abilities, it granted him kingship,

So that the land may live in prosperity.

His crown pierces the sky and embraces the stars."³

0

In the same text, we learn that the sky represented a dwelling place for the higher gods:

"...'Geb' laughs, and 'Nut' screams with joy in front of me when I ascend to the sky. The sky thunders for me, the earth shakes, and the ice storm bursts forth for me. I roar as 'Set' did..."³

1

Although the ancient Egyptians imagined that the sky rested on four massive pillars, in this myth, Osiris is depicted as being able to carry the sky. This reflects Osiris' immense power and greatness, to the extent that he can bear the vast sky

³ Clarke, Randall, "Symbol and Myth in Ancient Egypt," translated by Ahmed Saleh (Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, 1988), p. 101.

³ Saber, "Pyramid Texts," p. 294. ¹

with its expansive dimensions. The myth describes Osiris carrying the sky with his right hand using the "Awas" staff.³ 2

"...And I will raise the sky with life, and I will carry the earth with joy. This right hand of mine will carry the sky, with the 'Awas' staff..."³ 3

And the sky did not stop at a specific limit; the ancient Egyptians depicted that the sky had many doors. In this myth, Osiris is welcomed by the gods of the sky, and even the eastern gates of the sky are open to him, represented by the goddess Nut. She has horns and breasts, and places her hand on Osiris, symbolizing that she will provide him with unending blessings, which will spread throughout all of Egypt, as stated in the text:

"... The mouth of the earth is open for this king, "Geb" speaks to him.

This king is great as a king, and his kingdom is like "Ra."

Be welcomed, the ennead says to the king.

Here, the eastern gates of the sky are opened to him, thanks to the enduring spirit ("Ka") of his.

The great "Nut" places her hands on him, with long horns and large breasts.

She nurses the king and will not wean him; she takes him with her into the sky.

She will not let him fall to the earth, and promises the king's seat at the head of the councils.

He ascends the boat like "Ra" along the banks of the winding canal, and the king rows in the boat of lightning..."³ 4

Just as the ancient Egyptians believed in the upper sky, they also believed in a lower sky, specific to the afterlife, as shown in the Pyramid Texts. This lower sky was imagined as an inverted dome, with a central abode, and the king of that world

³ Awas: It is one of the most important religious and royal symbols used throughout the ages. Its shape consists of a long staff with an animal head, symbolizing the authority and power possessed by the leader or ruler. The meaning of the name in hieroglyphs is (sovereignty and good fortune). See: Nour El-Din, Abdel Halim, "Sacred Symbols, Crowns of Gods and Kings of Ancient Egypt" (Cairo: D.T.), p. 8.

³ Saber, "Pyramid Texts," p. 294. ³

³ Saber, Hassan, *The Pyramid Texts*, pp. 328-329.

was the god Osiris. In this sky, there were the fields of *Iaru*³ (the fields of reeds),⁵ which were abundant in crops, fertility, and water. Osiris, the god of the afterlife, was the one who cultivated and harvested these fields.

"...And he heard the threat of the gods who spoke about the father of the god. "Izé" took your arm, O Osiris, and Nephthys took your hands, so go between them. The sky is yours, and the earth is yours, and the fields of *Iaru*."³ 6

What is conveyed in the above text about the status of the god Osiris in the sky indicates that the sky is a source of goodness, fertility, and cultivation, which the righteous person enjoys in the afterlife. Thus, in one of its aspects, the sky is considered a source of blessings for the deceased in the afterlife according to ancient Egyptian thought.

In another text from the Pyramid Texts related to the Osiris myth, we read:

"... The doors of the sky are open to you.

The doors of the dome of the sky are wide open for you.

May you sail in the boat to the fields of 'Iaru'.

To plant barley for yourself and harvest wheat for yourself.

