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Classifying the Duat

Tracing the Conceptualization of the Afterlife between Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts

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Summary: The notion of Duat plays a major role in ancient Egyptian funerary beliefs. Yet, a single definition of this notion is impossible to achieve, as it underwent a process of evolution over thousands of years without ever designating just one unambiguous place at a time. In this context, an approach based on cognitive linguistics and on the significance of the determinatives accompanying the word Duat can be exploited to shed more light on this elusive concept. The focus will be here on the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts as well as the intermediary phase of transmission of the funerary literature during the period between the end of the Old Kingdom and the beginning of the Middle Kingdom.

Keywords: Coffin Texts – Cognitive linguistics – Determinatives – Duat – Pyramid Texts

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1 Introduction

Among the ideas pertaining to Egyptian afterlife beliefs, the notion of Duat¹ plays a major role, since it refers to the realm of the dead. Yet, there is to date no scholarly consensus on a proper definition of what the Egyptians meant as Duat, and the textual sources provide no single delineation of this notion. The best known description of an Egyptian royal afterlife – the Amduat² – preserved mainly

¹ The spelling Duat is the most common in Egyptology nowadays, and will therefore be used in the present paper. Although different orthographies of this word (*dʒt*, *dwʒt*, *dʒ*, *dt*) are attested throughout the preserved religious texts, they can all be considered variants of the same phonologic entity (Allen 1989: 21 f. with n. 143). In order to avoid any preconceived treatment of this notion, I will leave the word Duat untranslated here, since a single translation does not fit all the contexts in which it appears.

² This composition has been studied and published by an impressive number of scholars since its discovery, and especially by E. Hornung. It would be impossible to list here even a small portion of the extensive bibliography on it, for which I refer the reader to Hornung 1999: 170–173.

in the New Kingdom royal tombs, describes the Duat as an underworld. But this is only one of many alternatives offered by funerary documents and depictions dating to different periods, and it represents a point of culmination in the evolution of the concept, which took place over thousands of years. In fact, the concept of Duat appears already in the oldest funerary composition from ancient Egypt, the Pyramid Texts, and accordingly plays a major role also in the Coffin Texts, some of which are attested in conjunction with the former collection already at the end of the Old Kingdom (e.g. Mathieu 2004). This paper aims to shed more light on the long-standing debate regarding the nature of the Duat by tracing its evolution through the determinatives classifying it in the Pyramid Texts and in the Coffin Texts³ and by subjecting the evidence to an analysis based on some principles of cognitive linguistics⁴.

2 Cognitive linguistics and Egyptian determinatives

The discipline of cognitive linguistics has played a major role in Egyptology over the last few decades, especially in the study of linguistic phenomena such as the determinatives, but has also proved useful in the investigation of broader areas of research such as cultural studies, where textual and sometimes iconographic evidence is analyzed in order to uncover the conceptual framework underlying certain aspects of religion and society, for instance (e.g. Shalomi-Hen 2000, 2006; Allon 2010; Nyord 2013). Cognitive linguistics is an important branch of linguistics, which treats the human cognitive system and skills as having their basis in physical (“embodied”) experi-

³ The system used to identify the hieroglyphic signs is the one devised by Gardiner (1957), which is now complemented by the extended library included in Hannig 2006b. All references are to Gardiner’s sign list, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ In earlier works this field of study has at times been called cognitive semantics. Since the purpose of this paper is not to provide an in-depth discussion of the discipline, but rather to introduce some of its key concepts to be applied in the following analysis, I refer the reader to the detailed overview presented in Nyord (2009: 5–35; 2015) for further discussion.

ence (Nyord 2009: 6; 2015: 1f.)⁵. By stressing the fact that linguistic structure reflects conceptual structure, i.e. is related to thought processes, cognitive linguistics can be exploited to look beyond the pure linguistic analysis of a given language, and beyond its visual achievements. Hieroglyphs, for example, are essentially icons, i.e. pictures of high symbolic value with strong visual connotations, that represent elements of the real world. Yet, they can carry meaning(s) beyond their immediate reality, conveying not only phonetic values but often having a metaphorical signification as well. This is due to the fact that even the most abstract thinking is based on conceptual structures that are ultimately derived from physical or sensorial experience⁶. These structures are translated into a script by means of the hieroglyphs on the one hand, and on the other they are the subject of conceptual metaphor formation. In cognitive linguistics, the latter is understood as a mechanism providing structure to abstract domains by transferring immediate, concrete experience onto a more abstract level. This way, hieroglyphic signs may aid in make such abstractions more easily comprehensible (Nyord 2009: 6; 2012; 2015: 2). Metaphors, which belong in the realm of figurative speech⁷, are often based on icons, and frequently refer to characteristic features of a person, object or situation that are easily recognizable and hence idealized, or prototyped⁸. Moreover, research in

the cognitive sciences has demonstrated that the human brain stores neural equivalents of metaphors in specific areas that, respectively, encode certain categories of information. Thus, the metaphor “affection is warmth”, for example, has been shown to stimulate neural reactions in both the emotion and the temperature domains of the brain (Goebbs 2013: 128). Various levels of encoding, by contrast, such as specific objects vs their superordinate categories (e.g. “sparrow” vs “bird”), can be shown to relate to one another in a sort of semantic network that facilitates memory storage⁹. Some of the processes resulting from the categorization of the information in the neural networks in the brain find expression in the use of analogies, metaphors, and icons that men use to convey their own experience of reality (Goebbs 2013: 129)¹⁰. The iconicity of the hieroglyphic script hence can be said to have paved the way for an entire world of new conceptual meanings based on metaphors and going far beyond the immediate and material (Goldwasser 1995; 2009b)¹¹.

This is where the analysis of determinatives comes into play. In Egyptology, the determinatives written at the end of (most) words have traditionally been interpreted simply as mute “reading aids” used to signal the end of the word and to indicate the general idea of the word itself (Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 17 f. with n. 4). However,

5 The term “embodied” refers to the fact that the body forms the physical basis of cognitive processes that find expression, for example, in conceptual metaphors. It is the body, in fact, that experiences the events and sensations that underlie abstract meanings. For “embodiment” in cognitive sciences and the traditional dichotomy body-mind in the studies of language, epistemology and anthropology, see e.g. Nyord (2009: 10–14, 41–44).

6 These conceptual structures can be also referred to as “knowledge structures”, “(conceptual) domains”, and “*image schemata*”. See remarks in Goldwasser 2002: 25 f. with n. 4; compare Nyord 2009: 10–19, providing a more detailed overview of said structures.

7 For the semiotics of figurative language and metaphors, see the fundamental study by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). According to these authors, it is not only our language that is of a fundamentally metaphorical character, but so is also our perception of the world and our way of thinking about it and representing it, which in turn determine how we act. For a more up-to-date work on metaphor in cognitive linguistics, see e.g. Kövecses 2005.

8 A prototype is the most representative item belonging to a given category. On this notion applied to the Egyptian writing system, see e.g. Goldwasser 1995: 31–35; 2002: 91–110; Shalomi-Hen 2000: 25–30; Lincke 2011: 28–30; Lincke and Kammerzell 2012: 76–81; Nyord 2012. In a contribution on the hieroglyphic script and the major role that conceptual metaphors played in it, Goldwasser (2005) understands the Egyptian system as a prototype-centered classification system. Notwithstanding the presence of one or more prototypes that build the core of a category, most categories have “fuzzy edges”, in which their boundaries may overlap (Goldwasser 2002: 29).

