



Sacred Skies – the Soul and the Stars

**Pyramid Text
The ascension myth
of the king**

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Egyptian Soul – 2500 BCE

It was viewed as a complex part of the self, related to the life force, the moral quality, the personality, one's name, one's character, one's image and one's potential to be a divine being.



The Egyptian Soul:

The *ib* – the heart

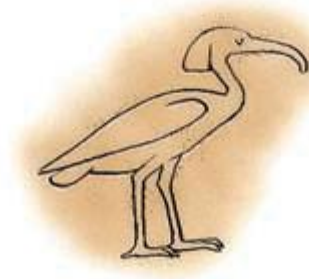
The *sheut* – the shadow

The *ren* – the given name

The *ka* – the vital life force

The *ba* – the moral essence

The *akh* – the transfigured spirit
in the next world.



Ib – the heart - amulets

The pyramids with text are those of the kings:

Unis of the Fifth Dynasty,
circa 2350 BCE

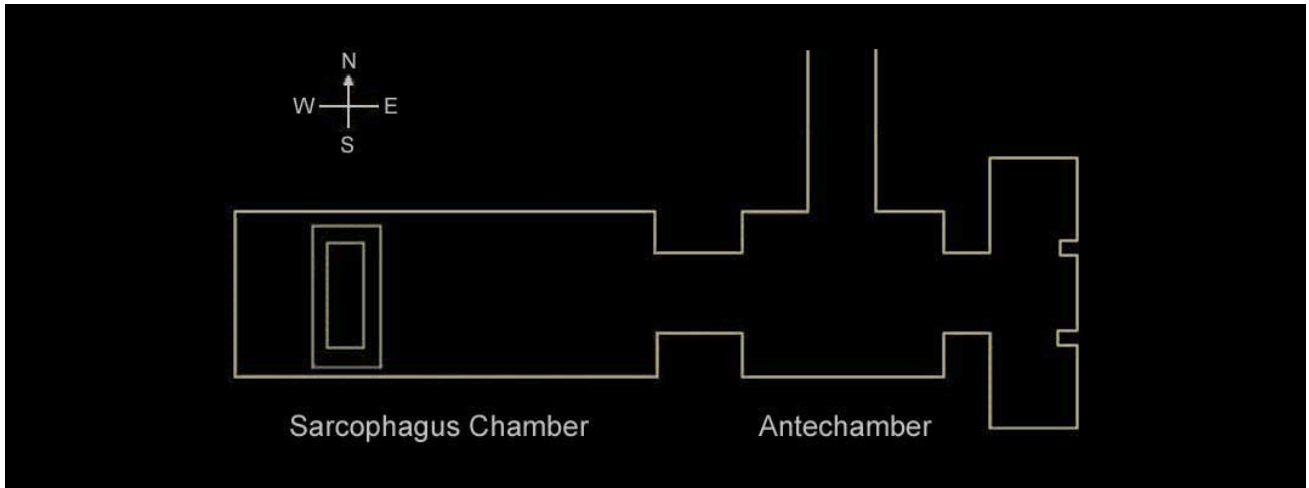
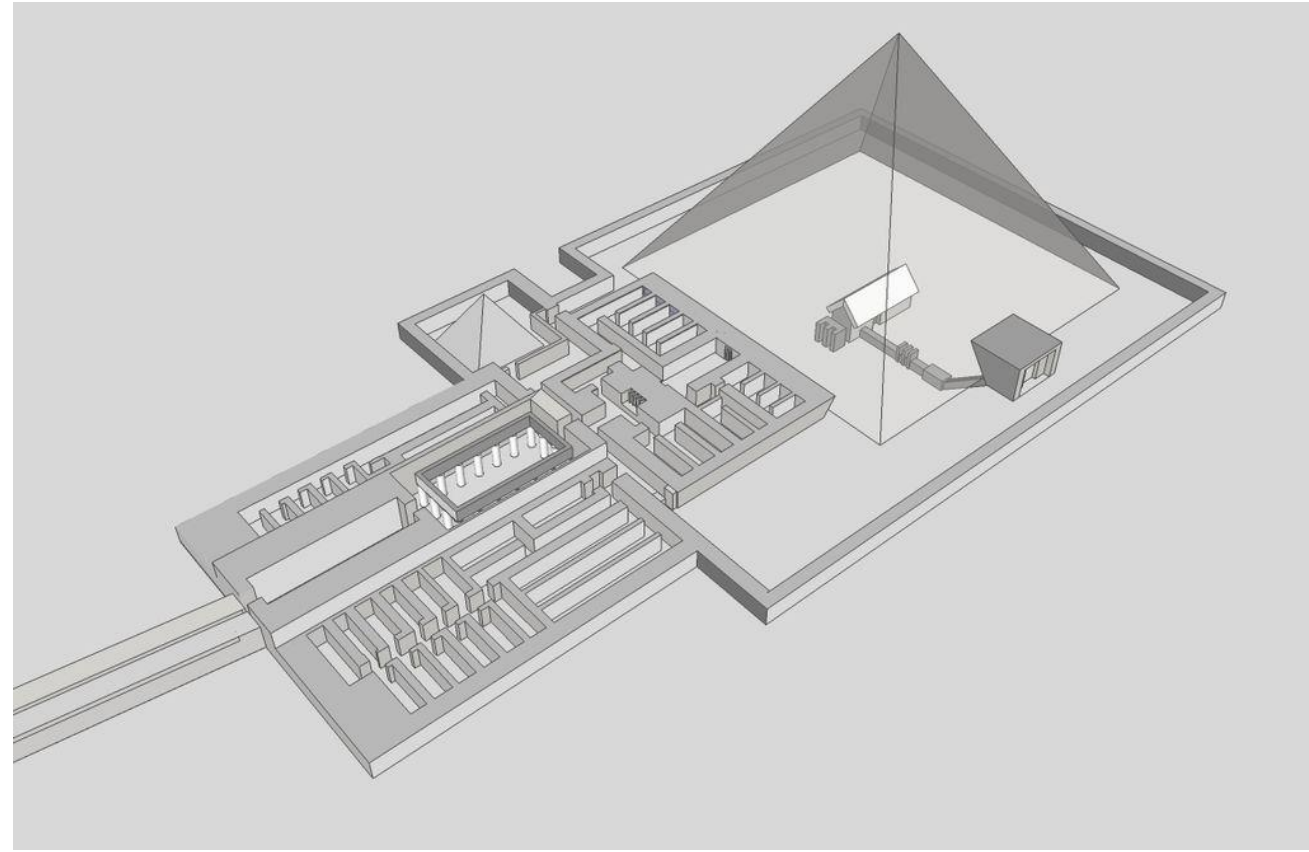
Teti, Pepi I, Merenrē' and Pepi II of the Sixth Dynasty.

