

Sealing the Dead

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ONE OF THE most salient characteristics of the material culture of ancient Egypt is its polyvalence¹. As a result, the meaning, significance, and interpretation of any one entity – be it a hieroglyph, an object – real or created – or an architectural structure – are all ambivalent. The concept had already been described by others, including Erik Hornung.² The appearance of an owl (Gardiner Sign List 17), along and by itself, as one of 104 amulets created for the protection of Osiris³ and the noun *ḥssii* / *iḥssii*, “fish-man,” in the inscriptions on a naos of Amasis⁴ are recent demonstrations of that polyvalence in the hieroglyphs. Camilla Di Biase-Dyson⁵ and Kathlyn M. Cooney⁶ discuss the multiplicity of meanings inherent in so-called birthing bricks and sarcophagi, respectively. This same polyvalence is operative on the ancient Egyptian understanding of the function of Temple of Isis at Dendera.⁷ When dealing with complexities, such as interlocking astronomical phenomena, the problems of meaning, significance, and interpretation are compounded.⁸ And so ingrained had this salient characteristic become in the material culture of ancient Egypt that the phenomenon persisted into the Coptic period where it informed both the definitions and the understanding of the concept of Christian resurrection, which initially resulted in an open discourse in which contrary notions of that concept co-existed.⁹ Richard Bussmann provides

¹ I wish to thank Marsha Hill for enabling me to examine the sealing in New York; she together with Diana Craig Patch provided me with additional data from the department’s records and provided me with the images, the photography of which was arranged by Catharine H. Roehig, which are reproduced in this essay. Several colleagues, among whom I single out Paula Veiga, Dmitry Sychev, and Pietro Testa assisted me with scans of publications otherwise unavailable because of the quarantine imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Edward Meltzer generously shared his knowledge and bibliography of Gnostic texts with me. I am indebted to Regine Schultz and Helmut Brandl for their assistance in expediting several technical issues, and to Carolina Delucé for her editorial work.

² E. HORNUNG, *Idea into image: essays on ancient Egyptian thought* [translated by E. Bredeck], New York, 1992, pp. 30-45.

³ G. PRISKIN, “The 104 amulets of Osiris at Dendera,” in M. Franci, S. Ikram, I. Morfini (eds.), *Rethinking Osiris. Proceedings of the international conference, Florence, Italy, 26-27 March 2019*, Rome, 2021, pp. 147-158.

⁴ Leiden AM 107: M. ZECCHI, *The naos of Amasis: a monument for the reawakening of Osiris*, Leiden, 2019, pp. 38-39

⁵ C. DI BIASE-DYSON, “Multiple dimensions of interpretation: reassessing the magic brick Berlin ÄMP 15559,” *SAK* 43, 2014, pp. 93-107.

⁶ K.M. Cooney, *Coffin commerce: how a funerary materiality formed ancient Egypt*, Cambridge, 2021, p. 24.

⁷ S. CAUVILLE, *Dendara. Le temple d’Isis I*, Cairo, 2007, pp. xvi, xxii, and xxiv.

⁸ S. THUAULT, “L’herminette et la cuisse, histoire d’un taureau parmi les étoiles,” *BIFAO* 120, 2020, pp. 411-448.

⁹ E.E. POPKES, “The Interpretation of Pauline Understandings of Resurrection within »The Treatise on the

an informative summary of the issue of polyvalence, which he prefers to regard from a praxeological context, in which any aspect of ancient Egypt's material culture might have meant different things to different individuals.¹⁰ Accordingly, the material culture of ancient Egypt cannot be quantified by a reliance upon Aristotelian categorization into which meaning, significance, and interpretation can be neatly sorted into discrete pigeon-holes. One size does not fit all.

It is within this context of polyvalence that we now discuss the envelopment of one of two mummies which were discovered resting back to back in fill beneath a locus identified as containing "Priests' Houses" during the 1923-1924 season of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's excavations at Deir el Bahri. One of the mummies, identified as male, was enveloped in what has been identified as a fisherman's net,¹¹ and accessioned into that museum's collections as inv. nr. 25.3.225 [fig. 1]. The excavators dated this find globally to the Roman Imperial Period, according to the accession records held by the museum.

It is entirely possible that the use of that fishnet was motivated by the practical consideration of keeping the mummy bandages in place, possibly anticipating the use of burial tapes ostensibly for the same purpose as seen on several mummies suggested to date to the Coptic Period from sites at Western Thebes.¹² The best example of such a Coptic mummy bundle readily available for examination is from Karara (el-Hibeh) now in Heidelberg.¹³ Although the coverings of those Coptic mummies often consists of clothing repurposed for funerary requirements tied into place,¹⁴ it should be stressed that the practice of repurposing clothing¹⁵ so tied to serve the same purpose is attested as early as the Third Intermediate Period.¹⁶ One

Resurrection» (NHC I 4),” in B. Schiesser, J. Rüggeleier, T.J. Kraus, J. Frey (eds), *Alexandria. Hub of the Hellenistic world*, Tübingen, 2021, p. 341.

¹⁰ R. BUSSMANN, “Practice, meaning and intention: interpreting votive objects from ancient Egypt,” in N. Staring, H. Twiston Davies, L. Weiss (eds.), *Perspectives on lived religion: practices - transmission - landscape*, Leiden, 2019, pp. 73-84.

¹¹ Because of its size (28 cm in length as presently rolled) it was probably a seine net: D.J. BREWER, R.F. FRIEDMAN, *Fish and fishing in ancient Egypt*, Warminster, 1989, pp. 42-46.

¹² E.R. O'CONNELL, “Representation and self-presentation in late antique Egypt: ‘Coptic’ textiles in the British Museum,” *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* 121, 2008, fig. 8, for the Deir el-Bahri mummies dating circa 600-800 (EES Carter 69): <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/121> [viewed April 30, 2020]; and S. LÖSCH, E. HOWER-TILMANN, A. ZINK, “Mummies and skeletons from the Coptic Monastery complex Deir el-Bachit in Thebes-West, Egypt,” *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* 70, 1, 2013, p. 32, and fig. 5.

¹³ Heidelberg, Ägyptologisches Institut der Rupert-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, without inventory number: R. Schulz, C. Bayer, O. Gauert (eds.) *Mumien der Welt*, Hildesheim, 2016, *Frontis*, and pp. 118-121; and B. HUBER, “Coptic coffins from Qarara: the *Pfauensarg* (peacock coffin) in context,” in J.H. Taylor, M. Vandenbeusch (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian coffins: craft traditions and functionality*, Leuven, 2018, pp. 435-469. The use of wide bands of linen may very well be a continuation of the practice already in use in the Roman Imperial Period, for which compare the wrappings of a mummy dated to the second century A.D. in Paris, Musée du Louvre E 13382 (CM 365): M.-F. AUBERT, R. CORTOPASSI, G. NACHTERGAEL, V.A. AMORÓS, P. DÉTIENNE, *Portraits funéraires de l'Égypte romaine II. Cartonnages, linceuls et bois*, Paris, 2018, p. 131.

¹⁴ D. FRANKFURTER, *Christianizing Egypt: syncretism and local worlds in late antiquity*, Princeton, Oxford, 2018, pp. 155-156 and 176-181.

¹⁵ C. PRICE, *Golden Mummies of Egypt. Interpreting identities from the Graeco-Roman Period*, Manchester, 2020, p. 118, observes that the single largest expense in the mummification process was the cost of the linen used, and cites D. MONSERRAT, “Death and funerals in the Roman Fayum,” in M. Bierbrier (ed.), *Portraits and Masks: Burial customs in Roman Egypt*, London, 1997, p. 37, “In a second-century funeral account from Socnopaiou Nesos, the wrappings account for more than a third of the total burial cost, and included the buying of an old tunic which was presumably used somehow in the invisible internal wrappings.”