9 This is reflected, for example, in the use of different divine names and features to express the complexity of the mythical subcategories and iconographies assigned to a specific god. On this, see Goebbs 2013: 129–130 with fig. 1. Furthermore, D. Kurth (1977) has demonstrated that, in syncretistic groupings of divine names (e.g. Ptah-Sokar-Osiris), the second and further names function as determinatives do with the word they are associated to, namely they categorize it. Thus, he established that divine names act like prototypes of a given category, thereby classifying the (main) name of the deity which they refer to.


10 The metaphoric processes are connected to the categorization processes to such an extent that metaphor is described in semiotic and cognitive studies as the creation of temporary categories (Goldwasser 1995: 54 f.). Myth and mythical icons encapsulating mythical meaning can also be intended as a medium of categorization, and it has been argued that they might have functioned as classifiers both in thought and in representation. On this avenue of research, see e.g. Goebbs 2013. Compare also Goldwasser (1995: 99–106), who argued that myth and beliefs are part of the human experience relevant for categorization.

11 This process of extrapolating and transferring meaning from the basic, iconic level of the hieroglyphic script to an abstract level that categorizes the world through metonyms, synecdoches and metaphors (see below) is what Goldwasser (1995: 54) calls “phonetic metaphor”, namely the expression of a whole range of notions through the high level of iconicity of the hieroglyph as *sign*, which makes it a “complex metaphorical construct” (*ibid.*). This process turns signs/icons into units of meaning(s), that is “from icons to metaphors” (Goldwasser 1995: 56–62).

the significance of the determinative system in the hieroglyphic script extends well beyond this, and it has been shown that it can reveal aspects of the Egyptian mindset that are not necessarily expressed in the lexicon (Goldwasser 1995: 81), due to the fact that hieroglyphs are “fossils of historical thought processes” (Goldwasser 1995: 1). Only Goldwasser, head of what is referred to as “Jerusalem School” of classifier studies¹², has convincingly argued that what Egyptologists call determinatives is actually a system¹³ of graphemic classifiers that relate semantically to the word they determine, thus creating for each type of determinative conceptual categories that mirror the structure of other categories of human knowledge (Goldwasser 1995, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006). Determinatives functioned as iconic tools classifying the world, and mirrored the organization and categorization of knowledge, and with it the collective Egyptian mind. At the same time, they provided the reader with a wide variety of encyclopedic, pragmatic, and grammatical information (e.g. Goldwasser 1999 and 2006; Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 22–32). Acting like icons encoding many basic elements of cultural knowledge in a condensed form, they can reveal much more about the word they are attached to than the simple fact that the word ends where they appear¹⁴, as had


¹² Goldwasser has been advocating the need for a replacement of the term “determinative” with “classifier”, which would better describe its function from a cognitive standpoint. However, critiques have been raised against this new naming, and most Egyptologists continue to refer to this part of the Egyptian script as “determinatives” (for some examples, see e.g. Lincke and Kammerzell 2012: 86; Nyord 2015: 6). Goldwasser further differentiates between what is known as “repeaters” or “echo classifiers”, which duplicate iconically a part of or the whole phonetic information of the previous word (see below), and the “classifiers” proper, which add new semantic information not included in the word itself (Goldwasser 2002: 15; cf. Shalomi-Hen 2006: 1). For the sake of simplicity, I have chosen to keep using the term “determinative(s)” in this paper. It is certainly not my intention to dismiss the arguments put forward by the scholars of the Jerusalem School.


¹³ Based on the studies carried out by scholars of the Jerusalem School, it is evident that the Egyptian determinatives do constitute a system, as they show a certain degree of regularity in their use and they follow rules (Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 32–42). Such a system has been proven to be comparable to the oral classifier systems of other languages, such as Burmese, the official language of modern Myanmar (Goldwasser 2002; 2009a).

¹⁴ For instance, by looking at the category “dog” and the determinative(s) associated with it during different periods, valuable insight can be gained into what the Egyptians pictured as the most representative “type” of dog, which in turn influenced the choice of making it the one representing the whole category. This example was analysed in detail by Goldwasser (2002: 91–110; cf. Goldwasser 2009b: 350f.), who shows how the choice of the particular sign  (E14) to represent the typical dog was a political one, aimed at pi-

already been recognized by Champollion in 1836 (Goldwasser 2009a: 17–20; 2006: 273–274). Because of the inherent cultural significance of the determinatives system, the approach applied here, based on cognitive linguistics, partially overlaps with the field of linguistic anthropology. This is an interdisciplinary field of studies and a branch of anthropology, which treats language as a cultural activity and resource, and explores how it shapes communication, encodes social and cultural identity, and articulates culture-specific ideologies and knowledge and their representation (e.g. Duranti 1997: 1–5). On the one hand, an approach based on cognitive linguistics can reveal the conceptual framework underlying the linguistic structure of a given language, and is applicable on a more “universal” level, regardless of cultural distinctions. On the other, principles of linguistic anthropology will also be applied in the present analysis in order to better contextualize the evolution of the notion of Duat within the specificity of the Egyptian culture, hence as an expression of its “Egyptianity” (Goldwasser 1995: 58; 2009b: 352). The script, and more specifically determinatives, can reveal aspects of the Egyptian conceptualization of the world which never materialized in the language, and plays a major role in the shaping of ideas and the nature of culturally-specific thought processes, whereas the language *per se* lacks conceptual organization¹⁵.





As determinatives play such a significant role in the interpretation of ancient Egyptian thought, it seems particularly promising *a priori* to examine the determinatives of the word Duat appearing in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts. Studying them from the point of view of their semantic contents may yield results going beyond the strictly linguistic analysis, and will provide a springboard for a better comprehension of the conceptual framework within which this notion originated and evolved during the period when

cking the icon of the “politically correct” dog that could be a symbol of prestige for the members of the élite of Egyptian society. The same could be said of the sign  (A1), which represents the ideal of man according to the ancient Egyptians, namely a young, healthy and muscular one. These two examples illustrate how the world depicted through the hieroglyphic system, and especially through the determinatives, is inevitably an Egyptian one, thereby proving that those mute “reading aids” are not just that, but actually represent a window into the ancient Egyptians’ *Weltanschauung*.

¹⁵ The example of the sign  (F27) for “hide and tail” is quite pertinent here. As Goldwasser (2002: 56–89) has shown, the classification of certain animals through this sign constitutes the only evidence that Egyptians conceptualized those animals (e.g. lion, panther, mice, monkey, etc.) as members of a single category, which identified them all as having hide and tail. Thus, the classification system provides structure to the Egyptian conceptual sphere through the script, while the language never unequivocally represents it.

said texts were in use. My analysis is based on the classic editions of these texts, namely Sethe's (1908–1922) for the Pyramid Texts and de Buck's (CT I–VII, 1935–1961) for the Coffin Texts. Both publications are unfortunately incomplete, and it was necessary to supplement them with additional sources that have more recently become available¹⁶. Additionally, as the transition between these two corpora is a particularly relevant process also in terms of socio-cultural history, the copies of the Pyramid Texts appearing on Middle Kingdom coffins, tombs' chambers and other items of funerary equipment such as canopic boxes were also analyzed, based on the eighth volume of the Coffin Texts Project published by Allen in 2006¹⁷.