Also the queens of Pepi II: Oudjebten, Neit, and Apout.

Ibi, a king of the Seventh Dynasty, of whom little historically is known.

These pyramids were constructed, and inscribed, between the years about 2350 to 2175 B.C.E.

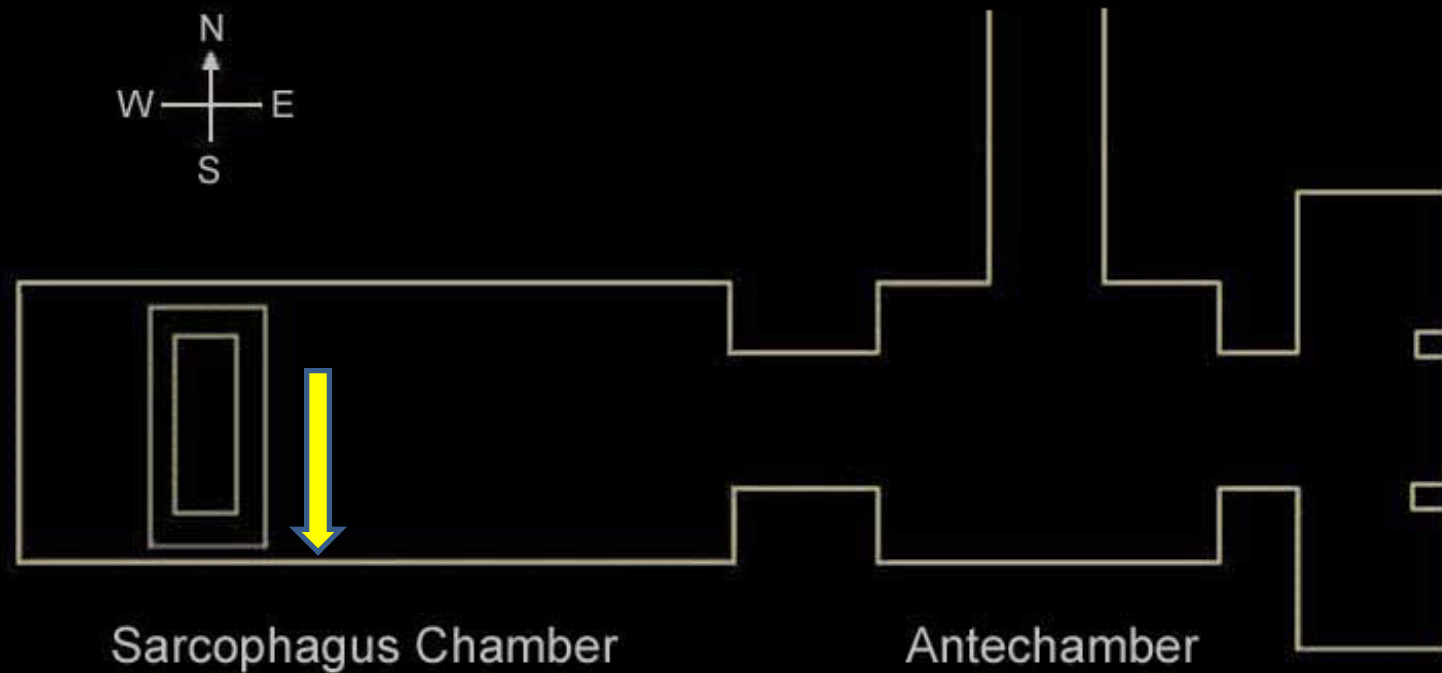
The origins of the text is believed to be as early as 3000 BCE.