¹⁶ H.E. WINLOCK, “The Egyptian Expedition 1924-1925: the Museum's excavations at Thebes.” *Bulletin of the*

of the better examples of that earlier practice is the mummy found at Deir el Bahari in the East Chamber, Cemetery 500, connected with the temple Montuhotep, which was “wrapped in a pink shroud bound by three horizontal and seven transverse yellow bandages.”¹⁷

If the fishnet in the collections of the Metropolitan were found on a female mummy, one might be tempted to associate it with erotic connotations of fishnet dresses, evocative of the salacious nature of the costumes worn by the female rowers described in the Westcar Papyrus (V, 11-13).¹⁸

On the other hand, the reticulated pattern exhibited by the cords of that fishnet is so extremely evocative of the pattern encountered on bead nets often placed over mummies, which are attested as early as the Old Kingdom,¹⁹ as to suggest the possibility that this fishnet and those bead nets were so conflated as to be regarded as equivalents. The use of fishnets and other envelopes woven into an open, diamond-shaped knit in which a mummy might be wrapped is confirmed by written descriptions of some of the grave goods discovered within other burials datable to the Third Intermediate Period at Medium. Those envelopes included the body of a child “wrapped in a fibre string bag,”²⁰ that of a second child “wrapped in a fibre bag,”²¹ and that of “an adult with part of a fishing net.”²² Although an autopsy of those last three cited examples cannot now be performed because their whereabouts are presently not known, one cannot simply dismiss them out-of-hand as disintegrated “fibre body coverings.”²³ It is entirely possible that they are indeed related to the fishnet under discussion. Furthermore, there is a second example in the form of a textile-net soaked in green paint, described as a fishnet, discovered at Thebes in an intrusive burial of Nesiamun on the south side of the court of Montuhotep, presently in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.²⁴ This

Metropolitan Museum of Art 21, no. 3, 2, 1926, p. 15, and D.A. ASTON, *Burial assemblages of dynasty 21-25: chronology - typology - developments, Contributions to the chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean* 21, *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Denkschriften der Gesamtakademie* 54, Vienna, 2019, p. 199, no. TG 828, Deir el Bahari Tomb 59, a Dynasty XVIII tomb reused in the Third Intermediate Period for Henettawy F, the mummy of which was simply bandaged with voluminous shrouds and placed straight into the coffin.

¹⁷ D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 218, no. TG 895.

¹⁸ R. HALL, “Fishing-net (𓆎𓆏𓆐𓆑) dresses in the Petrie Museum,” *GöttMisz* 42, 1981, pp. 37-46.

¹⁹ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 27.1548: M. JICK, “9. Bead-net dress,” in S. D’Auria, P. Lacovara, C.H. Roehrig (eds.), *Mummies & magic: the funerary arts of ancient Egypt*, Boston, 1988, pp. 14-19; and B. HINSON, “A beaded scarab in the Victoria and Albert Museum,” *JEA* 105/2, 2019, p. 307. It is tempting to suggest that the carnelian-beaded linen fragment discovered at Tarkhan (London, University College UC 16355: L. MAWDSLEY, “Burying the Dead with Textiles at the Naqada III Cemetery at Tarkhan,” in A.R. Warfe, J.C.R. Gill, C.R. Hamilton, A.J. Pettman, D.A. Stewart (eds.), *Dust, Demons and Pots. Studies in Honour of Colin A. Hope*, Leuven, Paris, Bristol, CT, 2020, p. 509-510, with fig. 3 stands at the beginning of this tradition.

²⁰ A. ROWE, “The Eckley B. Coxe Jr. Expedition excavations at Meydûm 1929-30,” *The [Pennsylvania] Museum Journal* 22/1, 1931, p. 26; D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 90, no. TG 160.

²¹ A. ROWE, *ibid.*; and D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 91, no. TG 169.

²² A. ROWE, *ibid.*; and D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 91, no. TG 165.

²³ D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

²⁴ New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 26.3.11: Tomb Card 5240, The Metropolitan Museum of Art: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/575557?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=26.3.11&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=2> (viewed May 9, 2020). This ensemble belongs to Taylor’s Type II Coffin, Lid Design 1, examples of which generally date to the period between the late tenth to seventh century B.C.: J.H. TAYLOR, *The stylistic development of Theban coffins during the Third Intermediate Period*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1985, cited by D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 275, with note 2598, *passim*; J.H. TAYLOR, “Theban coffins from the Twenty-second to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty: dating and synthesis of development,” in N. Strudwick, J.H. Taylor (eds.), *The Theban necropolis: past, present and future*, London, 2003, pp. 95-121.

example finds its exact parallel in a third example in Leiden,²⁵ the provenance of which is not recorded, but which is dated to Dynasty XXV.²⁶ This pink-colored textile, originally red (?), was created using a medium-fine, warp-faced tabby weave. One can, therefore, suggest that the practice of enveloping a mummy in a fishnet or its equivalent in the form of either a bead or textile net, both often designed as open, diamond-shaped patterns, was a practice pioneered during the Third Intermediate Period, particularly at Thebes, where it persisted into the Roman Imperial Period. One must, therefore, abandon both notions that “nothing like this [practice] has been recorded elsewhere”²⁷ and that this practice is relegated to “poor burials.”²⁸ The documented cavalier treatment of hundreds of mummies created during the centuries spanning the Third Intermediate to Roman Imperial Periods doubtless contributed to the virtual absence of this particular practice in the archaeological record as currently preserved.²⁹

The practice of enveloping a mummy in a fishnet is congruent with the use of a bead net for the same purpose. Because the evidence for the earliest appearance of each type is equivocal, it seems futile to argue for the primacy of the one as the trigger for the development of the other. Both appear to be contemporary developments associated with certain radical changes in funerary practices and accouterments pioneered at two different chronological points in time during the course of the Third Intermediate Period.³⁰

The (re-)introduction³¹ of the bead net around 750 BC has been embraced by David Aston³² and others,³³ following both the suggestion of Flora Silvano³⁴ and that by Kate Bosse-

²⁵ Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden AMM19-b: at this link, <https://www.rmo.nl/en/collection/search-collection/collection-piece/?object=796> (viewed 9 May 2020); and P. GIOVETTI, D. PICCHI (eds.), *Egitto. Splendore millenario: la collezione di Leiden a Bologna*, Milan, 2015, cat. VII.46.

²⁶ G. VITTMAN, *Priester und Beamte im Theben der Spätzeit. Genealogische und prosopographische Untersuchungen zum thebanischen Priester- und Beamtentum der 25. und 26. Dynastie*, Vienna, 1978, pp. 130 and 132.

²⁷ D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

²⁸ D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

²⁹ *Inter alia*, A.C.V. Adams, “An investigation into the mummies presented to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales in 1869,” *DiscEg* 18, 1990, pp. 5-19; T. BABER, “Ancient corpses as curiosities: mummymania in the age of early travel,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 8, 2016, pp. 60-93; M. DEPAUW, “The late funerary material from Akhmim,” in A. Egberts, B.P. Muhs, J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis: an Egyptian town from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest; acts from an international symposium, held in Leiden on 16, 17 and 18 December 1998*, Leiden, Boston, MA, Cologne, 2002, pp. 71-81; C. ELLIOTT, “Bandages, bitumen, bodies and business: Egyptian mummies as raw materials,” *Aegyptiaca* 1, 2017, pp. 26-46; R. HARI, “Faux et usage de faux ou: le commerce des dieux égyptiens,” *BSEG* 1, 1979, pp. 27-35; H. WHITEHOUSE, “Egyptology and forgery in the seventeenth century: The case of the Bodleian shabti,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 1/2, 1989, pp.187-195, and S.J. WOLFE, R. SINGERMAN, *Mummies in nineteenth century America: ancient Egyptians as artifact*, Jefferson, N.C., London, 2009.

³⁰ D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

³¹ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 27.1548: M. JICK, *loc. cit.*, is an earlier example, dated to the Old Kingdom.

³² D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-293.

³³ J. BUDKA, “Kushite tomb groups in Late Period Thebes,” in W. Godlewski, A. Łajtar (eds.), *Between the cataracts: proceedings of the 11th Conference for Nubian studies, Warsaw University, 27 August-2 September 2006. Part two: session papers*, Warsaw, 2010, 503-518; K. ZIBELIUS-CHEN, “Das Tübinger Fragment eines Perlennetzes (Inv. 1842),” *SAK* 40, 2011, pp. 399-406; E. KOPP, P. KOPP, “Phrase kit and pseudo-writing: a set of ushebti from an elite tomb in Buto,” *MDAIK* 70-71, 2014-2015, pp. 265-271; and Z.I. FÁBIÁN, “Re-use and modification of a saff-tomb on the south slope of el-Khokha, Thebes,” in K.A. Kóthay (ed.), *Burial and mortuary practices in Late Period and Graeco-Roman Egypt: proceedings of the international conference held at Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 17-19 July 2014*, Budapest, 2017, p. 86.

