



Birmingham Egyptology Journal

Coffin Texts Spell 155 on the Moon

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Abstract

This paper presents a fresh rendering of Coffin Texts spell 155 based on the hieroglyphic text variant that is found on the coffin of a Deir el-Bersha official, Sen. It is argued that through references to an extensive body of lunar knowledge and wide-ranging associations this spell gives an elaborate – hitherto only partially understood – description of the period of time when the moon is not visible in its monthly cycle, i.e. astronomical new moon.

Introduction

When weighing the importance of the sun and the moon in ancient Egyptian thought, for a superficial observer it may seem that the Egyptians were so preoccupied with the bright solar disc of plain daylight that the attention they paid to its nocturnal counterpart was but negligible. This is especially true for the Old Kingdom but sources from all periods of Egyptian civilization tend to point in this direction. The sun and its divine personification Ra feature heavily in cults and cosmogonies, while allusions to the moon in the same genre of texts are scant. The solar cult has throughout Egyptian history been a cornerstone of state ideology. The pharaoh has – from the Fifth Dynasty on – a ‘son of Ra’ name and many of his insignia are of solar association. In the Old Kingdom the king’s final resting place, the pyramid, was erected as the stone-built replica of the sun’s rays, while the kings of the Fifth Dynasty built not only pyramids but also sun-temples to perpetuate their own cult; not surprisingly, in the tale recorded on the Westcar Papyrus the future kings of the Fifth Dynasty are begotten by the solar deity. In the netherworld books painted on the walls of New Kingdom royal tombs the dead ruler joins Ra in his solar barque to ferry over the treacherous regions of the underworld. The chief god of the Theban area, Amon, just like a host of other deities worshipped in other regions of the country, merges with the sun god. Hymns are addressed to him in his solar capacity, and his well-being and daily triumph over the forces of chaos are of national concern. The list to take stock of the importance of solar ideology may be continued almost endlessly.

Yet as a strong undercurrent the moon is also present in a considerable number of records that give us an insight into the Egyptians' view of the world.¹ True, compared to the weight of sun-oriented thought, at first we do not find many references to the moon, but already in the private tombs of the Fourth Dynasty² and in the Pyramid Texts (PT §861a–c) some monthly feasts, the writings of which clearly give away their lunar origins, are mentioned regularly. The further we advance along the timeline of Egyptian history, the more pronounced become the attestations of the moon and lunar thinking, as evidenced for example by the peak in the number of personal names containing the moon-element (*jꜥḥ* as in *Jahmes*) at the beginning of the New Kingdom,³ or the astronomical ceilings of the Ptolemaic temples where the depiction of the moon becomes a central theme.⁴ The increased emphasis on the moon – it seems there can be little doubt about that – runs concurrently with the growing importance of the god Osiris, who was originally the ruler of the dead, but who along the course of time takes on more and more lunar attributes, so much so that the classical authors – following the Egyptian fashion current at the time – without hesitation identify him with the moon.⁵

While there are not many direct references to the moon in the written records of the Old Kingdom, one cultural achievement of the Egyptians strongly suggests that they were already keenly observing lunar phenomena at the beginning of their civilization. Though the civil calendar totally disregarded the actual lunar cycles, that is, it was in no way synchronized with or adjusted to observational months, its overall structure – the fact that one civil year comprised twelve thirty-day months – certainly indicates that the people who devised it had been fully aware of the moon's cyclical behaviour over the yearly period. So prior to the inauguration of the civil calendar – which surely took place by the middle of the third millennium BCE, as, after some sporadic instances under the Third Dynasty,⁶ civil dates began to be recorded in large numbers during the Fourth Dynasty⁷ – the Egyptians must have accumulated quite an extensive body of knowledge on the moon. In modern Egyptological literature this obvious conclusion has prompted wide speculation about the possible existence and precise workings of an Egyptian lunar calendar in the Old Kingdom or perhaps even earlier.⁸ It is needless to discuss this debate here; the pertinent point is that the civil calendar does stand witness to an early familiarity with the lunar world.