Your provisions are counted there like Horus, the son of Atum."³ 7

What is indicated in the above text is that one of the aspects of the lower sky is the waters that permeate it, extending through the fields of *Iaru*, which cause the growth of all kinds of crops that were offered to the gods. These waters are likened to the Nile River, which was described as the water of "Ra," and Osiris

³ Fields of *Iaru*: These are the fields of bliss located in the underworld, according to the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. They are reserved for the righteous dead, with canals and streams flowing through these fields. These fields were referred to as "Fields of Paradise" and were characterized by sanctity, requiring the deceased to be pure upon entering them. See: Azeddine, Sherine Kamal Mohamed, "Rivers of the Afterlife in Ancient Egyptian Thought During the New Kingdom (A Study in Funerary Literature)", unpublished Master's thesis (Alexandria University: Faculty of Arts, Department of Archaeology, 2011), pp. 130-131.

³ Saber, *The Pyramid Texts*, p. 266.

³ Saber, Hassan, *The Pyramid Texts*, p. 251.

is said to move through it like the god "Ra" and cross the sky like (or "Djehuty").³

8

"... Perhaps I will sail with the same vessels as you do,

My boat is furnished with reeds from 'Iaru'

Overflowing from the field of offerings,

The food offerings are your home, O goddess.

My water is like wine, like the water of 'Ra'.

I move in the sky like 'Ra'

And cross the sky like Thoth."³

9

In the aspect of water in the lower sky, we also read:

"... Perhaps you will take yourself to the sky.

The paths of the rising arches of the sky have been paved for you to reach

"Horus".

"Set" greets you like the great one in "On".

For you have crossed the winding stream in the northern sky

Like a star crossing the sea beneath the sky.

Hold the "Duat" in your hand, in the place where the Gemini lies,

And the bull of the sky extends its hand to you.

And you will eat from the provisions of the gods wherever they eat..."⁴

The Legend of Isis and the Seven Scorpions (also known as the Legend of Horus and the Seven Scorpions):

This is considered one of the important Egyptian myths. The legend was known to the ancient Egyptians from the earliest periods, and its influence persisted until

³ Jahwaty: He is the god of wisdom and the moon in ancient Egyptian belief. He was one of the deities of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad. Thoth was also associated with the protection of Osiris in the afterlife. His many symbols include the ibis bird and the baboon monkey. See: Lorcher, Manfred, Dictionary of Deities and Symbols in Ancient Egypt, translated by Salah El-Din Ramadan (Cairo: Madbouly Publishing, 2000), pp. 83-85.

³ Saber, The Pyramid Texts, p. 97.⁹

⁴ Saber, Texts of the Pyramids, p. 238.

the end of the Pharaonic era. The myth was recorded on a stela, which is now preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York under number (5085). Originally, this stela was found in the city of Alexandria, but it originally belonged to the Temple of Ptah in Memphis and was attributed to the priest "Nes Atum," the chief priest in Memphis.⁴ 1

The events of this myth revolve around "Isis," the sister of Osiris, who played an important role in the conflict between Osiris and Set. After giving birth to her son, the god "Horus," by Osiris, the goddess fled in fear of the wrath of her brother, the god "Set."⁴ 2

The events then continue with the return of "Set" and the eventual victory of her son, Horus, over him. Horus takes control of the throne of all of Egypt. Among the key figures in this myth is the god "Thoth" (Tahut), the god of wisdom, who aided Isis by informing her that danger was approaching. He advised her to flee with her son, Horus, away from Set⁴. The god 'Thoth' informed the goddess 'Isis' to take her son 'Horus' and flee because her brother 'Set' was searching for Horus to kill him. So, 'Isis' left with her son disguised as a lowly woman riding a chariot, which was pulled by seven scorpions. When they arrived at a village, they approached one of the houses, and she asked the house owner, named 'Wesret' (wsrt), to allow her to stay the night. However, the woman refused. 'Isis' then went to another house, where the owner, also a woman, allowed the goddess 'Isis' and the scorpions to enter. Later, the scorpions went to take revenge on the first woman, setting her house on fire and stinging her son. The woman screamed, and goddess 'Isis' went to help her, rescuing her son and saving him from the fire.⁴

⁴ Bayan Shaimaa, Abdul-Moneem Mohamed Saleh, *Miracles Through Texts of Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Unpublished Master's Thesis (Cairo: Tanta University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Archaeology, 2018), pp. 52-53.