The meaning of a sign when it is activated as a determinative includes its pictorial value as icon and the meaning acquired acting as determinative, which may or may not be identical to the former (Goldwasser 2002: 13–14). In the latter case, determinatives are related to the word they classify in two principal ways, which together form part of a domain, namely a “network of taxonomic and schematic relations” (Goldwasser 1995: 84). The first way is metaphoric, and conveys categorical/taxonomic relations in such a fashion that the representation of the prototypical member of the category to which the word belongs is immediately recognizable (Goldwasser 1995: 57–62). I shall return to this in a moment. The determinative can also stand in a metonymic¹⁸ relationship with the

word preceding it, thus conveying a notion of contiguity between the word itself and its determinative (Goldwasser 1995: 63; 90–94; 2002: 16; Lincke 2011: 37–43). The word *rryt*  “gate”, for instance, takes the determinative that more efficiently expresses the schematization of the domain to which a gate belongs, meaning a house, or any generic building. The determinative thus conveys the idea of the *whole* (house, building) to which the *part* (gate) belongs, which is what metonymies generally express. Furthermore, words could be assigned more than one determinative at a time, representing both the metaphoric and the metonymic conceptual “axes” (Goldwasser 1995: 55 f.). Particularly important for the purposes of the present study is the metaphorical axis, which can be divided into a horizontal and a vertical dimension (Goldwasser 2002: 15 f.). To the horizontal dimension belong those iconic determinatives that are repetitive pictorial representations of the whole word they follow, and possibly depict the Egyptian prototype of the word that makes up the category. This is for instance the case of the word *ff*  “fly”, in which the determinative merely “repeats” the word coming before, thus being a “pictorial tautology” (Goldwasser 1995: 85 f.)¹⁹. On the other hand, the vertical dimension of determination is one of taxonomic classification, where words receive “superordinate” determinatives that define the broader conceptual domain within which the determined word falls (Goldwasser 1995: 86–88). The most obvious examples of this type of determination occur whenever the names of specific gods are determined by the “generic god” determinatives  (G7) or  (A40) (cf. Shalomi-Hen 2000; 2006). Three levels can be distinguished within the vertical axis of categorization: in cognitive linguistics terminology, these are the superordinate level, the basic-level (prototype), and the subordinate level (Goldwasser 2002: 29–32; Lincke 2011: 25–36; cf. Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 48). It has been observed that, when a sequence of determinatives appears to classify a word, usually it follows a metonymic-taxonomic categorization order, whereby the more specific, schematic

¹⁶ One such source is the new publication of the Pyramid Texts by James P. Allen (2013), which provides a complete list of all the currently available instances of the Pyramid Texts, including those discovered in the past decade by the Mission Archéologique Française de Saqqâra (MAFS) working at the pyramid of Pepi I. The issue is more complex in the case of the Coffin Texts, as many manuscripts and coffins are still unpublished or part of private collections or both, and therefore impossible to access. One can get an idea of how much was left out by the Buck by perusing the list of all the known sources of Coffin Texts compiled by Willems (2014: 230–237).

¹⁷ Spells from the Pyramid Texts and from the Coffin Texts occur side by side on coffins and other items of funerary equipment, proving that the transmission of funerary literature during the Old and the Middle Kingdoms operated as a continuous socio-cultural phenomenon encompassing two different but coexisting streams of tradition (Morales 2013: ix, *passim*). Therefore, the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts can – to some extent – be considered essentially one corpus under constant development, the origins of which possibly go back to the early Old Kingdom. On the close relationship between them, see the comprehensive argumentation presented by Mathieu (2004).

¹⁸ The term “metonymic” is very close to the concept of synecdoche in linguistics. The former applies to cases where a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something very closely associated with it. The latter is a figure of speech, in which either a term for a part of something refers to the whole or vice versa, and can be thus seen as a sub-category of metonymy. On metonymies in general, see Lakoff

and Johnson 1980: 35–40; Kövecses 2005: 143–162. The schematic relations expressed by determinatives in the hieroglyphic classification system are also called “meronymic” in linguistics, a term denoting a semantic relation between some given element and a constituent part of it (e.g. Goldwasser 2002: 33 f.). For further references on the relationship between metonymy and synecdoche, see Goldwasser 1995: 90 with nn. 55–56. To avoid confusion, I will use the term “metonymic” in this paper.

¹⁹ This category is also known as “phonetic determinatives”, “echo classifiers”, or “repeaters”. See Goldwasser 2002: 15; 2009a: 21 f. Further details can be found in Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 20, 48.

determinatives precede the generic, superordinate determinatives assigned (Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 33). This allows the reader to move from a detailed sub-level of categorization of knowledge to a broader one.


3 The Duat in the Pyramid Texts

Determinatives were used less in Old Egyptian than in later texts, especially with verbs (Allen 2015: 3)²⁰, arguably because the system was still in an earlier stage of development (Shalomi-Hen 2006: 16; Chantraine 2014: 40). This is underscored by the fact that, where determinatives were used, clear developments can be traced, with certain types of determinatives falling out of use by the Middle Kingdom, for example, and others being introduced²¹. Because of and despite this, the signs “classifying” the word Duat in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts may offer insights regarding the nature of the Duat as it was envisi-





oned in those periods. Goldwasser (2006: 479) has noted that most determinatives (or “classifiers”) in the Pyramid Texts are used quite consistently, as they appear in more than one example of the same word throughout the corpus in different pyramids. This is indeed mostly the case also for the word Duat. While various determinatives may be used in association with the term in the Pyramid Texts, an overwhelming majority of cases features the sign of the star in a circle ♂ (N15), with the plain star ★ (N14) ranking second for number of attestations. The former is used ideographically to write the word *d(w)ꜣt* only starting with the Coffin Texts (see below), but in the Pyramid Texts is consistently used solely as determinative. The star sign, on the other hand, could be used in general as an ideogram or as a phonetic determinative (i.e. a “repeater”) in the word *sbꜣ* “star” (♂ ★ or ♂ ♂ ★ or ♂ ★), and phonetically to spell words such as *sbꜣ* “door” (♂ ♂ ♂); it could also be used as determinative for stars and constellations as well as for notions related to time, for instance with the words ♂ ♂ *ꜣbd* “month” and ♂ ♂ ♂ *wnwt* “hour”. This sign, however, had another phonetic value, *dwꜣ*, and was thus additionally used to semi-phonetically spell words such as *dwꜣt* “morning” (♂ ♂ ♂), *dwꜣ* “to adore” (♂ ♂), as well as the word Duat from the Coffin Texts on (see below). It has been observed that there may be a connection between the etymology of Duat, being this identified as the region where the sun reappears at dawn, and the semantic field of *dwꜣ*, denoting the morning and morning worship (Allen 1989: 23 with n. 153; Beaux 1994: 5). In the Pyramid Texts, however, the star sign is not yet used to spell the word Duat, but to classify it instead, at least in a few instances (Beaux 1994: 3 with n. 26). Because one of the aspects of the notion of Duat in these texts is its characterization as the place where the sun, the king, and the stars would spend some time before being reborn in their renewed luminosity in the morning (see further below), there seems to be an overlap in the use of such signs as determinatives. If, on the one hand, the information conveyed by ♂ and ★ when activated as determinatives partially “repeats” the word they classify, on the other hand these signs seem to act as superordinate determinatives, thereby providing the reader with the additional information that the broader category to which the Duat belonged was a celestial domain, within which the stars moved along their cosmic cycles. This seems to reflect the combination of the quite widespread use of the so-called repeaters on the one hand with a system of classification into superordinate classes on the other, as exemplified by the Pyramid Texts (Goldwasser 2006: 479–481). It has also been noted that repeaters in classifier languages tend to be superseded over time by more general classifiers, or to become general classi-