One of the earliest textual sources in which there are longer passages about the moon is the Coffin Texts. Unlike the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts make references to the moon in ways that go beyond simply mentioning lunar feasts or just naming the moon in a context that otherwise deals with rebirth or its astral connotations. There are whole spells that – based either on their title or content – can be identified as being concerned with the major theme of lunar phenomena. In this category fall, among others: spell 6, which in all probability talks about the appearance of the first crescent on the western horizon following new moon;⁹ spells 155 and 156 that, according to their titles, enumerate the *bas* (souls) of the new moon and Hermopolis respectively (see below); spell 207 in which two goddesses are invoked with the

¹ Derchain 1962: 19.

² Simpson 1978: pl. xix.

³ Ranke 1935: 12.

⁴ Herbin 1982: 239–246.

⁵ Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride*: ch. 41–43.

⁶ Depuydt 2001: 89.

⁷ See Verner 2006.

⁸ Depuydt 1997: 16–17.

⁹ Goedicke 1989; Willems 2005.

hope of being reborn as the moon;¹⁰ and spells 824 and 1096 that associate the moon with Thoth and the eye of Horus.¹¹

That these texts are quite informative about the moon is not at all surprising, since a lot of the coffins on which they were written come from Deir el-Bersha, the burial ground of Hermopolis.¹² Although the Hermopolitan origin of the Book of Two Ways (CT 1029–1130)¹³ has been debated lately,¹⁴ it still remains a distinct possibility that a large portion of the Coffin Texts was composed there, since some spells exclusively occur in the Deir el-Bersha material.¹⁵ Given that Hermopolis was the chief cult centre of the preeminent Egyptian lunar deity, Thoth, it is even more likely that the lunar passages were devised in that locality. However, this circumstance is only inadequately reflected in the existing translations of the Coffin Texts. The main concern of this paper is CT 155, a spell that expressly states in its title that it is about the moon, so here again we may reasonably surmise that this text is of Hermopolitan origin. Yet none of the standard collections of Coffin Texts translations – all based on Adriaan de Buck's hieroglyphic edition (CT) – uses a Deir el-Bersha coffin for their source text. Louis Speleers gives a synoptic translation without specifying a particular coffin,¹⁶ Raymond O. Faulkner uses the text variant on Nakhti's inner coffin coming from Asyut (S2P in de Buck's designation),¹⁷ Paul Barguet does the same,¹⁸ and Claude Carrier still adheres to the same coffin as his starting point.¹⁹ One is left to wonder whether the preference for the S2P coffin is simply the outcome of its first position in de Buck's publication (i.e. the text of S2P runs along the left-hand margin), and had he chosen a different arrangement, would we now be reading translations of a quite different kind.

But that is simply not the case and the disregard of the Deir el-Bersha material also applies to works that have not attempted to take a look at the Coffin Texts as a whole, but have instead focussed on particular sections of it that included the lunar passages. When examining the spells of the Book of Going Forth by Day (Book of the Dead) that are themed around gaining knowledge of the bas of different sacred localities (BD 107–109, 111–116), Kurt Sethe gave a rendering of CT 155 with an extensive commentary, but he also followed the Asyut text variant.²⁰ Alexandre Piankoff, discussing the mythology of the eye of Horus in his book about the tomb of Ramesses VI, used Sethe's publication to give an English translation of the first part of CT 155.²¹ More recently, a significant portion of spell 155 has been transliterated and translated by Frédéric Servajean, yet he once more relies on the S2P coffin, at least for the title.²² This is – as far as all the translations mentioned here are concerned – perhaps the most unfortunate choice, as Servajean emphatically attempts to highlight the subtleties of the lunar ideology underlying this spell. To be fair, he then – without making an explicit mention of it – does publish a few lines of the text using the variants coming from Deir el-Bersha.

¹⁰ Willems 1996: 253–255.

¹¹ See Faulkner 1978: 14 and 152.

¹² Gestermann 2004: 201.

¹³ References to Coffin Texts conform to the following pattern: CT 155 = Coffin Texts spell 155, CT II 290a = de Buck's second volume, page 290, section a.

¹⁴ Stadler 2009: 99–103.

¹⁵ Gestermann 2004: 202.

¹⁶ Speleers 1946: 87–88.

¹⁷ Faulkner 1973: 133–134.

¹⁸ Barguet 1986: 572–573.

¹⁹ Carrier 2004: 376–379.

²⁰ Sethe 1922: 27–34.