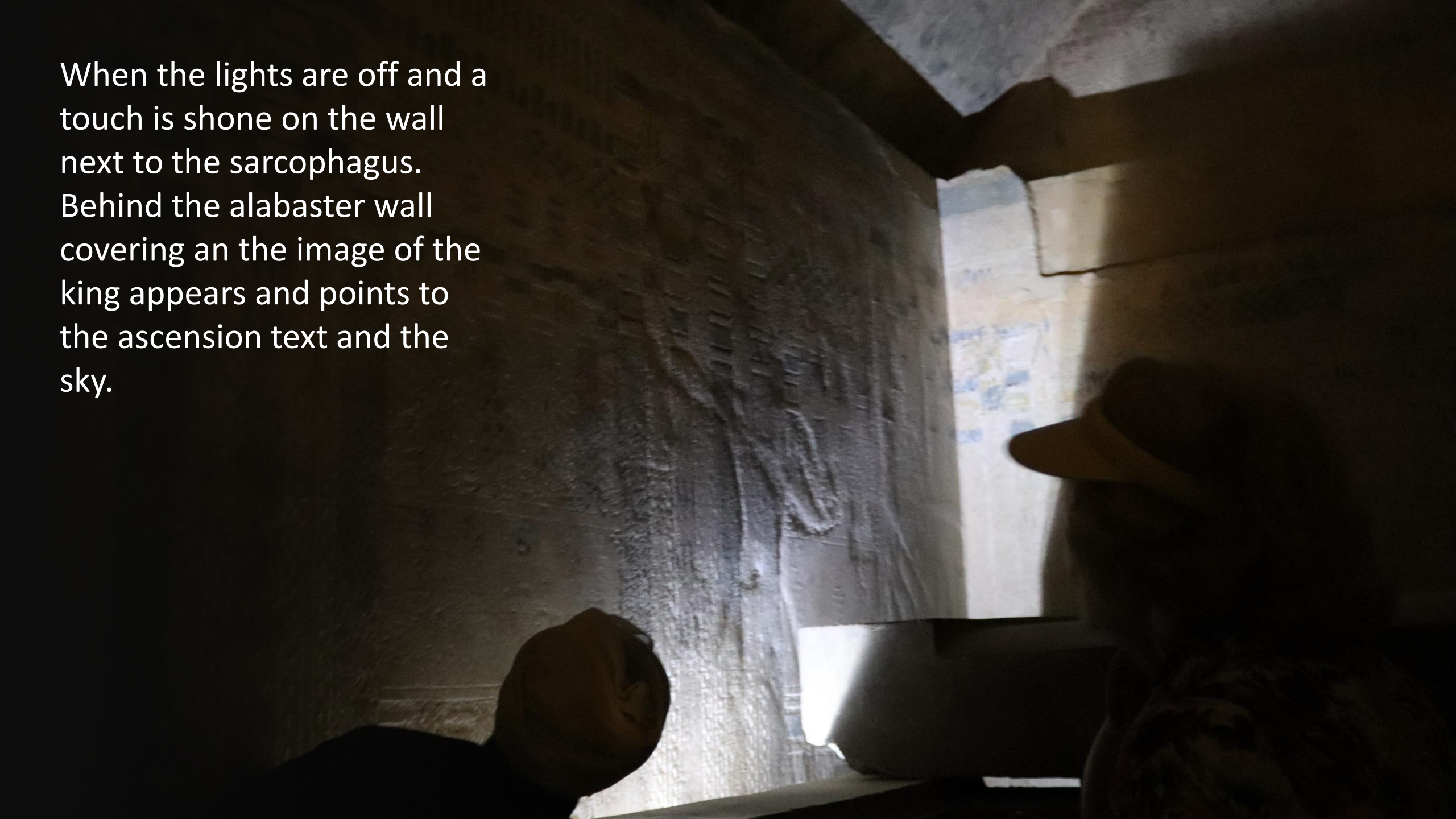
The Pyramid
of Teti

The texts of the king's ascension myth – the scent of the soul – are located next to the sarcophagus.