²⁰ Goldwasser (2006: 479) has pointed out that the classification of verbs is not very common in classifier languages, to which she assigns ancient Egyptian. More specifically, she defines Egyptian as “a nonclassifier language recorded in a classifier script”, Goldwasser 2005: 99; cf. Goldwasser 2002: 2–3). However, the so-called “Berlin school” (for the name, see Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 19), headed by Frank Kammerzell, has recently put forward an interesting theory on the semantics of verb classifiers in particular, suggesting that they were a means of codifying relevant participants in the event expressed by the verb (e.g. Lincke and Kammerzell 2012). According to this theory, some determinatives are assigned to a specific word depending on its referent in the context in which it appears, thereby making the “referent” object or entity in the discourse the reason for the choice of a particular determinative over another. For example, in PT 408 § 716c, which mentions suckling cows that will be slaughtered for the king at the Wag festival, a determinative that is a variant of the basic one for “cow, bull”, ♂ (Hannig extended library E176) is added to the verb *rꜣs* “to slaughter” in Pepi’s pyramid (antechamber, east wall), because the referents are the suckling cows named right after. This is what the authors call “referent classification”; it features mainly in the Pyramid Texts and decreases over time, which underscores the fact that the determinative system was still under development during the Old Kingdom (Lincke and Kammerzell 2012: 88–95; cf. Lincke 2011: 43–59).

²¹ This is the case, for example, of the mutilation, suppression and replacement of signs representing human and animal figures in the Pyramid Texts, a practice aimed at annihilating the destructive potential inherent in writing animated signs of any kind. While it was clearly perceived as a necessity by the compilers of the Pyramid Texts, leading for instance to the conspicuous absence of whole human signs in this corpus, by the Middle Kingdom it was no longer deemed indispensable, due to the underlying change in burial practices (Lacau 1913). A discussion of the diachronic development in the mutilation of anthropomorphic signs in the Pyramid Texts, with a convenient list of mutilated hieroglyphs and related lexemes, can be found in Lincke 2011: 131–149.



fiers themselves. By this process, repeaters could even become the prototypes of a given category, as for example in the case of the *ʒpd* duck or goose  (G38), initially appearing as a repeater after the noun *ʒpd*, and yet very soon becoming the prototypical bird used to represent the whole “birds” category in the Egyptian world (Goldwasser 2002: 19–20; 2006: 477)²². This procedure can be observed to take place diachronically time and again, when more generic (superordinate) classifiers systematically replace the more specific (subordinate) ones²³. This was by no means a unilinear development, as there are later examples of scribes or scribal traditions going back to the older system, with reasons for this choice ranging from archaism or idiosyncratic choices to the graphic peculiarities of certain texts (Goldwasser 2005: 109–110; 2006: 477 with n. 35)²⁴. Additionally, different determinatives to classify the same word were at times being used during the same period and within the same text (e. g. the Pyramid Texts), perhaps reflecting a shift of focus on the various semantic components of the word, each denoting a slightly varied aspect of its complex meaning (Goldwasser 2009a: 27). The tendency to create more or less standardized combinations of determinatives classifying a word is nevertheless well documented throughout the lifespan of the Egyptian script(s) (Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 44), and is observable starting from the Middle Kingdom, when the

writing system underwent a process of standardization, whereby graphic variations were significantly reduced and fixed, conventional orthographies were introduced (e. g. Loprieno 1995: 21).



The other determinatives occurring in conjunction with the word Duat do not have such a high incidence rate, but they are still significant, since they provide the reader with additional information about this notion. The sign for pool  (N37) occurs once, besides the star sign²⁵, and would seem to point to the watery nature of the sky, which was seen as a sort of interface between the primordial ocean Nun, lying inert outside the created world, and the atmosphere (Allen 1988: 5). Innumerable passages in the Pyramid Texts point to this notion, as they refer to the journey of the celestial bodies and the king through the sky as a navigation²⁶. If the Duat was thought to be part of a broader celestial domain, it may seem odd that the sign for sky  (N1) appears only twice to determine it, following once the star in a circle and once the plain star sign²⁷. Applying the aforementioned principle of the metonymic-taxonomic categorization when more determinatives are involved, we could speculate that whoever copied those spells in the pyramids of Pepi I and Pepi II felt the need to further clarify that the afterlife destiny of their king was indeed a celestial one, and did so by juxtaposing the determinative for a “starry domain” and the celestial determinative par excellence, namely the sign for the sky, being this latter the superordinate category for “starry domain”, as the place across which the celestial bodies moved. The use of the sign  (N31)²⁸ could further indicate that the Duat was also conceived as a path towards (re)birth (Beaux 1994: 4 with n. 36). Moreover, the sign  (O49) appears alone twice²⁹ to determine the word Duat. While



22 The same process, by which the prototype of a given category comes to stand for the entire superordinate category, is also evident in the evolution of the sign  (M1). This ideogram was originally a pictorial representation of the sycamore tree, and gradually became used to classify words designating trees, thus becoming the prototype of the superordinate concept of tree, for which no lexeme existed up until the Middle Kingdom (Goldwasser 2002: 39–55).



23 This process reached its peak in the New Kingdom, when a systematic reorganization of the hieratic classifier system took place. A more important place was assigned to abstract notions, which underscores an underlying evolution of cognitive, cultural and linguistic conceptions affecting the Egyptians’ view of their world (Chantraine 2014: 39–41, 54–55). On the other hand, it has to be noted that scribes writing hieratic from the Nineteenth Dynasty onwards did not carefully select the determinatives that they would use, but heaped them up at the end of the words (Spalinger 2008: 142).

24 Apart from the few occurrences of “earlier” writings that can still be found in the Middle Kingdom copies of the Pyramid Texts and in the Coffin Texts (see below), the only instance of the sign  used to determine the word Duat in the New Kingdom royal compositions is in the catalogue of gods from the Amduat inscribed in the upper pillared hall of the tomb of Thutmose III (KV 34), where the word is spelled  (Hornung 1992: 428). In the New Kingdom royal compositions, this sign is retained only when cryptographic orthographies of the word Duat are involved (e. g. Roberson 2012: 73–74); these are particularly common in the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos (Osireion), where they occur without determinatives, as is quite typical in cryptographic texts (Darnell 2004: 8).



25  PT 466 § 882c (Merenre). All the references to passages of the Pyramid Texts employ Sethe’s numbering system, which is maintained in Allen 2013.





26 Verbs such as “to row”, “to ferry”, “to traverse”, “to cross” are used to describe the journey across the sky in the Pyramid Texts (examples in Allen 1989: 7). Moreover, boats were the preferred mode of transportation, especially the Day-Bark (*mʿndt*, e. g. PT 222 § 210c) and Night-Bark (*mstkt*, e. g. PT 222 § 210a), aboard which the sun god (and the king) traversed the firmament. The boat determinative  (var. P1) is one of the most commonly used to classify (horizontal) movement in the Pyramid Texts, together with the sign  (D54), and reflects the importance of the fluvial environment in the ancient Egyptian world (see Goldwasser 2006: 480–481; Lincke 2011: 72–77).



27  in PT 437 § 802c (Pepi I);  in PT 603 § 1677a (Pepi II).

28 PT 569 § 1434c ( twice in Pepi I, perhaps  once in Merenre, but the context is extremely difficult to interpret in both cases).