²¹ Piankoff 1954: 38.

²² Servajean 2003: 446.

As a result, all existing translations of spell 155 of the Coffin Texts give a false impression of its contents and this seriously hampers the full understanding of the role that the moon played in the funerary cult of the period. It is high time now that this fault was rectified, so here I offer a fresh rendering of CT 155 based on the hieroglyphic text that is written on the outer coffin of Sen, as published by de Buck (CT II 290a–308b; B4L^b). Sen bore the titles ‘Chief Physician’ (*wr swnw*) and ‘Steward’ (*jm.j-r pr*) and – as his coffin was found in the burial complex of the nomarch Djehutihotep – he was undoubtedly one of the distinguished members of the local elite at Hermopolis that flourished during the time of Senwosret II and III.²³ Thus the texts on his coffin date to the end of the nineteenth century BCE. While Sen’s titles are not really suggestive of his association with the lunar cult of Thoth, the spells of the Coffin Texts were not personalized in such a way that this fact would have had any bearing on the contents of the writings on his coffin. Clearly, all the coffins coming from Deir el-Bersha reflect spell variants of Coffin Texts that formed a local canon.²⁴ The particular group or choice of spells that made up this canon, as is evident from de Buck’s synoptic edition, can be distinguished from other, locally canonized or preferred sets at, say, Meir or Asyut.

It must be emphasized that the occurrence of the moon in funerary literature, be it composed in Hermopolis or elsewhere, is fairly natural because – as sources from all periods indicate – the Egyptians clearly drew a parallel between the monthly renewal of the lunar disc and the regeneration of the deceased. A straightforward expression of this idea is already found in the Pyramid Texts, where one passage talks about ‘the king’s birth on the second day of the lunar month, the king’s conception on the fifteenth day of the lunar month’ (*msj N m 3bd jwr N m smd.t*; PT §1772a). While numerous examples alluding to the intricate link between the moon and rebirth may also be cited from the Coffin Texts,²⁵ the most overt one is perhaps that of spell 207, already mentioned above, in which the speaker, having implored the two goddesses for rebirth, refers to lunar feasts, thus putting the whole situation in a lunar context.²⁶

For the Deir el-Bersha coffins there could be different criteria dictating the choice of text that a translation should follow. Certainly, the text on Sen’s coffin is not the longest one. The inscriptions on the coffin of the nomarch Djehutinakht (B2Bo) – though mainly due to a more verbose title – run significantly longer and show more affinities with the variants found on the Asyut coffins, so if my assumption that spell 155 was written in Hermopolis is correct, then this is perhaps an indication of the fact that Djehutinakht’s text was seen as the most authentic representation of this particular spell. On the other hand, it may be entirely fortuitous that the copyists of spell 155 in Asyut tried to conform to Djehutinakht’s version, that is, perhaps more precisely, to the source text written on papyrus on which Djehutinakht’s text was also based. It may just have been that the scribes in Asyut only had access to the archive that happened to preserve the original of Djehutinakht’s version. So in themselves, length and similarity to other texts found at a different location do not necessarily guarantee that the right text will be chosen. For my choice I have given much more weight to similarities within Deir el-Bersha: out of the ten local versions six, including Sen’s texts (as there are two inscriptions of spell 155 on his coffin), show close resemblance to each other (B2P, B4L^a, B4L^b, B1Y, B17C and B1L). Within this group I opted for Sen’s text because in some small details – the writing of particular phrases, the choice of determinatives – it seems to best display the lunar characteristics of spell 155.

Inevitably, the translation of CT 155, just like perhaps the translation of almost any passage in the Coffin Texts, is fraught with many difficulties. In my opinion, apart from the

²³ Willems 1988: 76–77.

²⁴ Gestermann 2004: 201–202.

²⁵ Wallin 2002: 66–89.

²⁶ Willems 1996: 253.