⁴ Same source, p. 53. 2

⁴ Bayan, *Miracles through Texts of Ancient Egyptian Literature...*, p. 53.

⁴ Same source, p. 53. 4

In light of this myth, we know that the sky, in one of its forms, can rain out of season. This is a phenomenon that can occur at any time and in any place. We can imagine that the ancient Egyptians noticed that the sky sometimes rained, even if just a little, during the scorching summer days. Perhaps this happened due to high humidity and proximity to the sea. In any case, it was an unusual occurrence, and as usual, the people of Egypt provided a mythological explanation, attributing the rain to the love of the sky gods for rain, and their granting of its blessings to the people of Egypt whenever needed. According to this myth, the goddess 'Isis' cast a spell that caused the rain to fall from the sky, thus saving the house of 'Wesret' from the fire and rescuing her son from the scorpion's poison.

"...Then 'Tefen' entered through the bottom of the door of 'Wesret's' house and stung her son, setting the house on fire. There was no water there, but the sky, out of season, poured rain onto 'Wesret's' house. The fire was extinguished because the sky was filled with the sacred incantations of 'Isis.'⁴

5

3. The Myth of the Destruction of Mankind

This myth was found inscribed on the walls of several tombs of the kings of the New Kingdom (1580-1085 BCE).⁴

6

The events of the myth revolve around the sin committed by humans against the gods and the subsequent revenge of the gods against them. The myth mentions that humans broke their loyalty to the chief god "Ra." After they had been offering him acts of devotion and loyalty, they began to mock his worship because he had become elderly. At that point, "Ra" decided to take revenge on them. After consulting several gods, he sent those who would destroy them. In the end, when Ra saw the humans dying, he took pity on them and decided to retract his

⁴ Bayan, *Miracles through Texts of Ancient Egyptian Literature...*, p. 56.

⁴ Mehran, *Egyptian Civilization...*, Vol. 1, p. 43.

vengeance and destruction, so that life on Earth could continue. He then allowed the remaining humans to reflect on their fate if they were to disobey the gods again.⁴

7

In this myth, we see that the ancient Egyptians imagined the sky as the eternal dwelling place of the gods after they had previously resided on Earth alongside humans. In this sky, the god "Ra" provided all that the gods could wish for in terms of food, drink, and clothing. However, humans rebelled against the gods, which is clarified in the following text:

"... O great god, you who surpass your creator in greatness, you who are the son whose power exceeds that of your father, send your eyes to strike down those who conspire against you. Then they will disappear from the face of the Earth. Ra sent his eye to destroy the humans, as advised by Nun, but when they felt its presence, they scattered into the deserts and hid among the rocks. Ra said: 'Look, they have fled into the desert, their hearts trembling at what they had said.' Then the assembly of gods advanced to His Majesty and said: 'Send your eyes to kill them for you. Let them descend upon them in the form of Hathor.'⁴ This goddess went⁸ and killed the humans in the desert and returned to her father. Ra said: 'Hail Hathor, you have done what I sent you to do.' And she replied: 'By your life, I have triumphed over the people, and this is something that pleases my heart.' Ra said: 'I will conquer them in Heliopolis and destroy them.' The goddess responded: 'Your destruction of them will consolidate my dominion over them, but enough of what you have done. Do not kill any more of them.' "⁴ 9

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⁴ Same source, Vol. 1, p. 44.