Griffiths who attributes its (re-)introduction into Egypt to the Kushites.³⁵ David Aston repeatedly questions whether the fragmentary beaded material from burials at Tanis can be identified as bead nets³⁶ but Guy Brunton is adamant that at least one example can be so identified.³⁷ If Guy Brunton's identification obtains, one needs to consider whether the antecedents for the bead net placed upon mummies can be traced to the beadwork associated with coronation clothing and sed-festival garments,³⁸ particularly since the goddess Hathor in representations participating in such jubilee festivals is habitually clothed in a beaded dress,³⁹ which may be related to representations of a "gold lattice" covering Hathor's long robe in other offering scenes.⁴⁰ A garment worn during the sed-festival is connected with rituals associated with regeneration,⁴¹ and the regenerative associations of such garments have been linked to mummy bandages,⁴² as well as to Anubis in certain Osirian contexts.⁴³ Indeed, during the more recent periods of ancient Egypt's history Hathor assumes a more prominent role in funerary contexts, as Sylvia Cauville's summary of those functions at Dendera reveals.⁴⁴ The deceased, both male and female alike, often aspire to be identified with Hathor rather than with Osiris in death.⁴⁵ In certain other funerary contexts Hathor assumes the functions of Anubis.⁴⁶ As these examples reveal, ancient Egyptian religious exegeses were not shackled by a strict adherence to Aristotelian categorizations. The boundaries between religious spheres were both permeable and fluid to such an extent that a volume devoted to such crossovers was dedicated to Anthony Loprieno, who coined the phrase, "fuzzy boundaries," as a label for this particularly ancient Egyptian cultural phenomenon.⁴⁷

The presence of the fishnet under discussion was not the only remarkable feature of the

³⁴ F. SILVANO, "Le reticelle funerarie nell'antico Egitto: proposte di interpretazione," *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 3, 1980, pp. 83-97, although her suggested typology was not rigorously imposed in antiquity, as the example from El-Khoka, Saff-1, which combines her Type A with her Type B, reveals: Z.I. FÁBIÁN, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁵ K. BOSSE GRIFFITHS, "Some Egyptian bead-work faces in the Wellcome Collection at University College," *JEA* 64, 1978, pp. 99-106; reprinted *id.*, "Some Egyptian beadwork faces," in *id.*, *Amarna studies and other selected papers*, Freiburg (Switzerland), Göttingen, 2001, pp. 152-164.

³⁶ D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 80-81, and 292.

³⁷ G. BRUNTON, "The bead network of Shashanq Heqa-kheper-Re, Tanis," *ASAE* 42, 1943, pp. 187-191.

³⁸ J. LARSON, "The heb-sed robe and the 'ceremonial robe' of Tut'ankhamūn," *JEA* 67, 1981, pp. 180-181.

³⁹ M. FEKRI, "Les attributs de la déesse Hathor," *ASAE* 79, 2005, pp. 95-196.

⁴⁰ B.A. RICHTER, "On the heels of the Wandering Goddess: the myth and the festival at the temples of the Wadi el-Hallel and Dendera," in M. Dolińska, H. Beinlich (eds.), *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Interconnections between temples, Warschau, 22.-25. September 2008*, Wiesbaden, 2010, p. 165.

⁴¹ L. CHAPON, "Some reliefs representing the king in the *Heb Sed* robe discovered in the *Henket-Ankh*," *Études et Travaux* 31, 2018, pp. 123-143.

⁴² U. RUMMEL, "Weihrauch, Salböl und Leinen: Balsamierungsmaterialien als Medium der Erneuerung im Sedfest," *SAK* 34, 2006, pp. 381-407.

⁴³ B. BRUYÈRE, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1935-1940) IV/3. Notes à propos de quelques objets trouvés en 1939 et 1940*, *FIFAO* 20/3, Cairo, 1952, pp. 133-135; and A. EISSA, "'Heb-sed' two phases: the Osirian one and the Horus one," *Studies in honor of Ali Radwan, Suppl. ASAE* 34/3, 2005, pp. 10-23 [in Arabic: أحمد عيسى].

⁴⁴ S. CAUVILLE, *Le temple de Dendara. Guide archéologique* (2nd ed.), Cairo, 1995, pp. 7-9; so, too, Manchester 13783: C. PRICE, *op. cit.*, p. 134, with fig. 115, for one of the earliest attentions of the identification of the deceased with Hathor.

⁴⁵ B. MENU, "Une stèle démotique inédite," *RdE* 26, 1974, p. 69.

⁴⁶ S. MORENZ, "Das Werden zu Osiris: die Darstellungen auf einem Leinentuch der römischen Kaiserzeit (Berlin 11651) und verwandten Stücken," *Forschungen und Berichte* 1, 1957, pp. 65.

⁴⁷ H. Amstutz, A. Dorn, M. Müller, M. Ronsdorf, S. Uljas (eds.), *Fuzzy boundaries: Festschrift für Antonio Loprieno I-II*, Hamburg, 2015.

⁴⁷ H. Amstutz, A. Dorn, M. Müller, M. Ronsdorf, S. Uljas (eds.), *Fuzzy boundaries: Festschrift für Antonio Loprieno I-II*, Hamburg, 2015.

mummy in New York discovered during the 1923-1924 excavations at Thebes because three conically-shaped mud pastilles⁴⁸ were attached to it via a series of [linen?] cords. These pastilles can be identified as sealings because they exhibit impressions stamped multiple times using the same two signets, either a human hand, to judge from the position of the thumb, with open palm, or a figure in a contrapposto pose, portrayed frontally, with arms bent at the elbow and raised in a position that is associated with an *orans*-gesture. So, for example, the first sealing [fig. 2] was stamped seven times, twice with the open hand and five times with the *orans*-gesture whereas the second [fig. 3] was stamped five times, once with the *orans*-gesture and four with the open hand, whereas the third [fig. 4] was only stamped five times, but only with the open hand. It must be emphasized that those two motifs on these dealings cannot be used as evidence to suggest the ethnicity of the deceased.⁴⁹

Amulets in the form of an open hand first appear during the course of the Old Kingdom, as an example in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art reveals.⁵⁰ The *consensus omnium* is that an amulet in the form of an open hand is efficacious for individuals seeking to immobilize and repel malevolent forces.⁵¹ It is a particularly long-lived, pan-cultural talisman, still in use to this day, in certain European Catholic countries as well in Islam.⁵²

Yet there is another aspect to consider, because of the polyvalence of the hand, particularly the hand of the demiurge in an aquatic environment as the following two citations reveal. The first occurs within The Festival of the Hand of Pakhons,⁵³ in which that hand, apparently mould-made for this occasion, is not interred on land but in water. That hand returns into its aquatic environment within the primeval waters where it is employed by the demiurge in the performance of his generative activities.⁵⁴ In another episode, dealing ostensibly with The Waving of the Hand of Re (?), *h3' dr.t n.(t) R'*, a fish plays an active, enveloping role within which the demiurge is regenerated.⁵⁵ The meaning of passages in that episode remain opaque, but one has suggested that the hand of the demiurge is likewise immersed in water.⁵⁶ Given the polyvalence of Egyptian motifs and the known resonances between the resurrection of the deceased and the creative processes of the demiurge, the appearance of a hand as a device on a sealing attached to a fishnet enveloping a mummy enabling its aspired resurrection is not surprising in the least.

The *orans*-gesture, earlier described as a personification of the *ka* of a deceased individual

⁴⁸ New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 25.3.226a (5.3 cm; 2 1/16 inches); 25.3.226b (5 cm; 1 15/16 inches); and 25.3.226c (5.3 cm; 2 1/16 inches).

⁴⁹ A. VILLING, "Wahibreemakhet at Saqqara: the tomb of a Greek in Egypt," *ZÄS* 145, 2, 2018, pp. 174-186, citing S. QUIRKE, "The regular titles of the late Middle Kingdom," *RdE* 37, 1986, pp. 123-124.

⁵⁰ New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 10.130.235: E. BRESCIANI, "La 'Mano aperta': un amuleto di protezione nell'Antico Egitto," in C. Zivie-Coche, I. Guerneur (eds.), "*Parcourir l'éternité*": hommages à Jean Yoyotte I, Turnhout, 2012, pp. 165-167; see, too, both C. SOURDIVE, *La main dans l'Égypte pharaonique: recherches de morphologie structurale sur les objets égyptiens comportant une main*, Bern, Frankfurt am Main, New York, 1984, pp. 441-449; and S.H. AUFRÈRE, *Le propylône d'Amon-Rê-Montou à Karnak-Nord*, *MIFAO* 117, 2000, p. 413.

⁵¹ J.R. OGDON, "Studies in ancient Egyptian magical thought I: the hand and the seal," *DiscEg* 1, 1985, p. 32.

⁵² E. BRESCIANI, *loc. cit.*; and M.J. RAVEN, *Egyptian magic: the quest for Thoth's Book of Secrets*, New York, 2012, p. 176.

⁵³ D. MEEKS, *Mythes et légendes du Delta d'après le papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, Cairo, 2006, pp. 199-200.