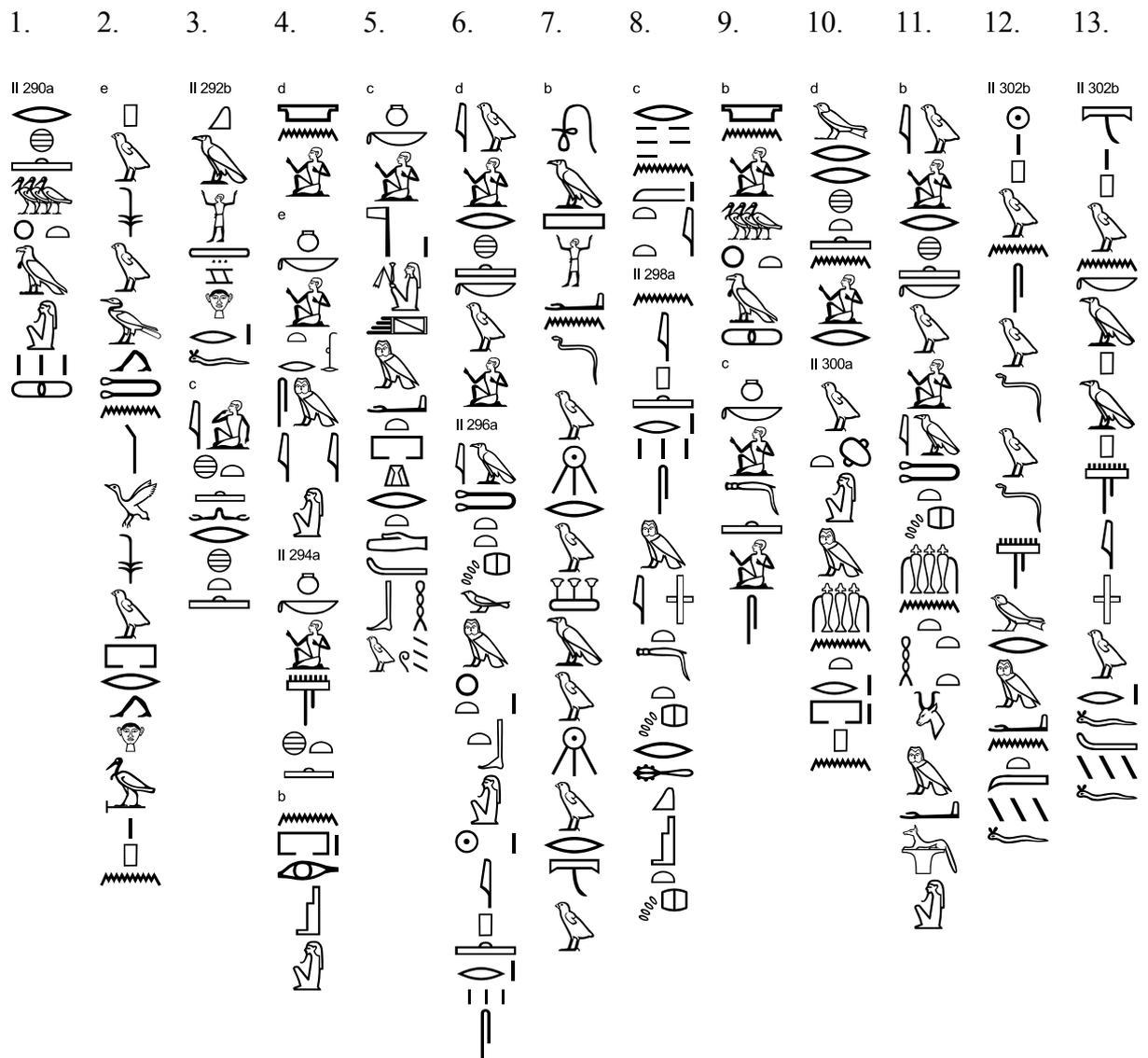
fact that the spells ‘resemble disconnected scraps of conversation for which the context has been lost’,²⁷ the most serious obstacles to full comprehension stem from four major factors. These are (1) the use of a specialized vocabulary, (2) textual corruption, (3) the deliberate opacity with which the ancient authors recorded their thoughts, and, somewhat corollary to all the previous points, (4) our insufficient understanding of the cultural background of the texts. So, however great the advances we have made in understanding the ancient Egyptian language, there are still some words the precise meaning of which we simply cannot grasp, either because we live in an entirely different world, or because our sources do not provide sufficient context to understand them. Second, the inscriptions on the coffins are not original in the sense that the ancient scribes surely wrote them down using a master copy that had been recorded in the hieratic or cursive hieroglyphic script either on papyrus or on a leather roll; unavoidably, repeated copyings resulted in the corruption of the texts. Third, to maintain the ritual efficacy of the texts the authors often used language that was full of allusions and would express simple truths wrapped in indirect intimations, or even employed cryptic writings to make their expressions less intelligible.²⁸ As a result, some texts were quite probably incomprehensible even to the vast majority of their contemporaries – those people who did not form the immediate officiants of particular cults. Lastly, the written and archaeological records that have come down to us often only give a fragmented picture of ancient Egyptian ritual activities and cultic practices. Sometimes even crucial pieces of the puzzle are missing, and these gaps in our knowledge can seriously hinder the understanding of such funerary compositions as the Coffin Texts.