29  PT 215 § 148a, and PT 216 § 151a (both Wedjebetni).


this could be simply taken as a misreading of the original  that the other versions consistently show, there is a possibility that it may point to the Duat being classified as a concretely delineated locale, as opposed to other areas of the universe that were less clearly delimited and therefore left unnamed and/or undetermined³⁰. There is yet another group of signs determining the term Duat, consisting of a sun (N5) topping two small horizontal traits (). This occurs only once, and in a passage where the word Duat is used to convey the notion of (early) morning, when the stars fade into the growing light of dawn, a notion that is accordingly reflected in the determinative³¹. Based on the contexts in which the term appears and the incidence

³⁰ This is true of the differentiation between the sign  (M20), indicating marsh areas or fields, and the sign  (O49), which was used to classify words conveying the notion of (Egyptian) village, city, or urbanised area in general (Chantrain 2014: 50). The former was usually broadly assigned to words relating to areas that were perceived as being non-delineated, with no specific borders, as for instance the marshes or fields that also populated the topography of the afterlife. The latter was instead preferred when the area to which it was applied had some specific features that made it a “locale” with delimitations of some sort. These signs were used even later, in the *Amduat*, to indicate various portions of the Netherworld (see Horning 1963, I: 18–19 with nn. 3, 11), thus perpetuating the distinction between irrigated fields/marshlands and inhabited areas/towns that was at the basis of the Egyptian landscape, and transferring it onto a cosmographic level. The Pyramid Texts are the first textual source to which the emergence of the category “place” – articulated by the determinatives  and  – can be traced back (Goldwasser 2006: 481 with n. 59; cf. Thuault 2018: 15–21). On the cultural organization of the geographic space as can be inferred from the determinatives assigned to toponyms, see Loprieno 2003 and Spalinger 2008.

³¹ In the Cannibal Spell (PT 273–274, Wenis and Teti), the king is said to hunt the gods and to feed on them in order for him to absorb their power during his *morning* meal ( *ist.f dw3t*, § 404a), an evening meal (*msrwt.f*, § 404b), and a night meal (*ist.f h3w*, § 404c). On this, see e.g. Goebis 2008: 205–230. As pointed out by Beaux (1994: 2, with nn. 12–15), the determinative associated with Duat in the Cannibal Spell is used in the Pyramid Texts in connection with only three words that all convey temporal notions: *sf* “yesterday”, *bk3* “tomorrow”, and *nhpw* “early morning”. It could be interpreted as the sun over the horizon, with the two strips of land symbolically representing its eastern and western limits, or perhaps just the Two Lands. However, it is worth noting that the same group of signs appears once in the Coffin Texts in conjunction with the word Duat in a spell that seems to equate it with the lower part of the sky (CT V: 335e–B9C). Given that more explicit hints of a chthonic characterization of the Duat are found in this composition, and taking into consideration the double path that the solar god is said to travel upon in the Book of the Two Ways, it may be suggested that the duality of the determinatives () represents the two paths of the Duat, possibly even pointing to the Upper and Lower Duat. While these two areas are mentioned together only once in the Coffin Texts (spell 107, CT II: 119f, i), they became increasingly important in later funerary compositions. On this, see Darnell 2004: 375–380; cf. Leitz 1989.

of the various determinatives used with it, Beaux (1994) pointed to the existence of three “types” of Duat: the dawn at the eastern horizon, the daily sky³², and the subterranean space between the two horizons, where the celestial bodies remain when they are invisible. She thus concludes that the Duat stands for the environment of the invisible phase of growth and progress of the celestial bodies before (re)birth in the morning.

Beyond the domain of determinatives, the definition of Duat in the Pyramid Texts is particularly complicated, due to the fact that two main traditions on the afterlife coexist and blend, at times even within the same spell. One entails resurrection through ascent, implying detachment from earth and a celestial-solar process of elevation towards the sky, where the deceased would join the sun, the moon, and the stars. On the other hand, a chthonic-Osirian tradition of the hereafter surfaces, implying resurrection through interment and stressing the overcoming of death as associated with the burial, the west, and the necropolis. Judging by both the determinatives and the various contexts in which the word Duat appears, it seems safe to say that the authors of the Pyramid Texts did not (yet) imagine the Duat as an underground domain proper, despite some ambiguous hints in the texts which would appear to point in that direction, as has been repeatedly argued (e.g. Allen 1989: 23–24). Quite on the contrary, instead, the Duat was most likely imagined as a celestial-cosmic domain³³. Perhaps, taking the visual level of meaning even further, it could be argued that the sign , which appears in the majority of occurrences as the determinative classifying the word Duat in the Pyramid Texts, seems to point to a conception of this latter as being an all-

³² This claim is based on the fact that the sky sign  appears twice as determinative for the word Duat, and is the same that also accompanies words such as *pt* “sky”, *Nwt* “Nut”, and *shdw* “firmament”. However, this determinative could simply point towards the generic idea of a celestial domain not necessarily coinciding with the diurnal sky.

³³ By the expression “celestial-cosmic”, I intend to designate a domain which was neither purely stellar nor only solar. The king not only was believed to take part in a hereafter where he would live an eternal life following the stars and the sun, but he was also to become an active part in the cosmic cycles of the celestial bodies, as a star himself, or by being identified with the solar god. Countless are the mentions of the journey of the king across the sky, where he is said to accompany the sun god in his diurnal and nocturnal barques (e.g. PT 267 §§ 366b–368c, PT 407 §§ 711a–d, PT 469 §§ 906a–e), with the Imperishable Stars and the Unwearying Stars serving as their crew (e.g. PT 210 §§ 222a–c; see Krauss 1997: 143–144). These cosmic cycles, based on regular movements of the celestial bodies in the sky during the year, were a perfect symbol of perpetual regeneration, as the notion of cycle itself evokes that of eternal return and sameness (see Wallin 2002).

enclosing space surrounding the celestial bodies, a notion which quite a few spells refer to. As passages of this corpus already allude to, the stars could additionally be identified with the *akhs* of the deceased (Frankfort 1948: 100; Englund 1978: 57–59), by virtue of these latter’s connection with the light and brilliance (*ḥh*) typical of celestial bodies. As a consequence, the sign \oplus may also be interpreted as the ultimate symbol of the deceased as star (temporarily) being encircled by the Duat before reemergence and rebirth. Particularly important in this regard are the mentions of the king fading at dawn along with the other stars of the night sky, such as Orion and Sothis, which are said to be encircled (*šni*) by the Duat (e. g. PT 216 §§ 151a–c). As is known from later texts on astronomical ceilings, and also from Papyrus Carlsberg I, the expression *šni dwʿt* “to encircle the Duat” refers to the heliacal setting of decans (Krauss 1997: 160; cf. Leitz 1995: 64). Therefore, the passages in the Pyramid Texts employing such expression refer to a sequence of heliacal settings, thereby characterizing the Duat as the moment just before the sun rises on the eastern horizon, thus starting the dawn of a new day and making the nocturnal celestial bodies fade away with it (cf. Allen 1989: 21; Beaux 1994: 3). This would justify the apparent connection of the Duat with the earth that is observable in some texts³⁴, since the celestial bodies – and the king with them – were seen to reappear above the horizon rising from the earth, thus leading to the speculation that they might have come from a region “below” in which they were before that moment. The horizon would thus represent a transitional area between the two phases, namely invisibility and visibility, the former being the place/moment of darkness and the latter the one in which the sun shines (cf. remarks in Billing 2002: 201–203).