⁵⁴ D. MEEKS, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ *Le main jetée de Ré (?)*: *ibid.*, p.194.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

who had passed on to a blessed state,⁵⁷ is in fact polyvalent as well.⁵⁸ It incorporates into its design the open hand as an apotropaic gesture, utilized in life against malevolent forces such as the evil eye, and similarly in death against malevolent forces for those who require protection.⁵⁹ Within the context of the continuum of ancient Egyptian cultural phenomena, images incorporating the *orans*-gesture have been described as depictions of “the soul in transit communication with the gods in an effort to link oneself to an official image of a saint.”⁶⁰

That interpretation impacts upon both the dating and culture to which the mummy enveloped in the fishnet belongs. Within the culture of ancient Egypt, the *orans*-gesture is undoubtedly most often associated with relief representations within the corpus of stelae⁶¹ from the site of Kom Abou Billou⁶² (Terenouthis, Mefkat).⁶³ In the past interpretations of their subject matter⁶⁴ and dating have been contentious issues.⁶⁵ The perceptive comment by Françoise Dunand that the corpus is earlier in date,⁶⁶ rather than later, has now been re-affirmed by Maiken King who dates the corpus to the first centuries of Roman rule⁶⁷ and unequivocally dismisses all attempts to link their imagery to any early Christian practice.⁶⁸ The style of the figure in the *orans*-gesture and its contrapposto pose on the sealings attached to the fishnet under discussion are in many ways so congruent with those depicted on the Kom Abou Billou stelae⁶⁹ that a dating within the first two centuries AD for that mummy is entirely consistent with the suggested dating of the find into the Roman Imperial Period by the excavators.

A survey of the use of sealings in ancient Egypt reveals that almost anything that could be opened and closed, either literally or figuratively, could be sealed, from the expected administrative documents⁷⁰ to just about any other imaginable object,⁷¹ with the type of

⁵⁷ A. DOBROVITS, “Egy későkori halotti-lakoma-ábrázolás a Szépművészeti Múzeum egyiptomi gyűjteményében: adatok az orans-gesztus történetéhez,” *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 3rd series, 1946-1948, pp. 3-18.

⁵⁸ F. DUNAND, “Gestes symboliques,” *CRPEL* 9, 1987, pp. 81-87.

⁵⁹ G. NACHTERGAEL, “Les terres cuites gréco-égyptiennes du British Museum,” *ChronEg* 85, 2010, p. 335.

⁶⁰ D. FRANKFURTER, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁶¹ J. PELSMACKERS, “Studies on the Funerary Stelae from Kom Abou Billou II.” *Bulletin de l’Institut Historique belge de Rome* 59, 1989, pp. 5-29.

⁶² F.A. HOPPER, *Funerary stelae from Kom Abou Billou*, Ann Arbor, 1961.

⁶³ M. LE ROY, P. PICAUVET, S. DHENNIN, “La dernière phase d’occupation de la nécropole de Kôm Abou Billou: données archéologiques et anthropologiques inédites,” *BIFAO* 118, 2018, p. 269.

⁶⁴ L. CASTIGLIONE, “Stele eines Kupferschmiedes: zur Deutung der römischen ägyptischen Grabsteine,” *MDAIK* 24, 1969, pp. 78-86; Abd el-Hafeez ABD EL-‘AL, J.-Cl. GRENIER, G. WAGNER, *Stèles funéraires de Kom Abu Bellou*, Paris, 1985; and M. BERGMANN, “*Mallokouria*: portraits of local elite boys in Roman Egypt,” in S.E. Alcock, M. Egri, J.F.D. Frakes (eds.), *Beyond boundaries: connecting visual cultures in the provinces of Ancient Rome*, Los Angeles, 2016, p. 156-173.

⁶⁵ R. CRIBIORE, “A stele from Terenouthis,” *BASP* 34, 1997, pp. 5-10.

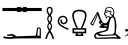
⁶⁶ F. DUNAND, “Du séjour osirien des morts à l’au-delà chrétien: pratiques funéraires en Égypte tardive,” *Ktèma* 11, 1986, pp. 29-37; so, too, L. CASTIGLIONE, “Graeco-Aegyptiaca III,” *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 64, 198, pp. 13-24 and 65-69.

⁶⁷ M. LE ROY, P. PICAUVET, S. DHENNIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-282, for the most recent period to which the site may date.

⁶⁸ M.M. KING, “The Christians of Terenouthis: a modern myth,” *GöttMisz* 256, 2018, pp. 107-114.

⁶⁹ Paris, Musée du Louvre E 21129 [stela of Phantias]: Paris, Musée du Louvre. “E 21129.” http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car_not&idNotice=36828 (viewed May 2, 2020).

⁷⁰ M.W.B. GEORGE, *Those administrative documents are sealed: a study of the evolution of the structure and function of the Egyptian administration in the Late Predynastic and Early Dynastic Period, with specific attention to seals and seal impressions* (MA, Macquarie University, Sydney 2014). “Macquarie University ResearchOnline” <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.14/1050321> (viewed May 13, 2020)

sealing employed being dependent upon the form and function of the object being sealed.⁷² The presence of sealings on mummies should, therefore, come as no surprise, particularly since the hieroglyph of a seal (Gardiner Sign List S 20) determines at least one noun used for the mummy of Osiris, *s'hw*,⁷³ , and the seal itself, *htm*, made of true lapis lazuli, *hsbd mhk*, was in fact one of the 104 amulets associated with the rites of the corn-mummy of Osiris during the Festival of Khoiak, according to at least one text from Dendera.⁷⁴

The practice of sealing mummies appears to have gained in popularity during the Ptolemaic Period (305/304-30 BC),⁷⁵ particularly at Thebes.⁷⁶ It is interesting to speculate about whether that practice developed from that of the First Intermediate Period during which time seal amulets were often interred in graves of women and children.⁷⁷ The association of sealings with human mummies is perhaps attested as early as Dynasty XXVII, if the fourteen tags discovered together with thirty-nine sealings, found at Memphis in a disturbed context,⁷⁸ can be unequivocally identified as mummy tags.⁷⁹ One cannot help but wonder whether this practice of sealing human mummies is in any way related to the attested practice of sealing receptacles housing animal mummies: «Osiris, Lord of *igt-ḳb* the great god who is in Athribis, the [holy] falcon.»⁸⁰ That practice resonates with that of sealing of Hadra hydriae used as cinerary urns at Alexandria during the early Ptolemaic Period.⁸¹ Furthermore, there is at least once attested instance in which a sarcophagus of Late Period date found at Fustat was cemented closed with plaster onto which was impressed a seal bearing the name of the deceased within a cartouche.⁸²

The individual responsible for affixing those seals on mummies is a matter of speculation. In

⁷¹ *Inter alia*, A. WITSELL, “Specialist reports. Sealings,” in A. Tavares, D. Jones, F. Sadarangani, H. Mahmoud, “Excavations east of the Khentkawes Town in Giza: a preliminary site report,” *BIFAO* 114, 2, 2014, pp. 536-540; see, also, the articles in E.-M. Engel, A.I. Blöbaum, F. Kammerzell (eds.), *Keep out! Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom cylinder seals and sealings in context*, Wiesbaden, 2021, especially A.I. BLÖBAUM, “Types of sealings and sealed objects: main features and new aspects,” pp. 252-287.

⁷² *Loc. cit.*

⁷³ D. MEEKS, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, and 29.

⁷⁴ G. PRISKIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-158.

⁷⁵ G. SCHREIBER, Z. VASÁROS, A. ALMÁSY, “Ptolemaic and Roman burials from Theban Tomb -400-,” *MDAIK* 69, 2013, pp. 187-225, esp. p. 196.

⁷⁶ G. SCHREIBER, “The final acts of embalming: an archaeological note on some rare objects in Theban elite burials of the early Ptolemaic Period,” in K. Endreffy, A. Gulyás (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fourth Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists: 31 August - 2 September 2006, Budapest*, Budapest, 2007, pp. 337-356, esp. pp. 343-345; A. NIWIŃSKI, “Excavations in a Late Period priest’s mummy at the National Museum Warsaw: preliminary report,” in Anonymous (ed.), *Sesto Congresso internazionale di egittologia: atti II*, 1993, pp. 353-361, esp. p. 356; and J. BUDKA, *Bestattungsbrauch und Friedhofsstruktur im Asasif: eine Untersuchung der spätzeitlichen Befunde anhand der Ergebnisse der österreichischen Ausgrabungen in den Jahren 1969-1977*, Vienna, 2010, p. 153.

⁷⁷ C.H. ROHRIG, “29. Seal-amulets,” in S. D’Auria, P. Lacovara, C.H. Rohrig (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁷⁸ W.M.F. PETRIE, E. MACKAY, G. WAINWRIGHT, *Meydum and Memphis III*, London, 1910, p. 41; one of those sealings is presently in London in the collections of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London, UC58385:

“CCL Petrie Collection Online Catalogue UC 58385: <http://petriecat.museums.ucl.ac.uk/detail.aspx#> (viewed April 21, 2020).

⁷⁹ H.P. COLBURN, *Archaeology of Empire in Achaemenid Egypt*, Edinburgh, 2020, p. 52.

⁸⁰ J. ROWLAND, S. IKRAM, G.J. TASSIE, L. YEOMANS, “The sacred falcon necropolis of Djedhor (?) at Qesna: recent investigations from 2006-2012,” *JEA* 99, 2013, pp. 53-84.

⁸¹ M.-F. BOUSSAC, “Sceaux sur des hydries de Hadra,” in J.-Y. Empereur (ed.), *Alexandrina* 1, 1998, pp. 55-63.