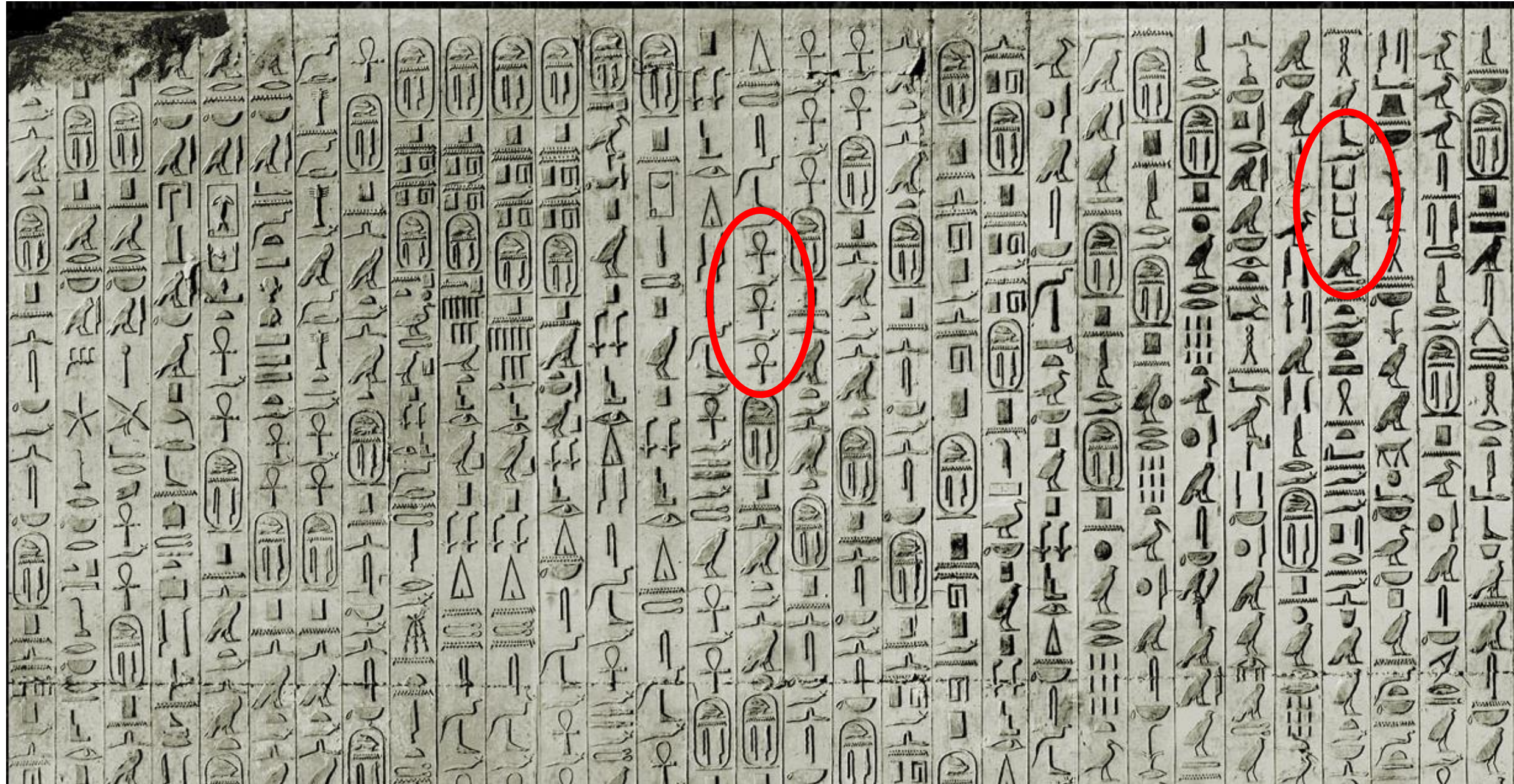




When the lights are off and a touch is shone on the wall next to the sarcophagus. Behind the alabaster wall covering an the image of the king appears and points to the ascension text and the sky.



Unas – Sarcophagus Chamber, south wall



Pyramid Texts

Contain the earliest writings on:

- The concept of soul.
- The ascent of the soul after death to the heavens.
- The adoration of the starry goddess of the heavens.

Additionally they are a complete corpus representing the entire mythology expressed in nine different versions which all reveal the same story features.

Samuel A.B. Mercer, *Literary Criticism of the Pyramid Texts* (London: Luzac & Company, 1956, pp. 9-10.



The King's ascension myth

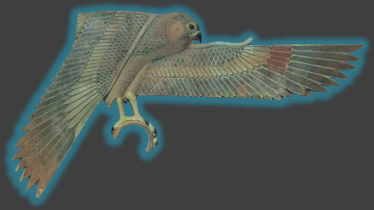
- The King's divine birth, and his immortality as he is the son of Nūt (§1145).
- Upon the King's mortal death he journeys to the western horizon and into the earthly Netherworld.
- His sister Isis, also the star Sophis (Sirius) blocks the path of Osiris in claiming the dead king for the death, 'I am Isis; go behind me, O Osiris the King.' (§44).
- The King, after being helped by the star Sirius then journeys to the eastern horizon where he will be resurrect as a god.



‘I am ferried over thereon to yonder eastern side of the sky, to the place where the gods fashioned me, wherein I was born, new and young’. (§344)

‘The King stands on the eastern side of the celestial vault, there is brought to him a way of ascent to the sky...’ (§326).