7

⁴ Hathor: She is one of the sky goddesses associated with breastfeeding. She was depicted in the form of a cow with a human head and cow ears. She is the nurse of the god Horus. Additionally, she is the goddess of love, tenderness, music, joy, and dance, and is also the goddess of crowns. Besides her importance in the afterlife, she also cares for and watches over the dead. See: Adeb, *Encyclopedia of Egyptian Civilization*, pp. 354-355.

⁴ Mehran, *The Egyptian Civilization...*, Vol. 1, p. 48.

1. The Story of the Fluent Farmer

This is one of the best and longest literary stories, as it has been preserved in full in the form of nine complaints or speeches. Modern researchers have named it "The Fluent Farmer," while its title in the Ancient Egyptian language was "The One Who Dwells in the Field"⁵. The story revolves around a farmer named **Khen-Anpu (ḥn-‘nbw)**, one of the residents of the city of **Ahnasia**⁵. He lived during the time of the 9th or 10th Dynasty. The farmer was wronged by an overseer of land belonging to a high-ranking official named Rensi Ben Mero. The overseer, named Nemti Nekht, stopped the farmer while he was walking with his donkeys after the farmer had been reprimanded and beaten. The story then details the farmer's attempts to meet with the official and present his complaint⁵. Finally, his efforts are successful, and he begins to recount the injustices he or farmers in general had faced at the hands of one of the officials. His complaint is recorded in nine eloquent speeches⁵, which impressed **Rensi Ben Mero**. In the end, the farmer regains his rights through his eloquent speech and achieves a measure of justice in the city.⁵

In these complaints, the eloquent farmer depicted what the people of Egypt saw in the sky, as it was a place where the boats of gods or kings sailed. The sky rested

⁵ Hassan, *Encyclopedia⁰ of Egypt...*, Vol. 17, pp. 54-55. For more, see: Foster, John L., *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Press University, Texas), p. 183.

⁵ Ehnasiya: It was one of the major cities in ancient Egypt and served as the capital of the Ninth and Tenth Dynasties. Many relics from the Middle and New Kingdoms have been found there. Its ruins are located in the Beni Suef Governorate, near the entrance to the Faiyum. It was known in ancient Egyptian texts as *Het-Hamn-Nus* (Ht-hamn-nus) and later became known as Ehnasiya. See: Samir, Adeeb, *Encyclopedia of the History of Egypt...*, p. 208.

⁵ Lichteim, *Egyptian Literature...*,²Vol. 1, p. 295.

⁵ Hassan, *Encyclopedia of Egypt...*,³Vol. 17, pp. 55-56, and for more on these speeches, see: Simpson, William Kelly, *The Masterpieces of Ancient Egyptian Literature*, translated by Dr. Mahmoud Maher Taha (Cairo: Al-Tawil Publishing and Studies, 2013), Vol. 1, pp. 53 and onwards.

⁵ Hassan, *Encyclopedia of Egypt...*,⁴Vol. 17, p. 56.

on pillars fixed to the earth, and thus, this prince represented the vertical line connecting the sky and the earth:

**"... O wave of the rudder of the sky, and supporter of the pillar of the earth,
O vertical line that bears the weights:**

Turn, do not let the rudder of the ship stray from its course.

Support the pillar of the earth and do not deviate.

O vertical line, do not sway.

The mighty ruler must recover all that is lost..."⁵

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The manifestations of the sky appear in his third complaint, where it is known that the people of Egypt see the sky as the source of their livelihood and life. It represents one of the aspects of goodness, growth, and justice, a source of light, and the dwelling place of the gods who guard and care for humans. Therefore, he described the high official or prince (Ransi ben Mero) as the god "Ra," the lord of the sky, because he is responsible for this kingdom, accompanied by your court who receive orders from you. He was described as the Nile River, as it is the source of goodness, fertility, and growth that causes plants to thrive and deserts to live. Egypt flourished during your reign, and you were described as a just ruler who punished the wrongdoer and defended the oppressed:

"...You are Ra, the lord of the sky, accompanied by your court. The increase of all mankind comes from you, just as the flood comes. You are Hapi, who makes the fields green and brings life to the desert. You punish the thief and defend the oppressed..."⁵

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What is known about Egypt's geographical environment is that it is characterized by a clear climate for most of the year, with clear and calm skies, so much so that

⁵ Simpson, *The Masterpieces of Egyptian Literature*, Vol. 1, p. 55, for more see: Gardiner, Alan H., *The Eloquent Peasant*, *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 9, No. 1/2 (published by Sage Publications, 1923), p. 10.