⁸² A. HAMADA, “The clearance of a tomb found at Al-Fostat, 1936,” *ASAE* 37, 1937, p. 67.

a lengthy discussion of the process of mummification, Gábor Schreiber calls attention to the divine chancellor, *h̄tm.w-ntr*, literally “the sealer of the god,” one of three prelates overseeing the process.⁸³ Whether or not that official sealed mummies such as those under discussion is moot. Andrzej Niwiński, whose argument is furthered by Susanne Töpfer,⁸⁴ would argue that the competence of a *h̄tm.w-ntr* was simply concerned with the physical mummification of the corpse,⁸⁵ after which the mummy was entrusted to a choachyte, the prelate who received the mummy and was subsequently charged with the preparation of the funeral, the furnishing for the burial, and the funeral itself. Consequently, any sealing associated with a burial would have seemingly been the choachyte’s responsibility.⁸⁶ Regardless of the title borne by the individual responsible for the sealing of a mummy, the very act of sealing it must be regarded as a performative ritual. Stamping the clay matrix with a signet was undoubtedly accompanied by the recitation of one or more appropriate spells, to judge from the emerging body of evidence concerning private burial practices of the period.⁸⁷

The practice of sealing mummies increases in popularity during the course of the Roman Imperial Period. William Matthew Flinders Petrie reports that a mummy on “the body of a helmeted head” from Hawara bore two seal impressions.⁸⁸ A completely wrapped mummy of a child in Berlin still retains a mud sealing attached to the end of one of the bandages,⁸⁹ in which their lozenge-pattern serves as an analogue for a bead net/fishnet. That mummy is associated with a second to which the Faiyum portrait of the Lady Aline is attached. Those two were found together in a cache of mummies, five of which were reportedly so sealed with a total of ten seals, prominent among which was the image of Hercules and the Nemean lion, suggested to have been made with an intaglio.⁹⁰ Other mummies exhibiting Faiyum portraits have been reportedly sealed, such as the examples from Antinoe,⁹¹ the sealing of which are of

⁸³ G. SCHREIBER, *op. cit.*, p. 343-345; and M. CANNATA, *Three hundred years of death. The Egyptian funerary industry in the Ptolemaic Period*, Leiden, 2020, pp. 54-68; and 209-277.

⁸⁴ S. TÖPFER, *Das Balsamierungsritual Eine (Neu-)Edition der Textkomposition Balsamierungsritual (pBoulaq 3, pLouvre 5158, pDurham 1983.11 + pSt. Petersburg 18128)*, Wiesbaden, 2015, p. 323.

⁸⁵ S. PASEK, *Hawara: eine ägyptische Siedlung in hellenistischer Zeit*, Berlin, 2007, pp. 298-310; I. UYTTERHOEVEN, *Hawara in the Graeco-Roman period: life and death in a Fayum village*, Leuven, 2009, pp. 361-376; and D.A. ASTON, B.G. ASTON, *Late Period pottery from the New Kingdom necropolis at Saqqâra*, London, p. 121.

⁸⁶ A. NIWIŃSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 345; but see, now, K.D. VAN HEEL, *The Archive of the Theban Choachyte Petebaste son of Peteamunip (Floruit 7th Century BCE). Abnormal Hieratic Papyrus Louvre E 3228 A-H*, Leiden, 2021; and *id.*, *Dealing with the Dead in Ancient Egypt. The Funerary Business of Petebaste*, Cairo, 2021, for the popular treatment of the same document.

⁸⁷ B. BACKES, J. DIELEMAN, “Current trends in the study of liturgical papyri,” in B. Backes, J. Dieleman (eds.), *Liturgical texts for Osiris and the deceased in Late Period and Greco-Roman Egypt / Liturgische Texte für Osiris und Verstorbene im spätzeitlichen Ägypten: proceedings of the colloquiums at New York (ISAW), 6 May 2011, and Freudenstadt, 18-21 July 2012*, Wiesbaden, 2015, pp. 1-13; J. DIELEMAN, “Scribal bricolage in the Artemis Liturgical Papyrus,” in B. Backes, J. Dieleman, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-232; and A.-K. GILL, “The Glorifications of Herisenefer in the Museo Egizio (P. Turin Cat. 2117 (R 08)),” *Rivista del Museo Egizio* 3, 2019, pp. 1-21.

⁸⁸ P.C. ROBERTS, “One of our mummies is missing: evaluating Petrie’s records from Hawara,” and “An archaeological context for British discoveries of mummy portraits in the Fayum,” in M.L. Bierbrier (ed.), *Portraits and masks: burial customs in Roman Egypt*, London, 1997, pp. 22 and 46, respectively.

⁸⁹ R. GERMER, H. KISCHKEWITZ, M. LÜNING, “Das Grab der Aline und die Untersuchung der darin gefundenen Kindermumien,” *Antike Welt* 24, 3, 1993, pp. 186-196.

⁹⁰ B. BORG, “Der zierlichste Anblick der Welt ...”: *Ägyptische Portratmumien*, Mainz am Rhein, 1998, pp. 19-20.

⁹¹ É. GAYET, *Les portraits d’Antinoé au Musée Guimet*, Paris, 2012, p. 10; and C.C. EDGAR, *Catalogue général*.

lead.⁹² That is the same material from which several other sealings associated with mummy bandages are made: a group of five sealings on several linen strips joined together without provenance in London;⁹³ a second example on a mummy, the sealing of which bears the personal name, Σαμβαθίου, Sambathion, found at Hawara;⁹⁴ a third from Saqqara;⁹⁵ and a fourth example in Hannover.⁹⁶

On occasion, sealings are placed on linen shrouds. Jánatan Ortiz-Garcia suggests that the sealings those funerary shrouds, the majority of which are of Roman Imperial date, may have function as a control element that insured the inviolability of the mummy as it passed from one of those individuals to another, on analogy with the practice described by Herodotus (*Hist.* II, 83, 3, 83) with regard to animal sacrifices.⁹⁷ In those two-dimensional representations the bead net/fishnet is likewise designed as a series of interlocking lozenges, the intersections of which are often enhanced by raised motifs, generally medallions, often gilded.⁹⁸ One particularly elaborate example in Paris also exhibits two lead sealings.⁹⁹

The physical presence of sealings on mummies is amply documented, and the fact that they were sealed is confirmed by this passage

ὄν παρεκόμισας cōμ[α νεκρό]ν τοῦ . [
 Ἡρώου ἐσφραγισμ[ένονν πα]ραγιν[νόμενον
 σφραγισθέντα καὶ ἀπ[.....]λωσαν[.....
 ...ων Διοσκόρου α.[.....] καταγιν[ομεν
 [...]ι ἡμῖν, ἐδεξάμεθα ἐσφραγ[ι]μένον.[.....

The dead body of the [deceased?] Heron which you brought sealed and having come sealed and from ... of Dioskoros ... to us, we have received sealed ...¹⁰⁰

The meaning of those seals in this passage remains perplexing as does the apparent lack of the mention of seals in both the Liturgical Texts¹⁰¹ and Embalming Ritual.¹⁰² In point of fact,

Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks and Portraits, Cairo, 1903, p. 129.

⁹² Paris, Musée du Louvre AF 6490 (MG 64); E 12581 (P 215, A 353); AF 6484 (MG 70); AF 6489 (MG 68); and AF 6493 (MG 67): M.-F. AUBERT, R. CORTOPASSI, G. NACHTERGAEL, V.A. AMORÓS, P. DÉTIENNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-174, 197-200, 206-209, 210-213, and 213-217, respectively.

⁹³ London, The British Museum, EA 6511: London, “The British Museum: Explore the Collection” https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=110664&partId=1&searchText=6511&page=1 (viewed April 27, 2020).

⁹⁴ Cairo, The Egyptian Museum CG 33126: C.C. EDGAR, *op. cit.*, p. 13; and Cairo, The Egyptian Museum CG 33017: J.G. MILNE, *Catalogue général. Greek inscriptions*, Oxford, 1905, p. 132.

⁹⁵ Cairo, The Egyptian Museum 33281: C.C. EDGAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 126 and 129.

⁹⁶ Hannover, The August-Kestner Museum 1950.80: R. Drenkhahn and R. Germer, *Mumie und Computer: ein multidisziplinäres Forschungsprojekt in Hannover*, Hannover, 1991, p. 87.

⁹⁷ J. ORTIZ-GARCÍA, *Tejidos para la divina muerte: los sudarios pintados del Egipto romano*, Barcelona, 2020, pp. 49-50.

⁹⁸ F. DUNAND, R. LICHTENBERG, *Les momies et la mort en Égypte*, Paris, 1998, p. 103.

⁹⁹ Paris, Musée du Louvre AF 6490 (MC 64): M.-F. AUBERT, R. CORTOPASSI, G. NACHTERGAEL, V.A. AMORÓS, P. DÉTIENNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 and 174, cat. no. 41.