The King's ascension myth

The King then becomes a star, he rises using a celestial ladder, step by step or he has, **‘soared to the sky as a heron, I have kissed the sky as a falcon’** (§891-892) and joins the imperishable stars.

‘My head is a vulture; I will ascend and rise up to the sky. The sides of my head are the starry sky of the god;...’ (§1303).





The Ascent of the King's Soul

'O King, free course is given to you by Horus,

You flash as the *Lone Star* in the midst of the sky, you have grown wings as a great-breasted falcon, as a hawk seen in the evening traversing the sky.' §1048-49.

Faulkner's translations.



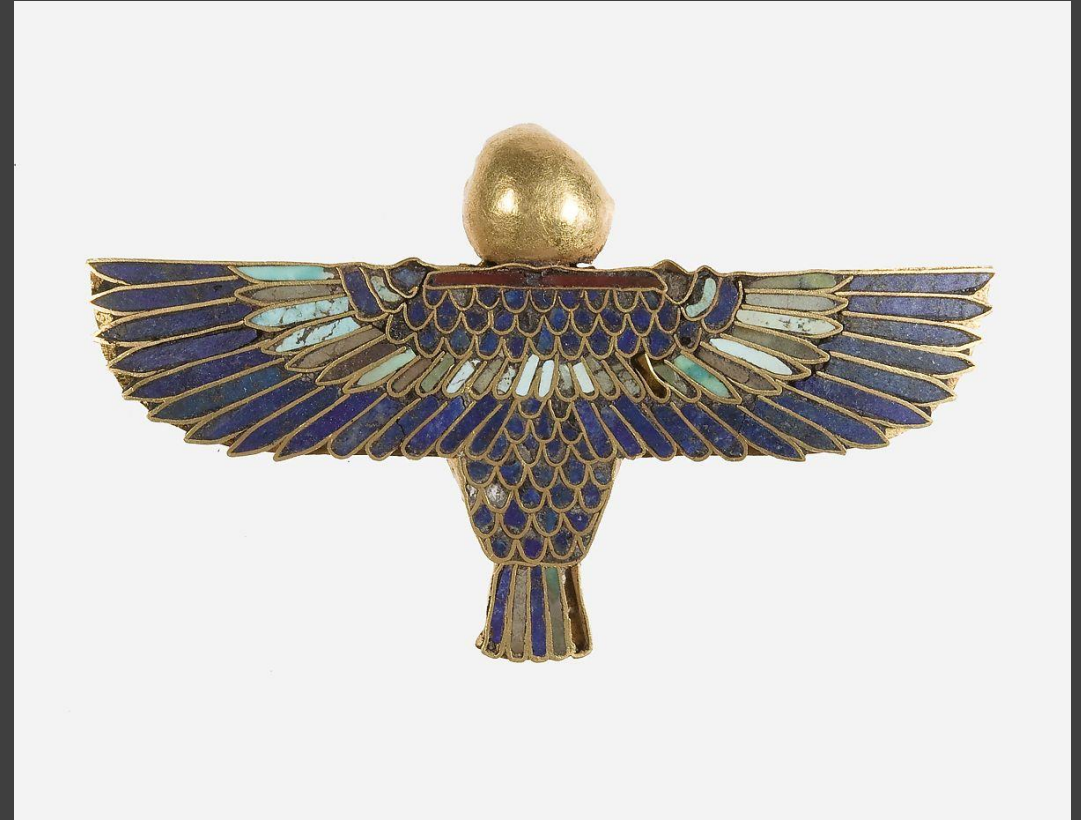
Khafre –Cairo Museum



The ascent of the soul to the stars

The King joins the Immortal Stars, the gods.

‘I am a star which illumines the sky, I mount up to the god that I may be protected, for the sky will not be devoid of me and this earth will not be devoid of me for ever. I live beside you, you gods of the Lower Sky, the Imperishable Stars.’ (§1454 – 1455).