Yet the constant accumulation of philological knowledge, the deeper understanding of ancient concepts, the publication of new sources, or just a shift of interest within the academic community may from time to time result in a constellation when texts long known to scholars are subjected to fresh scrutiny with the hope that they will yield their true character more thoroughly than ever before. Such a time, it seems to me, has arrived for Coffin Texts spell 155.

²⁷ Mueller 1972: 99.

²⁸ See for example Faulkner 1981: 173.

The hieroglyphic text (CT II 290a–308b)²⁹



²⁹ There are two versions of Spell 155 inscribed on Sen's outer coffin. I follow the text which has been designated by de Buck as B4L^b. The vertical orientation of the text is preserved, but the signs face left instead of right. The sections that run parallel in the original (split columns in II 290e and II 302b) are given consecutively.

14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23.



Transliteration and translation

1. *rh b3.w psdn.tjw*
2. *pw sw ʕq(.w) tnw sw pr(.w) hr b3 pn*
3. *q3 t3 hr r=f.j.ht n rh.t*
4. *wn n=j jnk tr(.w) sm.y jnk hbs(.w) h.t n pr Wsjr*
5. *jnk ntr jr.j sj3 m ʕ.t hr dbh.w*
6. *jw=j rh.kw j3t.t m jr.t Tby jp r.w=s*
7. *w3š ʕndw r wš3.w wh.w*
8. *r 5-nw n gs twt n jp r.w=s m jmj.t mh.t r hqs.t*
9. *wn n=j b3.w psdn.tjw jnk mh=j s(j)*
10. *wr rh.t.n=j r wtj m hnt r-pr pn*
11. *jw=j rh.kw j3t.t hnt ht.t m ʕ Jnpw*
12. *hrw pw n swdwd wr-m-ʕn.wt=f*
13. *grh pw n k3p3p jmj.w r=f*
14. *jw m jwtt hnt Wsjr*
15. *ts.n.tw h3.t=f n ph.wj=f*
16. *m mdh.t n.t s3w*
17. *wn n=j jnk rh(.w) r=f*
18. *jw=j bsj.kw hr n3*
19. *n whm=j n h3k.w-jb*
20. *wn n=j ntjw m psdn.tjw*
21. *jw m33.n=j wp.w pr(.w) m sh.w n.w Wr.t*
22. *jw=j rh.kw b3.w psdn.tjw*
23. *Wsjr pw Jsds pw Jnpw pw*

1. Knowing the bas of the moon's invisibility.
2. Who is he who enters, where is he from who comes forth upon this ba,
3. the earth being high on account of his spell? That is an unknown thing.

4. Open to me because I am one who respects the observed one, because I am one who makes the covering in the house of Osiris,
5. and because I am the god in charge of the full moon period in the room where the vessel containing the fractional components of the eye is stored.
6. I know what is missing from the eye of Tebi when its parts are counted,
7. and when dawn is stronger than the glow of the darkened night.
8. The fifth part of an entire half for counting its parts between what is in the filling eye and the ailing eye.