¹⁰⁰ Bodelian MS GR Class C 272: R.S. BAGNALL, *The undertakers of the Great Oasis*, London, 2017, pp. 124-126, no. 45. The verb used is σφραγιζω, “to seal; to stamp.”

¹⁰¹ B. BACKES, J. DIELEMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-310.

¹⁰² S. TÖPFER, *op. cit.*, pp. 418-428.

John Gee provides only two citations in the so-called Book of the Dead in which seals are mentioned, but those two spells deal exclusively with the role of Geb and Nut in sealing decrees by which the deceased and his/her family can be reunited in the hereafter.¹⁰³

In light of this apparent silence about sealings in this survey of ancient Egyptian funerary literature, the significance of sealings on mummies must rely on other data. In interpreting that data, one must always bear in mind that the same praxis and image “might have meant different things to different people.”¹⁰⁴ Within this praxiological context one cannot insist upon one and only one interpretation for any given aspect of ancient Egypt’s material culture. Interpretations must perforce remain multi-dimensional¹⁰⁵ because of the demonstrable interlocking complexities inherent in virtually every ancient Egyptian cultural phenomenon.¹⁰⁶

Katelijan Vandorpe suggests that the practice of sealing in Graeco-Roman Egypt had less to do with identification, and more to do with protection and authentication.¹⁰⁷ Indeed concepts of protection are inherent in the use of the same lexeme, *htm*, for «fortress»¹⁰⁸ as well as in a phylactery where the sealing process is likened to a turtle pulled up into its shell.¹⁰⁹ The very act of sealing conveys the notion of a magical praxis,¹¹⁰ furthered by the very performative nature of sealing which was considered to reflect the defensive power imparted to the seal by the deity invoked during the creation of its impression.¹¹¹ The magical transference of power in these protective contexts in which seals are employed is well attested.¹¹² In these contexts, however, it is the aggressor, and not the targeted victim, who is sealed.¹¹³

One may draw some preliminary conclusions from the preceding discussion. If the suggestion that the fishnet under discussion is the equivalent of a beaded network,¹¹⁴ and if both can then

¹⁰³ J. GEE, “On the practice of sealing in the Book of the Dead and the Coffin Texts,” *JSSEA* 35, 2008, pp. 105-122.

¹⁰⁴ R. BUSSMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁵ C. DI BIASE-DYSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-107.

¹⁰⁶ G.W. NEMES, “The mythological importance of the constellation *Mšjtjw* in mortuary representations until the end of the New Kingdom,” *ENiM* 13, 2020, pp. 1-61.

¹⁰⁷ K. VANDORPE, “Seals and stamps as identifiers in daily life in Greco-Roman Egypt,” in M. Depauw, S. Coussement (eds.), *Identifiers and identification methods in the ancient world*, Leuven, Paris, Walpole, CT., 2014, pp. 141-151.

¹⁰⁸ P.-M. CHEVEREAU, *Prosopographie des cadres militaires égyptiens du Nouvel Empire*, Antony, 1994, pp. 58-62.

¹⁰⁹ J.-Cl. GOYON, *Le recueil de prophylaxie contre les agressions des animaux venimeux du Musée de Brooklyn: papyrus Wilbour 47.218.138*, Wiesbaden, 2012, p. 135.

¹¹⁰ D. FALK, *Ritual professional furniture: a material and religious phenomenon in Egypt* (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, Liverpool, 2015, p. 72. “University of Liverpool:” <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/2012561/> (viewed April 18, 2020)

¹¹¹ H. GYÖRY, “Interaction of magic and science in ancient Egyptian medicine,” in Z. Hawass, L.P. Brock (eds.), *Egyptology at the dawn of the twenty-first century: proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists, Cairo, 2000 II*, Cairo, New York, 2003, p. 278.

¹¹² P. KOŁODZIEJCZYK, “Egyptian Predynastic tokens - traces of magic or economic activity? The beginnings of abstract writing and calculating system or a relic of early magical practices,” in G. Bąkowska-Czerner, A. Roccati, A. Świerżowska (eds.), *The wisdom of Thoth: magical texts in ancient Mediterranean civilizations*, Oxford, 2015, pp. 27-42.

¹¹³ *Inter alia*, A.-K. GILL, “The *Spells against Enemies* in the Papyrus of Pawerem (P. BM EA 10252): a preliminary report,” in B. Backes, J. Dieleman *op. cit.*, pp. 133-144.

¹¹⁴ F. SILVANO, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-97; and New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 96.4.5: the bead net work of Tabakenkhonsu: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/550800> (viewed May 2, 2020).

be designed as a two-dimensional lozenge-shaped networks on shrouds, reflecting the lozenge-shaped network of bandages on mummies,¹¹⁵ all four must be considered subsets of the same typology, the function of which is to serve as a “whole-body amulet,” as Cairns-Beatrice Arnst so felicitously observed.¹¹⁶

Despite these associations, one cannot automatically exclude other explanations for the presence of sealings in these contexts. Each occurrence deserves special consideration, because of the known polyvalence of ancient Egypt’s material culture.

One returns to the sealings on the fishnet with which this essay began. Those fishnets may well be regarded as the antecedents of mosquito nets, which, it has been recently suggested, were developed from hand-nets (*tnfj.t*) derived from larger seine nets,¹¹⁷ the function of which was to protect the sleeping monarch. Such hand-nets were originally equipped with conically-shaped floaters and sinkers, similar to the conically-shaped mud pastilles attached to the net under discussion, which were fashioned by hand to judge from the preserved finger prints which they exhibit. By and large sealings recovered from ancient Egyptian archaeological contexts are either in the form of discs or spheres, not cones.¹¹⁸ Their unusual shape in this context may have been purposeful in order to create evocations of either the floaters or sinkers¹¹⁹ that one might associate with an actual fishnet¹²⁰. Nevertheless, their design may have also been purposefully motivated by the conical design exhibited by the lump of clay (*nhp.t*) used not only in association with a potter’s stock, but also in other contexts, one of which is of particular relevance here.

The material termed *nhp.t* is used for sealer’s stock but it is also employed in pharaonic

¹¹⁵ New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 11.139: W.M.F. PETRIE, *The Hawara portfolio: paintings of the Roman age*, London, 1913, pl. XXII; K. PARLASCA, *Mumienporträts und verwandte Denkmäler*, Wiesbaden, 1966, pp. 50 with note 234, 51 with note 247, no. 2; and 252-253; I. UYTTERHOEVEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 64 and 219-220; B. BRIER, C. WILKINSON, “A preliminary study on the accuracy of mummy portraits,” *ZÄS* 132, 2, 2005, pp. 107-111; and C. PRICE, *op. cit.*, p. 168, who further suggests that perhaps the practice of using “rhomboid-shaped wrappings” may have first been pioneered for the mummies of animals which then informed its use on human mummies.

¹¹⁶ C.-B. ARNST, “Vernetzung: zur Symbolik des Mumiennetzes,” in M. Fitzenreiter, C.E. Loeben (eds.), *Die ägyptische Mumie: ein Phänomen der Kulturgeschichte. Beiträge eines Kolloquiums am Seminar für Sudanarchäologie und Ägyptologie der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (25. und 26. April 1998)*, London, 2004, pp. 79-93; so, too, C. PRICE, *op. cit.*, p. 168, who suggests that elaborate wrappings transfer their contents into something that becomes divine. K. ZIBELIUS-CHEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 399-406, who relates such bead nets to rites of protecting Osiris *hm3g* and the *hwt-hm3g*, “the atelier of goldsmiths.” For the ancient Egyptian vocabulary associated with bead making and bead stringing, see. C.A.R. ANDREWS, *Ancient Egyptian jewellery*, London, 1990, pp. 67 [*irw wsbt* and *stj nbw*, bead maker and stringer together (of beads) for a collar]; 80 [*mnh* and *stj*, stringing the beads]; and 81 [*b3b3*, the ones making faience beads].

¹¹⁷ S.H. AUFRÈRE, “Le ‘moustique’ d’Hérodote (*Hist.* 2, 95). Un diptère (moustique, phlébotomie) importun, vecteur de maladies parasitaires mortelles,” in *id.*, C. Spieser (ed.), *Le microcosme animal en Égypte ancienne: de l’effroi à la vénération. Études d’archéo- et ethnoarthropodologie culturelle*, Leuven, 2021, pp. 183-184; J. BERLANDINI, S.H. AUFRÈRE, “Les scorpions, la veuve de Coptos et les deuiollantes-‘guérisseuses’ (Élien, *Hist. an.* 10,23), in *id.*, C. Spieser, *ibid.*, p. 345; and F. HOFFMANN, “Die drei wirbellosen Tiere in Szene 10 des Mundöffnungsrituals,” in H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, *Die Vision von der Statue im Stein: Studien zum altägyptischen Mundöffnungsritual*, Heidelberg, 1998, pp. 93-101.