A pendant depicting a ba-bird with outstretched wings 664–332 B.C. MET



Summary

- The King having died goes to the west.
- With the help of others, amongst who is his sister the star Sophis (Sirius), he moves to the eastern horizon where he rises as a bright star.
- This bright star then joins the circumpolar stars representing the eternal or imperishable gods.



How the Stars Move

Group 1	Circumpolar stars
Always visible	
Never rising or setting	
Always circumpolar	

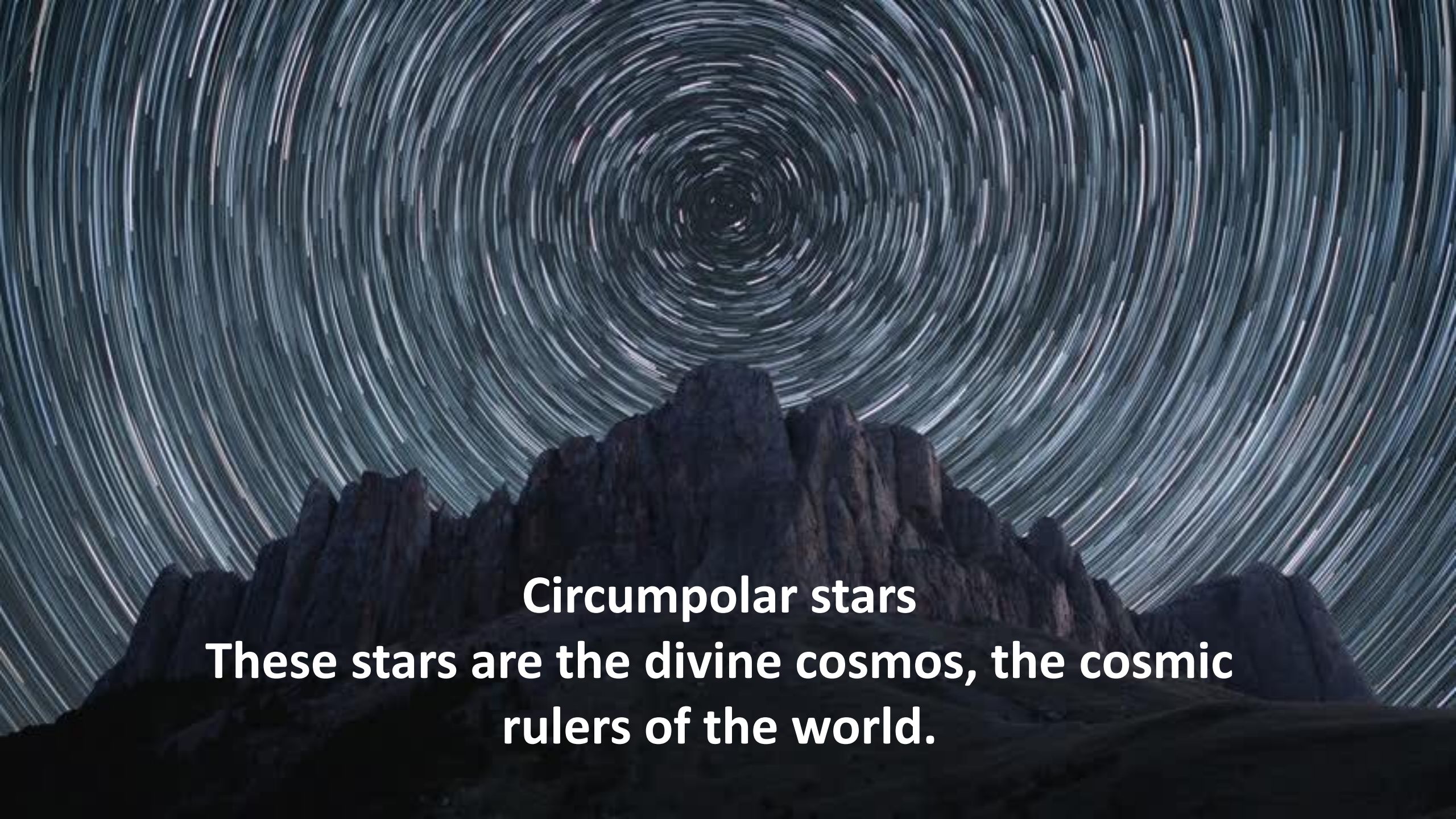
Group 3	Arising and Lying Hidden (ALH)
Sometimes visible	
Sometimes rising or setting	
Never circumpolar	



Arising and Lying Hidden (ALH)

These stars are the 'Unwearying stars'. Unwearying because they followed a perpetual pattern of entering the Netherworld and 'dying' to be born again some weeks or months later, and this pattern is repeated every year.