If this is compared to the description of the daily cycle of the sun and stars in the Book of Nut, it seems indeed that the Duat was imagined as a space enclosing the celestial bodies when they set, which also happened to coincide with Nut’s body, being her mouth the point of entry of the setting sun in the evening (Neugebauer and Parker 1960: 60 f. with pl. 49, text Bb; von Lieven 2007: 72 f. § 55–57). However, another passage in the Book of Nut characterizes the Duat as an outer realm that is neither earth nor sky (Neugebauer and Parker 1960: 52–54 with pl. 46,

text L; von Lieven 2007: 59–61 § 31–38), which as such was probably associated with the region therein called *qbḥw* “the fresh waters” (*Wb* V, 28.2, 29.5–13). This term, among other uses, could refer to the cosmic waters belonging in the dark void outside the created world already as early as the Pyramid Texts (Hannig 2003: 1333–1334) and the Coffin Texts (Hannig 2006a: 2516). In the Book of Nut, it is also applied to a portion of the outermost area of the cosmos, the northwestern one, lying in absolute darkness (*kkw-smʿw*) and being the place where the migratory birds were seen to come from and fly to Egypt (Neugebauer and Parker 1960: 64, 66 with pl. 50, texts Ff, Hh, and Dd; von Lieven 2007: 76–78 § 70, 79–83). In turn, these *qbḥw* seem to coincide with a region called *qbḥw Ḥrw* “the fresh waters of Horus”, which appears on a Late Period fragmentary “map of cosmos” now in the Map collection of Yale University Library (Clère 1958: 2, fig. 2), and which is there located right in the area corresponding to the northwestern outermost fringe of the cosmos. Therefore, the Book of Nut, which can be seen as the conceptual successor of the Pyramid Texts, characterizes the Duat as a notion of both time and space situated between two dimensions, physical and metaphysical, in which this realm could be located at the same time in the outer fringes of the universe and inside Nut, the sky, thus perhaps being imagined as an inner dimension of an outer, cosmic element. As was discussed earlier, this is indeed what may lie behind the prevailing determinative \oplus for the word Duat in the Pyramid Texts.



4 The transition to the Middle Kingdom


In the Coffin Texts, as in the Pyramid Texts, there are many astronomical references and statements concerning the movements of the sun and the celestial bodies, the cyclical character of which was correlated with eternal regeneration in the afterlife and the attainment of immortality by each individual. Like the Pyramid Texts before, the bulk of the Coffin Texts points towards a celestial universe dominated by the cosmic cycle of the sun, moon and stars as background for the perpetual regeneration of the deceased after death (cf. Willems 2014: 183; also Bickel 1998: 54). However, as opposed to the Pyramid Texts, where such destiny was chiefly encapsulated in the \oplus (N15) determinative, the same word in the Coffin Texts is almost always determined by the sign \square (O1), which never appears in the earlier collection of texts. This sign represents the prototypical ground plan of a small one-room house, and is in












³⁴ In PT 688 (§§ 2084a–c), the king is said to descend (*hʿi*) among those who are in the Duat (*imyw-dʿt*), thus suggesting an unspecified underground location of it, or perhaps one lying just below the visible sky above the horizon. Other passages contrast the sky with a chthonic dimension seemingly located below the earth and commensurate with it, and mention its gods, Geb and Aker (PT 437 §§ 796a–b, 799a–802c; compare PT 483 §§ 1014a–b, 1016a–d and PT 610 § 1713a, 1717a).



fact typically used to (logographically) write the word *pr* “house”  (cf. Goldwasser 1995: 46). However, when activated as a superordinate classifier, it becomes somewhat removed from its literal meaning “house” and is used as a generic sign to determine words conceptually belonging to the category “buildings” or “habitat”, such as  *ḥt* “room” or  *ḥt* “horizon”, the latter perceived as a metaphorical (temporary) dwelling place of the sun (Goldwasser 1995: 86 with n. 50; Goldwasser 2005: 33, 96 f. with fig. 1; 101)³⁵. There are only a few attestations of the term Duat in the Coffin Texts that display either an entirely different determinative³⁶ or other determinatives added to the sign .³⁷ Such development also affects the orthography of the word, which is now almost exclusively reduced to only two standardized graphic renditions, namely  or , as opposed to the broader spectrum of possibilities presented by the Pyramid Texts.


The same evolution can be observed also in the intermediary phase of transmission of the funerary literature that took place starting at the end of the Old Kingdom and through the First Intermediate Period, and that is represen-

35 This applies both to the case where a *kind* of house/building is the word classified by this sign (e. g.  *iz* “tomb”) and to the case where it is a *part* of a house/building that is classified (e. g.  *ḥt* “room”). Therefore, the category “habitat” has the potential of conveying both taxonomic and schematic (i. e. metonymic) aspects of the domain to which a given word belongs (Goldwasser 2002: 33).





36  (N23) in spell 335 (CT IV: 225d).


37 In spell 108 (CT II: 121d – pGardiner III), the star determinative  (N14) appears before the usual house sign, as is the case in spell 495 (CT VI: 76h), where there is a lacuna right after the star sign, which is highly likely to be reconstructed as the sign , based on an identical writing of the word attested in spell 983 (CT VII: 192f). In spell 397 (CT V: 114f), source T1c has  (O49) after the house sign. In spell 891 (CT VII: 101n), the determinative appears to be a sun disk (N5), of which only the exterior circle is drawn, without the central dot () , as already attested in a few Pyramid Texts spells (Beaux 1994: 2, n. 15). In spell 463 (CT V: 335e), the word Duat is accompanied by a few determinatives that are unusual in the Coffin Texts, and are reminiscent of some writings from the Pyramid Texts:   in B9c, and  along with  in P. Gardiner II. Finally, there are two instances of the same spell (937, CT VII: 145e) in which, before the usual house sign (only assumed to have been there in pGardiner III, but not preserved), another determinative appears, featuring a star enclosed in two signs similar to the circle of N15, namely  in pGardiner IV and  in pGardiner III. These variations show how the rules of Egyptian script did not prescribe rigid spellings, but were rather subject to change depending on shifting preferences and evolving codification processes. However, one also has to allow for the variable nature of hieratic to be taken into account. Accordingly, what de Buck transcribed as different signs may have originally been mere variations in the writing of the line enclosing the star in the usual sign  due to a slightly different scribal practice or to a scribe's different handwriting. I am indebted to Foy Scalf for pointing out and discussing this issue with me.





ted by the copies of spells belonging to the Pyramid Texts occurring on coffins and other carriers dated to the Middle Kingdom (Allen 2006). Here, in fact, when the word Duat appears, it is accompanied in the vast majority of cases by the determinative , which in itself may be indicative of a progressive transition towards a different characterization of the notion. Perhaps this change was simply due to the proximity of the Pyramid Texts copies to the Coffin Texts spells occurring on the same carriers, so that the artists inscribing them would switch to the “newer” determinative by analogy with the more recent collection of texts in order to adapt the older texts to the incipient process of standardization of the script. The older determinative  does not disappear entirely, as is also the case for the Coffin Texts. However, interestingly enough, it only occurs linked to the word Duat when this is inscribed on the walls of tombs dating to the Middle Kingdom in Lisht and in Thebes³⁸. Maybe the decoration of these monuments was carried out using older copies of the texts, which perhaps stemmed directly from the Memphite tradition of the Old Kingdom, and thus retained the original spelling of the word as occurring in the Old Kingdom pyramids³⁹.