⁵ Simpson, *Masterpieces of Egyptian Literature*, Vol. 1, pp. 58-59.

it has been known as the land of eternal sunshine⁵. This is due to Egypt⁷'s distance from the rain belt and its encirclement by desert on all sides. This phenomenon, or part of it, was reflected in this story, where the peasant in this complaint praises the prince, describing him as being like the calm and beautiful sky. He praises the prince's pure spirit and calmness, noting that even if he is affected by some injustice, he quickly returns to his original nature. The prince is expected to bring justice and fairness to the peasant, like the sky that may bring a strong wind but quickly returns to its calm and clear nature. This is a precise description of the climatic features of ancient Egypt.

**"... Just as the sky is calm after a fierce wind and warms everything cold,
Just as water quenches thirst,
Look ahead in the direction of your face,
The mediator, the judge, is the one who takes,
And the one who loves to act in peace is the one who creates misery
(now)..."⁵**

8

2- The Story of Sinuhe

It is considered one of the remarkable and lengthy stories dating back to the period of the 12th Dynasty. Parts of it have been preserved on papyrus. The story revolves around a court official in Egypt named **Sinuhe**, who fled to the Upper Retnu (Palestine) after the assassination of his master, **King Amenemhat I**, the founder of the 12th Dynasty. Sinuhe feared being accused of involvement in the assassination conspiracy and of being avenged by the new king, **Sesostris I**, the son of the slain king.

Sinuhe narrates his journey, starting from his service as a servant to **King Amenemhat I**, then his escape to Upper Retnu, how he lived there, and finally

⁵ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 55.

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⁵ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 64.

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his return to Egypt after many years to serve Egypt and its ruler, **Sesostris I**. Regardless of scholars' opinions on whether the story is true or fictional, the tale remains a significant part of Egyptian literature⁵ . 9

In this story, the features of the sky are mentioned, with the most important belief being that the sky is the dwelling place of the king's soul, which ascends after his death. It remains eternal in the sky, joining the gods who reside there, as the sky represents elevation and nobility. The sky is the home of the gods who protect and care for Egypt. Since the king is sacred and the son of the gods, his soul must be in the sky with the deities. In the story of Sinuhe, the soul of his deceased master, who died during the month of the flood (Akhit), ascended to the sky, and sorrow descended upon all of Egypt.

"...In the thirtieth year, the third month of the Akhet season, on the seventh day, the god ascended to his horizon, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Sehetep-ib-Re.

He passed into the sky, joining the solar disk, and thus the body of the god merged with the one who created him..."⁶ 0