9. Open to me, the bas of the moon's invisibility, for I am one who completes the eye,
10. for what I know is more than the embalmer of the temple knows.
11. I know what is missing from the eye canal in the hand of Anubis
12. on this day of covering his great fingernails,
13. on this night of hiding his teeth.
14. It is a void out of Osiris,
15. when one has joined his front with his back
16. as the hewn out part of the beam.

way the basic desire of being close to Osiris by claiming to have access to his property. Patrik Wallin consents to this latter view and sees here the expression of the wish to join in the ritualized pilgrimage to Osiris's main centre in the north.³¹

There is of course quite an easy explanation why some copyists may have felt that a direct reference to Osiris was appropriate at the beginning of spell 155. The closing of the spell is in fact a straightforward response to the very first phrase of the title, as it names in no uncertain terms the bas of the moon's invisibility: they are Osiris, Isdes and Anubis. Whether this statement is an early attestation of the process by which Osiris became thoroughly identified with the moon is a moot point, and I will discuss it in my comments to line 24 below. Nevertheless, the extended title relates Osiris to Djedu (Busiris), his chief Lower Egyptian cult centre in the middle of the Delta. If it could be proved that the lunar cult played a significant role in the ritual activities there, then this fact would explain the mention of this town in the title of a spell that claims to be concerned with the bas of the moon's invisibility. However, there is not much evidence hinting at such a connection in the Coffin Texts. One exception may be spell 339 that lists the localities where Thoth (here clearly in his judicial function) is supposed to vindicate Osiris against his enemies before the councils of magistrates, and it claims that in Djedu it should happen on 'the day when the *wd3.t*-eye is given to its owner' (*hrw pw n rd.t wd3.t n nb=f*; CT IV 338c). While the *wd3.t*-eye was most frequently conceived as a symbol of the restored left eye of Horus, that is, the full moon,³² in the absence of a wider lunar context it may not necessarily be equated with the moon here, so this piece of evidence remains inconclusive. But, as we shall see later, CT 155 itself hints at the connection of the lunar cult with the house of Osiris in Djedu (see comments to lines 4 and 5 below).

As for the remaining words in the short title, I keep the Egyptian expression *b3.w* in the translation, because it has no exact English equivalent, and the commonly used 'soul' would be a bit misleading. For the *ba*, and especially its plural form, really designates the force that enables beings to leave an impression on the world around them.³³ Accordingly, the *bas* here must refer to entities or essences within and around the moon that ensure its continuing impact on those who have cognizance of this nocturnal body in the sky, and that is virtually all humanity. To translate the term *psdn.tjw*, Leo Depuydt proposes the technically more appropriate expression 'last crescent invisibility',³⁴ for the event that in all probability inaugurated the new lunar month in ancient Egypt was the morning when the last crescent of the waning moon could no longer be seen above the eastern horizon. From the Egyptian sources it also transpires, however, that *psdn.tjw* did not only refer to a momentary event, that is, the disappearance of the last crescent, but also to the whole period when the moon was invisible (see discussion below). Therefore I render *psdn.tjw* 'the moon's invisibility', because on the one hand I would find the use of 'last crescent invisibility' a bit cumbersome, and on the other I think my rendering elicits the sense of duration to a greater extent than Depuydt's choice of words. I must also note that I use the term 'the moon's invisibility' interchangeably with the modern expression 'new moon' (the traditional translation of *psdn.tjw*), as in its wider sense (astronomical new moon) it also conveys the idea of the non-presence of the lunar disc.

³¹ Wallin 2002: 72.

³² Smith 2002: 124.

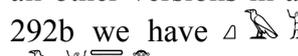
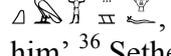
³³ Allen 2001a: 161.

³⁴ Depuydt 1998: 73.

Lines 2–3

pw sw ^c*q(.w)* *tnw sw pr(.w) hr b3 pn*
q3 t3 hr r=f.j.h.t n rh.t

Who is he who enters, where is he from who comes forth upon this ba,
the earth being high on account of his spell? That is an unknown thing.

That *pw* here on its own at the beginning of the sentence is equivalent to *ptr* ‘who? what?’ (etymologically *pw* plus the enclitic particle *tr*) has long been established.³⁵ The expression ‘this ba’ surely refers to the deceased, but in the following line Sen’s inscription differs from all other versions in a minute, yet perhaps quite significant detail. On most coffins in CT II 292b we have , while singularly on B2Bo (Djehutinakht’s inner coffin) , and this can of course be interpreted as *q3 t3 hr=f* ‘the earth is being high on him’.³⁶ Sethe then goes on to conjecture that the whole statement alludes to the mound that is elevated over the tomb.³⁷ However, Sen quite clearly has a stroke next to the sign of the mouth, so the hieroglyphs should definitely be read *q3 t3 hr r=f* ‘the earth being high on account of his spell’. Obviously, there is a marked difference between the two renderings, as the reference to a spell gives quite a different sense to the passage. My interpretation, however, on the one hand finds its echo in line 17, where the speaker boasts about knowing his spell, and on the other can be set against another passage in the Coffin Texts that may shed some light on the link between the earth’s highness and a written or orally recited utterance.