On the one hand, the shift from the more “specialized”, mainly stellar determinatives used in the Pyramid Texts to the broader category represented by the sign  may just be an example of the diachronic tendency to replace specific determinatives with more generic ones (Goldwasser 2006: 477; Chantraine 2014), as part of the systemic standardization of the graphic conventions started at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (see above). On the other hand, however, this evolution has the potential of providing invaluable insight into the ancient Egyptians' conceptual organization of their afterlife, and how this evolved over

38 The tombs in question are that of Wosret and Imhotep at Lisht (Arnold 2008: 24; 33–38) and the tomb of Meru (TT 240), located in the Asasif area of the Theban necropolis (Kampp 1996: 516).




39 PT 216 § 151b maintains the spelling  both in the original Pyramid Texts (W, N, Nt) and in TT 240 (Allen 2006: 177), while only minor spelling changes occur in PT 216 § 151c, not affecting the determinative in the copy of TT 240 (Allen 2006: 119). The spelling is again identical () in PT 247 § 257c in the tomb chamber of Wosret (Allen 2006: 269). As for the tomb of Imhotep, the inscription sticks to the original Pyramid Texts (W) in PT 262 §§ 331a–b (Allen 2006: 279), in PT 263 § 341c (Allen 2006: 280, with only the final –t omitted), and parts a little from the original (W, P, N) in PT 271 § 390b, where it adds a star () before the final –t of the word Duat (Allen 2006: 285). At the same time, one tomb in Thebes (TT 319, queen Neferu), tentatively dated to the same period as TT 240, namely the reign of Nehepetre Mentuhotep II of Dynasty 11 (cf. Kampp 1996: 573), shows the new determinative  in PT 215 § 148a (Allen 2006: 101) and in PT 216 § 151a–c (Allen 2006: 117, 119).


time⁴⁰. The underlying evolution of cognitive and cultural concepts associated with the word Duat was certainly not conveyed by the spoken language, which lacked the potential of expressing an elaborated conceptual organization of reality, but may be traceable through the icons, i. e. the hieroglyphs, used to classify those concepts. It is therefore possible that, by using such a determinative pointing to an enclosed space, the compilers of the Coffin Texts may have meant to introduce the idea that the Duat was starting to be imagined as a more confined domain, a more circumscribed area within the cosmos. Despite the still “fluctuating” notions concerning the topography of the afterlife in the Middle Kingdom (Bickel 1998: 55), this development is a significant one, as it also matches the growing tendency towards a systematizing of material and knowledge that the Coffin Texts display in many ways, from the titles assigned to many spells to the attempt at better organizing the geography of the afterlife, this latter particularly evident in the Book of the Two Ways⁴¹ and later fully developed in the large Theban compositions of the New Kingdom⁴². The use of the  sign in association

⁴⁰ The same approach was adopted by R. Shalomi-Hen in her survey of the evolution of the “divine determinatives” in the Old Kingdom (Shalomi-Hen 2006) and in one spell from the Coffin Texts (CT 335) which eventually became Book of the Dead spell 17 (Shalomi-Hen 2000). Her examination of the written material shows that the signs used to mark the category of divine, namely the *nfr*-pole  (R8), the falcon on the standard  (G7), and the seated bearded man  (A40), had different functions in the early dynastic times throughout the end of the Old Kingdom. However, a change in the organization of the knowledge of the wor(l)d took place between the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom, since, by the time the Coffin Texts were in use, all three signs had acquired the status of general divine determinatives, as opposed to their differentiated use in the earlier attestations (see the summary in Shalomi-Hen 2006: 159–164). Particularly interesting is the connection between the earliest appearance of the seated bearded man  as a divine classifier in the second half of the Fifth Dynasty and the earliest attestations of the god Osiris in the private inscriptions of the same period, especially since the very same sign was used until then to classify foreign peoples (Shalomi-Hen 2006: 71–136).


⁴¹ This composition, which is generally regarded as the first Egyptian cosmography mapping the afterlife (Hermesen 1991; Backes 2005; Sherbiny 2017), makes up the last part of the Coffin Texts in de Buck’s edition (texts 1029–1185, CT VII: 252a–521 f). Rößler-Köhler (e. g. 1999: 76, 86) has suggested that, in the version attested on the coffins from Deir el-Bersheh, the Book of the Two Ways may even be regarded as the forerunner of the New Kingdom royal Amduat.


⁴² The notion of Duat as a definite space became more clearly delineated at the beginning of the New Kingdom, when the phrase “sky, earth, Duat” (*pt t3 dw3t*) is commonly found in the Underworld Books to describe the division of the universe into different spheres, at times also including the primordial ocean (e. g. Allen 1988: 5). A formula that made its appearance then and is attested hundreds of times down to the end of the history of Egyptian religion describes


with the word Duat can also suggest that this was seen as a place where one could reside, specifically the gods and the deceased, who become very much like to gods once they have attained the condition of *akhs*. Accordingly, the category of *dw3t3w* “those of the Duat” (or, alternatively, the “dwellers of the Duat”) is also at times given this determinative⁴³, as these beings have their abode in the Duat. The same applies to the category “dwellers of the horizon” (*3ht3w*)⁴⁴, as the horizon had always been imagined at least as a place of transition of the king in his journey towards rebirth in the morning already as early as the Pyramid Texts. The writing of the term *3ht* itself undergoes the same evolution as the word Duat since, starting with the Coffin Texts, it is also determined with the house sign, although not uniformly. According to Goldwasser’s analysis of the metonymic relationship between hieroglyphic signifier (the script) and its linguistic signified, already the fact that the word *3ht3w* is spelled with the ideogram representing the sun rising above the horizon  (N27) as first sign is indicative of such a (metonymic) relationship existing between said sign and the alleged dwellers of the region horizon, with this latter forming part of the signifier for any beings associated with that location (Goldwasser 1995: 67 f.). The addition of a determinative sign that represents the prototypical member of the category “places where one resides” () further reinforces the conceptual metaphor, deeply rooted in the Egyptian culture, especially in religious and royal contexts, that the horizon was (one of) the eternal abode(s) of the deceased, along with the sky, of which it is part, and the Duat (Goldwasser 1995: 99; cf. Goldwasser 2002: 15 f.). Therefore, by assigning the word Duat the (now) typical determinative , the authors of the Coffin Texts also made it clear that such domain could be thought of as the dwelling place of the deceased in the afterlife, serving as the prototypical habitat for their regeneration.

Moreover, a further layer of conceptual meaning can be surmised behind the use of the sign  as the chief classifier of the word Duat in the Coffin Texts. The goddess Nut, personifying the celestial vault as early as the Pyramid Texts (Allen 1989: 16), was believed to conceive the sun each night and to give birth to him again each

the status to which the deceased aspired as “transfigured (*akh*) in the sky with Re, powerful on earth with Geb, vindicated in the realm of the dead with Osiris” (Assmann et al. 2005: 464 f. § 1).

⁴³ E. g.  in spell 236 (CT III: 302g – G1T) and in spell 458 (CT V: 332a – B3L).