Appendices

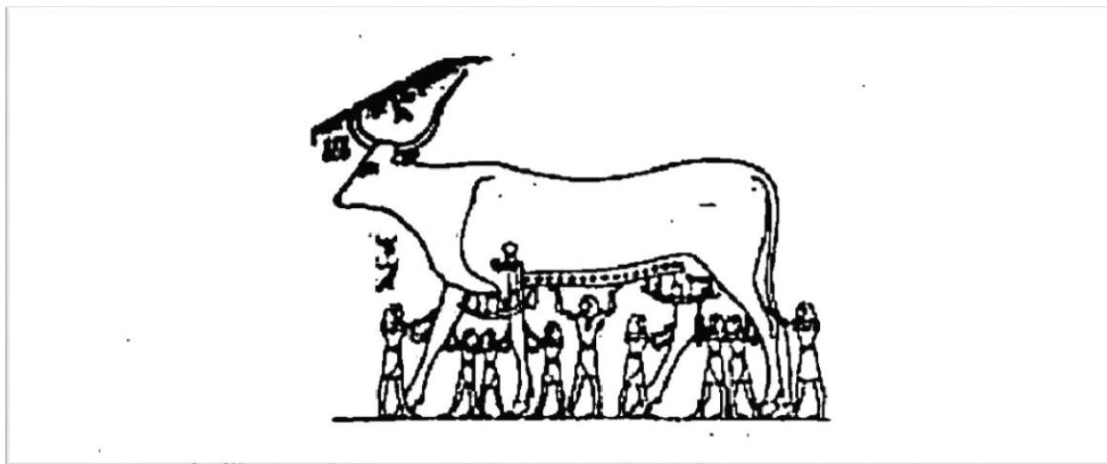


Figure (1): The goddess "Nut" is depicted in various forms representing her character.

⁵ Simpson, *Literary Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt...*, Vol. 1, p. 87.

⁶ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 88.

Waziri, and Abu Zaid. *Aspects of the Primeval Mound in Earthly, Heavenly, and Cosmic Beliefs...*, p. 456.



Figure (2): The goddess "Nut" represents the four pillars of the sky.
Waziri, and Abu Zaid. *Aspects of the Primeval Mound in Earthly, Heavenly, and Cosmic Beliefs...*, p. 456.

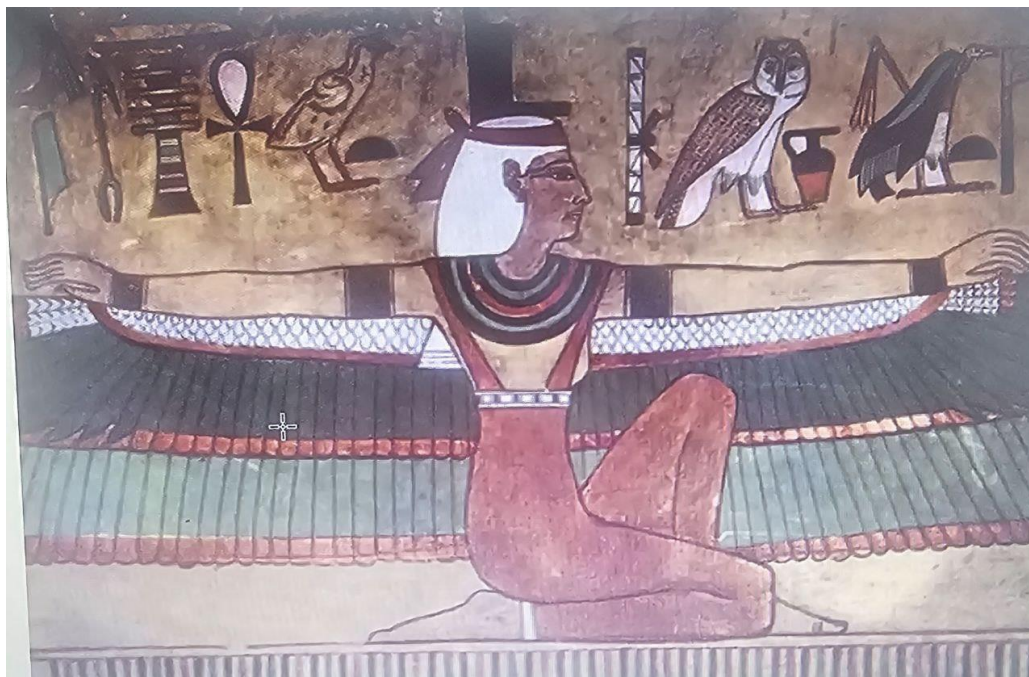


Figure (3): A depiction of the goddess Isis appearing in various forms.
Weaver, *Egyptian Mythology*, p. 13.