¹¹⁸ P. DAVOLI, *Oggetti in argilla dall’area templare di Bakchias (El-Fayyum, Egitto): catalogo dei rinvenimenti delle campagne di scavo 1996-2002*, Pisa, 2005, pp. 590-100.

¹¹⁹ As S.H. AUFRÈRE, *op. cit.*, p.183, also remarks.

¹²⁰ D.J. BREWER, R.F. FRIEDMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 24; and F. DAUMAS, “Fischer und Fischerei,” in W. Helck, W. Westendorf, *LÄ II*, 1977, col. 236.

imagery to evoke the shape of the stercoral lump of dung associated with the concepts of scarab's role in contexts of regeneration,¹²¹ but those last two concepts are even more inextricably linked because the ancient Egyptian themselves associated the shape of *nḥp.t* with that of certain sealings, particularly those shaped like the pastilles,¹²² of the shape exhibited by those attached to the fishnet under discussion.

And whereas it is true that motifs of netting, either visual or literary, generally suggest that the assertive powers of the netted are nullified,¹²³ ancient Egyptian religious exegeses are ambivalent in meaning because one and the same image or object is simultaneously possessed of positive and negative characteristics.¹²⁴ Within this context it is interesting to note that in certain episodes of the Statue Ritual contained within the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony, a net, compared to a spider's web, is an essential, beneficial component of the sculptural process.¹²⁵ Indeed in ancient Egypt, the ensnaring of one within a net is not always regarded in a negative light. In keeping with the beneficial associations compatible with netting in contexts such as those, Martin Fitzenreiter discusses other contexts, particularly in a funerary context.¹²⁶ In this particular funerary context the use of a fishnet may have been purposeful in order to trap and imprison the deceased in an impenetrable cage, rendering the deceased harmless to malevolent forces by enveloping him in a symbolic, protective net which contained regenerative agents in the form of the *nḥp.t*-shaped sealings.

Furthermore, Andrzej Niwiński opines that the final act of enveloping the mummy with bandages to which a seal is applied echoes the sealing of a rolled up papyrus.¹²⁷ The suggestion warrants serious consideration in light of a passage captioning Wadjet of Buto on the southwest wall of East Crypt 2 at Dendera,¹²⁸ published by Auguste Mariette,¹²⁹ and reproduced in hand-copy by Philippe Derchain in his discussion of the *snb*-plant mentioned in *Papyrus Salt 825*.¹³⁰ His copy is faithful to the original as comparison with the text reproduced by Sylvie Cauville demonstrates.¹³¹

¹²¹ S.H. AUFRÈRE, C. SPIESER, "Le pilule *nḥp.t*, le milieu matriciel [(*n*)*nw.t*] et renaissance solaire. Aspects du cycle de reproduction de Scarabées sacer, L., 1758, et limites religieuses de l'observation naturaliste," in S.H. Aufrère, C. Spieser, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-96.

¹²² S.H. AUFRÈRE, C. SPIESER, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹²³ M. ALLIOT, "Les rites de la chasse au filett, aux temples de Karnak, d'Edfou et d'Esneh," *RdE* 5, 1946, pp. 57-118; P. DERCHAIN, "La perruque et le cristal," *SAK* 2 1975, p. 59, with note 13; and F. SERVAJEAN, "Du singulier à l'universel: le *Potamogeton* dans les scènes cynégétiques des marais," in S.H. Aufrère (ed.), *Encyclopédie religieuse de l'univers végétal: croyances phytoreligieuses de l'Égypte ancienne* 1, Montpellier, 1999, pp. 252-253.

¹²⁴ D. FALK, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-33.

¹²⁵ H. FISCHER-ELFERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-50.

¹²⁶ M. FITZENREITER, "Sense and serendipity: zur Ambiguität pharaonischer Bildschriftlichkeit," in V. Verschoor, A. J. Stuart, C. Demarée (eds.), *Imaging and imagining the Memphite necropolis: Liber Amicorum René van Walsem*, Leiden, 2017, pp. 177-199.

¹²⁷ A. NIWIŃSKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-361.

¹²⁸ PM VI, p. 99 (66-71), Frieze.

¹²⁹ A. MARIETTE, *Dendérah: description générale du grand temple de cette ville*, Paris, 1873, plate IV, 43, 19.

¹³⁰ London, British Museum EA 10051: P. DERCHAIN, *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (BM 10051), rituel pour la conservation de la vie en Égypte*, Brussels, 1965, p. 170, (11), who translates this passage, *ta momie est enterrée dans une enveloppe de papyrus*.

¹³¹ S. CAUVILLE, *Le temple de Dendara. Les chapelles osiriennes X/1*, Cairo, 1997, p. 161, 44, who translates the same passage, *(j')ensevelis ta momie dans les tiges (?) de papyrus*.



sm3-t3.n.(i) s'ḥ.k m mnḥt mnḥw.

The fact that the verb is determined by the ideogram, *ḥtm*, depicting a cylinder seal on a necklace (Sign List S 20), inclines me to accept Pierre Koemoth's translation, *ta momie est interrée dans une enveloppe de papyrus*, because he alone of the three translators offers support for his reading.¹³² The association of that determinative in a context dealing with papyrus would certainly have resonated with the image of a rolled up scroll of papyrus secured by the application of a seal. The ritual described may reflect actual practice to judge from the intrusive burial of five infants, each within a papyrus coffer at Saqqara within the Dynasty XIX tomb of Iuruf at Saqqara.¹³³

The use of a sealed net in this particular instance reinforces the protective power of the sealings¹³⁴ but also, as Katelijm Vandorp suggests, authenticates the deceased's association with Osiris, as was the case with the sealed receptacles in which animal mummies were housed.

And finally, the suggested date of the fishnet into the early centuries of Roman control of Egypt invites still other areas of inquiry. Although a survey of ancient Egyptian religious practices is replete with references to fish and fishing, those references neither mention nor allude to fishnets.¹³⁵ That reticence is deceptive as the following two examples reveal because the corpus of religious texts occasionally alludes to the beneficial effects of netting in funerary contexts. One example may suffice, namely an episode in the Pyramid Texts.¹³⁶ There, Thoth traps the *ba* of the deceased in a net, *b3 ibt.f*, so that, protectively enveloped, the *ba*'s unhindered ascent into the sky is facilitated. This passage is of particular significance in light of the developed practice of using magical gems during the Roman Imperial Period.¹³⁷ One asks whether the use of such sealings on the fishnet under discussion might be regarded as an antecedent for the later use of seals in assisting the deceased's ascent through the heavens, as specified in this Gnostic spell:¹³⁸

¹³² P. KOEMOTH, *Osiris et les arbres. Contribution à l'étude des arbres sacrés de l'Égypte ancienne*, AegLeod 3, Liège, 1994, pp. 36-37; *contra*, S. CAUVILLE, *Le temple de Dendara. Les chapelles osiriennes II. Commentaire*, Cairo, 1997, p. 77, 161; and *ead.*, *Le temple de Dendara. Les chapelles osiriennes III. Index*, Cairo, 1997, p. 490, *sm3-t3*.

¹³³ D.A. ASTON, M.J. RAVEN, J.H. TAYLOR, "Coffins and related objects," in M.J. Raven (ed.), *The tomb of Iuruf: a Memphite official in the reign of Ramesses II*, London, 1991, p. 11; D.A. ASTON, *op. cit.*, p. 84; and M.Z. GONEIM, *Horus Sekhem-khet: the unfinished step pyramid at Saqqara I. Excavations at Saqqara*, Cairo, 1957, p. 65, p. 65, for earlier examples of papyrus used as burial coverings.

¹³⁴ M.-F. AUBERT, R. CORTOPASSI, G. NACHTERGAEL, V.A. AMORÓS, P. DÉTIENNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 and 207.

¹³⁵ I. GAMMER-WALLERT, "Fische, religiös," in W. Helck, W. Westendorf, *LÄ II*, 1977, col. 228-234; and C. DESROCHES-NOBLECOURT, "Poissons: tabous et transformations des morts (Nouveaux commentaires sur les pèlerinages archaïques aux villes saintes)," in D. Sinor (ed.), *Proceedings of the twenty-third International Congress of Orientalists, Cambridge 21st-28th August*, London, 1956, p. 59.

¹³⁶ § 1378c: D. MEEKS, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-235.

¹³⁷ C.A. FARAONE, *The transformation of Greek amulets in Roman imperial times*, Philadelphia, 2018.

¹³⁸ R. SMITH, "39. Spell for ascending through the heavens," in M. Meyer, R. Smith, *Ancient Christian magic. Coptic texts of ritual power*, Princeton, 1999, pp. 66-68; and C. SCHMIDT, V. MACDERMOT, *The Books of Jeu and the untitled text of the Brice Codex*, Leiden, 1978, pp. 95-97 (Chapter 34, 84-85).