⁴⁴ The term *3ht3w* is classified by the sign  e. g. in spell 159 (CT II: 371a – B2Bo) and in spell 317 (CT IV: 117g – S1P, S2C).

morning (e. g. PT 563 § 1416c–1417d)⁴⁵. Besides being the sun's mother, she also appears in the Pyramid Texts in the role of mother of the king, of the stars and of other celestial beings, to which she gives birth (e. g. PT 504 §§ 1082a–b, PT 577 § 1527a; further references in Allen 1989: 15 with n. 97), and which travel along her belly in their barques. Additionally, Nut could be identified with the coffin and the sarcophagus (e. g. PT 364 §§ 616d–f), as also her most common epithets “Great Encloser” (*hnmt wrt*) and “Encloser of the Great One” (*hnmt wr*) would seem to indicate (Allen 1989: 17 n. 113; Billing 2002: 179 f.). She was therefore imagined to be a space enclosing all the phases of life, hence the term *nb ʕnh* “Lord of Life” used to designate the coffin, among other names (Willems 1988: 46 f.). Being the coffin as a whole a ritual element (Willems 1988: *passim*) that effectively transformed death into (new) life, the placement of the body within it can be conceived of as a return to the maternal womb (Assmann 2005: 165–173). The reception of the ascending king is described in terms of a conception, similarly to the Kamutef motif in which Re reaches up to his mother and is said to make her pregnant (e. g. PT 479 § 990a; cf. Billing 2002: 124). An ascension scenario (Willems 1988: 134 f.; Billing 2002: 124 f.; Assmann 2005: 183) is thereby combined with the reconstitution of the king and with rebirth, rejuvenation, and renewal of the deceased occurring symbolically in Nut's womb and in the sky at the same time⁴⁶. The possibility that the name of the goddess may be identical with the word *nwt* “oval” (Allen 1989: 16–17), as the variant determinative  would seem to point at in at least one occurrence in the Pyramid Texts

(PT 593 § 1629a)⁴⁷, further enhances the mother symbolism associated with her, according to which her body could be seen as a “pre-birth environment” (Billing 2002: 11). More importantly, the oval was a symbol of an enclosed and hidden space. As such, it is used in the New Kingdom Amduat for the representation of the cavern of Sokar, and it may be the shape that the whole Duat was thought to have in that period (Hornung 1963, II: 105). Additionally, Nut's typical mode of interaction and integration with the deceased is the embrace, which is also one of the meanings of the verb *šn*, the same used to describe the celestial bodies being “encircled” by the Duat at their heliacal setting (see above). Nut as an all-enclosing and enclosed space therefore embodies a third tradition concerning the idea of afterlife in both the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts, representing their underlying foundational concept. Her function of prototypical motherly habitat for the deceased and the celestial bodies during their phase of renewal before rebirth overlaps with the notion of Duat as a liminal domain full of regenerative power, situated between two modes of existence, and thus perhaps also between two areas, geographical or otherwise. As such, the Duat can lie in the sky or somewhere between the earth and the horizon, and it may even coincide with Nut's womb, which harbors the sun and the stars and offers a place of regeneration through (re)birth. In the figure of Nut all the seemingly contrasting destinies of the deceased seem to be brought together and reconciled, as is more explicitly expressed in the New Kingdom Books of the Sky and also, at times, in some passages of the Underworld Books⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ This is the only passage in the Pyramid Texts that describes Nut receiving the dead (identified with one of the celestial bodies) using the verb *ʕm* “to swallow” in the versions of Merenre and Pepi II; the text of Pepi I uses the verb *šp* “receive” instead. This motif is found much later for instance in the so-called “Dramatic text” concluding the Book of Nut in the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos and in its Demotic commentary in pCarlsberg I (IV, 35–V, 11), where the sky goddess is described as a sow eating her piglets offspring (Neugebauer and Parker 1960: 67–70 with pl. 51; von Lieven 2007: 80–81, 83–84). While by that time it had already become a common way of describing the evening phase of the cosmic cycle, with the sun described as being swallowed by Nut, this passage in the Pyramid Texts is the only known attestation of the motif before the New Kingdom (Billing 2002: 124).

⁴⁶ The Pyramid Texts include a series of spells that deal with the role of Nut in the reconstitution of the deceased's body and in their rebirth, and that represent one of the largest sequences of spells transmitted from the Old Kingdom into the Middle Kingdom and up to the Roman Period. This series has been labeled in different ways by scholars over the years, such as for example “Book of Nut” (Billing 2002: 111–116, with further references), and “Pyramid Texts of Nut” (Morales 2017).

5 Conclusion

The change observed in the use of the determinative(s) classifying the word Duat is indicative of an underlying evolving conceptualization of the afterlife domain in the

⁴⁷ However, Billing (2002: 11) has pointed out that, although Allen is certainly right in associating Nut with the oval, the reason behind it seems dubious, since it is based on only one occurrence of such determinative.

⁴⁸ The example of the Book of Nut has already been mentioned above. Although the Underworld Books are more focused on the nocturnal journey of the sun god through the underworld, the goddess Nut is therein given prominence in virtue of her dual nature reconciling the two extremes of death and life. Therefore, the Amduat as well as the Book of Gates and the Book of Caverns can link her with the Duat by equating the solar journey through the underworld with a journey through her body. For further references, see Hornung 1963, II: 195 with n. 2.

period between the redaction of the Pyramid Texts and the appearance of the Coffin Texts, with a mingling of traditions in the Middle Kingdom copies of the Pyramid Texts. The drive towards a better conceptual categorization of the world led to an evolution in the choice of the determinative(s) classifying the word Duat. In the course of this process, one prevailing sign (𓄿) was consistently assigned to this notion as a more generic superordinate determinative that could better materialize in the script all the physical and non-physical attributes that the ancient Egyptians imagined the Duat to possess, in its quality of habitat of the deceased. At the same time, there was still room for variations and for more specific determinatives to be added to the generic ones, as was shown above. Most importantly, the choice of a particular determinative could also be dictated by context and, in conjunction with that, it determined a whole new range of conceptual meanings.

Bearing in mind how important the phenomenon of the “multiplicity of approaches”⁴⁹ was in the Egyptian *Weltanschauung*, it is fair to conclude that there was no singular, unambiguous conception of Duat in the Pyramid Texts as well as in the Coffin Texts. The very fact that it has been interpreted in so many ways by scholars seems to underscore its flexibility. The foundational conception that clearly underlies both a celestial and a chthonic Duat is a functional one⁵⁰, as this domain was imagined as a space of regeneration for both gods and men. While in it, the beings to be regenerated are hidden from view, and they are not perceptible as 𓄿 yet. This is most explicit in the case of stellar and solar gods, who make an appearance from the Duat after a period of invisibility in which they are encircled by the Duat, their luminous heliacal rising attesting to their revived state and their renewed existence. It is this functional aspect of the Duat as an enclosed space that seems to be emphasized also in the predominant choice of the sign 𓄿 as determinative for the term in the Coffin Texts, in contrast to the earlier writings with the signs ⚡ and ☉. The categorization of the term Duat in the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts lends strong

support to this notion and shows that there was indeed a shift from the idea that it was located somewhere in a celestial realm of sun and stars (Pyramid Texts) to that of a more circumscribed (meta)physical place, an iconic “habitat” for those who had passed on to the next life. The beyond was eventually gaining a better defined position within the Egyptian cosmos.

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⁴⁹ H. Frankfort (1948: 18ff., and *passim*) coined this oft-cited definition to describe the ancient Egyptians’ way of dealing with the differentiation of the world, which could accept various explanations for the same issue at the same time and managed to fit them in a coherently organized system. Based on this principle, various layers of meaning could be superimposed and, even if to the modern logic this seems naïve or irrational, those layers were not mutually exclusive but rather complemented one another, in an incredible effort to describe and explain a multifaceted reality in the most comprehensive way.

⁵⁰ On the notions of flexibility and functionality as being major components of the ancient Egyptians’ mindset, see e.g. Goebis 2002.

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