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Circumpolar stars
These stars are the divine cosmos, the cosmic rulers of the world.

Group 1
Always visible
Never rising or setting
Always circumpolar

Group 2
Curtailed
Passage (CP) **Always** visible
Sometimes rising or setting
Sometimes circumpolar

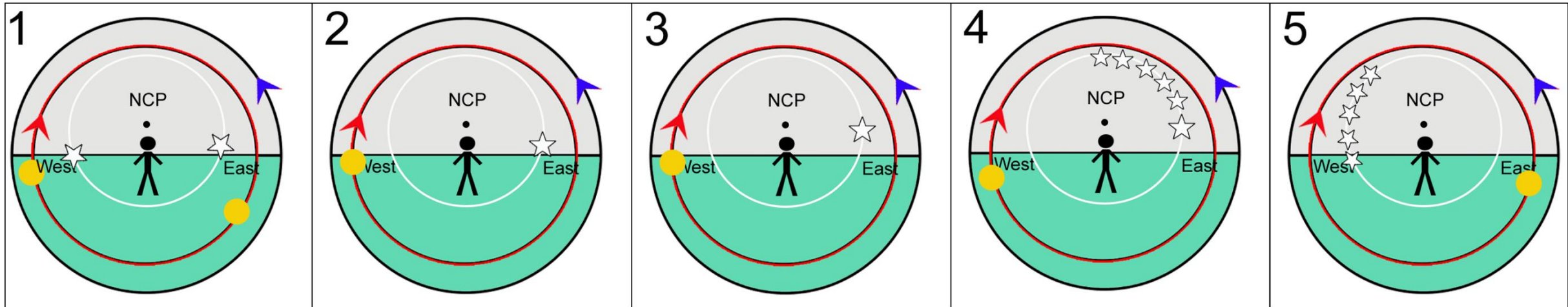
Group 3
Sometimes visible
Sometimes rising or setting
Never circumpolar

Arising and
Lying Hidden
(ALH)

Star Phases – Curtailed Passage

Red arrow is the movement of the sun along the ecliptic

Blue arrow is the diurnal movement from east to west.



1 - Sun sets with the star – but before the sun can rise the next morning the star has risen.

2 – Later in the year the sun has moved to an opposite place on the ecliptic to the star – as the sun sets the star is seen to rise.

3 – A few days later as the sun sets, the star has already risen and seen to be low in the eastern sky.

4 – Every night at sun set the star is seen to be higher in the sky – and does not set during the night- It is ascending to the heavens.

5 – Later in the year at sunrise the star gets lower and lower in the west until it is seen to set at sunrise.



Key Points

- The Egyptian view of the soul – one that ascends to the heavens – is reflected in the naked-eye astronomy of how the stars move recorded in the Pyramid Texts.
- This stellar theology is passed into the Greek world around the time of Plato and replaces their earlier version of the soul as a shadow in the underworld. Plato produces a literature which is a celebration of the personal soul and its ascent to the heavens.
- This Egyptian stellar theology can also be linked to the later Greek view that some humans could become god-like – ie Hercules, and in turn to the later Christian view of angels, intermediate beings who move between the mortal world and the heavens.
- Thus the Pyramid Texts from 2500 BCE are the oldest known literature on the soul and in that literature the soul, via the Greeks, laid the foundation of the Western notion of soul.

Sources

Mercer's complete 1952 translation of the text is online at:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/egy/pyt/>

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