ΕΓΕΤΗΝΩΑΝΟΥΩ ΕΓΕΤΗΝΦΡΑΠΖΕ

ΜΜΩΤΗ ΖΗ-ΤΕΙΣΦ

When you have finished sealing yourselves with this seal.

That Gnostic spell resonates with passages of the Book of Gates,¹³⁹ although admittedly the design of the seal accompany this spell drawn on the papyrus is an eight-rayed starburst. Still, as Vincent Rondot so persuasively argues, the study of sealings of Egypt of the Roman Imperial Period should be considered within the wider context of the material culture of the period, particularly since images on known sealings appear to correspond with motifs encountered in other media.¹⁴⁰ Consider the depictions of the deceased in a bead/textile-net, as represented on the back wall of the central niche of the Tigrane Tomb in Alexandria,¹⁴¹ or images of Osiris, each occasionally enveloped in a bead/textile-net on linen shrouds of the Roman Imperial Period, as seen in an example in Paris in which the figure of Osiris is so enveloped.¹⁴² The interpretation of images of Osiris in those contexts has been a contentious issue, which Dieter Kurth admirably summarized before concluding that the image of Osiris and the image of the deceased in such group compositions are to be regarded as one and the same, the deceased having been transformed into Osiris.¹⁴³ Dieter Kurth's conclusion is supported by the growing body of evidence that certain two-dimensional representations in ancient Egyptian art are to be understood as kinetic, rather than static.¹⁴⁴ From this perspective, the deity on the (spectator's) right in such compositions, usually Anubis, is to be regarded as the agent responsible for the transformation.

Further support is marshaled by the observation that the image of Osiris, enveloped in just such a bead/textile-net, develops into a stylized, abstract design that becomes iconic during the Roman Imperial Period. The image appears in just such a form as a graffito at Kalabasha,¹⁴⁵ on any number of magical gems,¹⁴⁶ on a (plaster?) image of Osiris without

¹³⁹ R. SMITH, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68.

¹⁴⁰ V. RONDOT, *Derniers visages des dieux d'Égypte*, Paris, 2013, p. 67, with note 75.

¹⁴¹ C.J. HAAS, *Alexandria in late antiquity: topography and social conflict*, Baltimore, London, 1997, p. 129, with note 1, for the illustration of which see M.S. VENIT, *Monumental tombs of ancient Alexandria: the theater of the dead*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 160, fig. 132.

¹⁴² Paris, Musée du Louvre N 3076: M.-F. AUBERT, R. CORTOPASSI, G. NACHTERGAEL, V.A. AMORÓS, P. DÉTIENNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 127 and 137-141, cat. no. 23; for which compare a second which we attribute to the same workshop, Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung 11651: K. Parlasca, H. Seemann (eds.), *Augenblicke. Mumienporträts und ägyptische Grabkunst aus römischer Zeit: eine Ausstellung der Schirn-Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 30. Januar bis 11. April 1999*, Frankfurt, Munich, 1999, pp. 260-261.

¹⁴³ D. KURTH, *Der Sarg der Teüris: eine Studie zum Totenglauben im römerzeitlichen Ägypten*, Mainz am Rhein, 1990, pp. 11 and 63-67.

¹⁴⁴ That movement is indeed one characteristic inherent in certain two-dimensional representations in ancient Egyptian art has already been mooted by M. HILL, D. SCHORSCH, "The Gulbenkian torso of King Pedubaste: investigations into Egyptian large bronze statuary," *MMJ* 40, 2005, pp. 185-186, in their discussion of the polychromy and motifs around the edge of a menat in Berlin, Staatliche Musee zu Berlin 23733, which they suggests conveys a sense of motion which that object is ritually manipulated. One should add to that discussion the so-called Hemaka disc, Cairo, The Egyptian Museum JE 70164 (C. ALDRED, *Egyptian Art*, New York, Toronto, 1980, p. 37, fig. 9), which, when ritually rotated, creates the allusion that the hounds and horned African ruminants are indeed running.

¹⁴⁵ H. GAUTHIER, *Le temple de Kalabchah*, Cairo, 1911-1914, p. 260, fig. 12.

¹⁴⁶ London, The British Museum EA 56040 (=G 40) and EA 56185: S. MICHEL, P. ZAZOFF, H. ZAZOFF, *Die*

head,¹⁴⁷ and, most significantly within the present context, as the principal motif found on the lead sealing of a mummy from Antinoe.¹⁴⁸ There the image of Osiris, enveloped in bead/textile-net is clearly inscribed for Σαμβαθίου [Sambathion], the deceased, which reinforces the conclusion of Dieter Kurth that the deceased has become Osiris. Such images resonate with a passage from a late fifth century anecdote preserved in Damascius (Fragment 174) (circa 450-550).¹⁴⁹ A certain Asclepiades prepares the body of Heraiskos, his brother, for burial. The passage is worth quoting in full:¹⁵⁰

οὕτω μὲν ζῶντι συνῆν· εἴ τι θεοειδές· ποθανόντι δέ,
 ἐπειδὴ τὰ νομιζόμενα τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν ὁ Ἀσκληπιάδης ποδιδόναι
 παρεσκευάζετο τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ τὰς Ὀσίριδος ἐπὶ τῷ σώματι
 περιβολάς, αὐτίκα φωτὶ κατελάμπετο πανταχῆ τῶν σινδόνων
 πόρρητα διαγράμματα, καὶ περὶ αὐτὰ καθεωρᾶτο φασμάτων
 εἶδη θεοπρεπῆ ἐπιδεικνύτων τὴν ψυχὴν ἐναργῶς, ποίοις ἄρα
 θεοῖς ἐγεγόνει συνέστιος

And so it was that in life something divine-like was habitually associated with him. In death just as Asclepiades prepared to honor him [Heraiskos, his brother] in the way prescribed for the priests, he specifically covered his body with the enveloping things associated with Osiris. Then all of a sudden ineffable figures, shining everywhere, immediately began to appear on the cloths. All around them one could clearly see the divine forms of visions which distinctly revealed his soul, so that his soul now joined the company of those deities. (paraphrased by the author)

The nouns used for the material in which the body is enveloped are both in the plural, περιβολάς¹⁵¹ and σινδόνων,¹⁵² the first denoting «those [things] which are wrapped around/enveloped» and the later «cloth.» The use of such multiples is well-attested as seen in the wrappings on the Coptic mummy in Heidelberg. The σινδόνων is itself covered with διαγράμματα¹⁵³, literally, “that which is marked out by lines,” often rendered as “figures.”¹⁵⁴ If this interpretation of that passage obtains, one can suggest that the use of such bead/textile-nets continued into the fifth century and that practice becomes additional supporting evidence

magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum, London, 2001, pp. 2, no. 3 and 4, no. 6; inventoried as Cbd-382 and Cbd-385, respectively, in The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database (viewed May 11, 2020): <http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/pandecta/76> and <http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/pandecta/79>.

¹⁴⁷ E. Adly (ed.), “Mardi 9 janvier 2018,” *BIA* 57, 2018, p. 24 (illustration), discovered at the site of al-‘Abd on the coastline of Alexandria.

¹⁴⁸ Cairo, The Egyptian Museum CG 33017: J.G. MILNE, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁹ P. Athanassiadi (ed.), *Damascius: The Philosophical History text with translation and notes*, Athens, 1999, p. 196; C. ZINTZEN, *Damascii vitae Isidori reliquia*, Hildesheim, 1967, p. 147; and C.J. HAAS, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁵⁰ M. WILDISH, *Hieroglyphic Semantics in Late Antiquity* (PhD diss., Durham University, Durham, 2012): “Durham E-Theses Online.” <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3922/> (viewed May 14, 2020), p. 31, [T203], for one of the most readily available texts of this fragment (viewed May 11, 2020).

¹⁵¹ H.G. LIDDELL, R. SCOTT, *Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English lexicon*, London, 1976, p. 547.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 635.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 160.

¹⁵⁴ C.J. HAAS, p. 129; but, see, D. FRANKFURTER, *Religion in Roman Egypt: assimilation and resistance*, Princeton, 2001, pp. 253-254, who interprets the nouns as “meaningless hieroglyphs.”

for the conservative longevity and persistence of ancient Egyptian funerary traditions.



Fig. 1. The fishnet removed from the mummy and rewound (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. nr. 25.3.225).

(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search#!?q=25.3.225> [viewed 2021.05.02]).



Fig. 2. Seal impression stamped seven times, twice with the open hand and five times with the *orans*-gesture (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. nr. 25.3.226a).



Fig. 3. Seal impression stamped five times, once with the *orans*-gesture and four with the open hand (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. nr. 25.3.226b).



Fig. 4. Seal impression stamped four times only with the open human hand (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 25.3.226c).