In spell 314 the deceased assumes a series of priestly positions which supposedly help him to draw near Osiris, and here he makes the claim: ‘I am the wab-priest in Djedu on the day when what is high is made high, I am the god’s servant in Abydos on the day when the earth is exalted’ (*jnk w^cb n Dd.w sw sq3 q33.t jnk hm-ntr n 3bd.w hrw h^cw.t t3*; CT IV 95i–l). Now, this passage made its way into the Book of Going Forth by Day, and there in spell 1 it ends with exactly the same expression as in CT 155: ‘I am the wab-priest in Djedu, made wise in Abydos, (on the day) when what is in the high one is made high, I am the god’s servant in Abydos on the day when the earth is high’ (*jnk w^cb m Dd.w sbq m 3bd.w sq3 jm.j-q33.t jnk hm-ntr m 3bd.w hrw n q3.w t3*).³⁸ In these excerpts the references to height and, more specifically, to the height of the earth quite plausibly pertain to the mound over the tomb of Osiris, and I think the same applies to CT 155.

Eventually of course, as in theory anyone’s tomb in ancient Egypt may be conceived as the replica of Osiris’s tomb, the heap of earth hinted at in line 3 of CT 155 could also relate to the speaker’s own burial place. But this is not the issue here. What matters is that surely there was an Osirian ritual connected with building a mound over the divine tomb. Consequently, I think that what the assertion ‘the earth is high on account of his spell’ is really intended to emphasize is the speaker’s ability to take part in ritual activities and his aptitude for producing the right speech acts during these rituals. These then lead to the desired effect, that is the mounting of earth over the tomb. The BD descendant of Coffin Texts spell 314, though of course dating from a much later time (Ptolemaic era), highlights the connection between the act of making the earth high and intellectual capacities by referring to the experience of becoming knowledgeable (*sbq m 3bd.w*). Understanding the clause ‘the earth being high on account of his spell’ as advertising the intelligence of the speaker is quite in keeping with the rest of spell 155.

³⁵ Sethe 1922: 28; Faulkner 1982: 27.

³⁶ Faulkner 1973: 133; Carrier 2004: 376.

³⁷ Sethe 1922: 29.

³⁸ Lepsius 1842: pl. 1, cols. 1.8–9.

Lines 4–5

*wn n=j jnk tr(.w) sm.y jnk hbs(.w) h.t n pr Wsjr
jnk ntr jr.j sj3 m ʕ.t hr dbh.w*

Open to me because I am one who respects the observed one, because I am one who makes the covering in the house of Osiris, and because I am the god in charge of the full moon period in the room where the vessel containing the fractional components of the eye is stored.

Faulkner believes that *tr* here is the enclitic particle,³⁹ but that is certainly an erroneous view, and I agree with Sethe that it is the participle of the verb *tr* ‘to respect, to esteem’.⁴⁰ In a similar fashion, I take *sm.y* to be the passive participle of *sm* ‘to pay attention to someone, to respect’,⁴¹ thus meaning ‘the observed one’ – for this see also the separate entry in the *Wörterbuch*, with essentially the same meaning.⁴² My rendering is therefore quite similar to that of Barguet’s,⁴³ but I think it is difficult to give a good translation here, because two words in line 4 – *sm.y* and *hbs* – make subtle allusions to the names of specific days of the lunar month, and thus different stages of the lunar cycle. The names of the thirty days of the lunar month are revealed at a much later time in Graeco-Roman temple inscriptions.⁴⁴ In these lists the fourth day is called *pr.t-sm* ‘the going forth of the sem-priest’. According to a papyrus with mythological content written in the seventh century BCE, this event signals the moment when Horus has recovered the faculties of his eye after the period of distress caused by Seth: ‘Horus opened his eyes, and he could see with them. ... His strength grew, so he went forth at dawn – one calls it the going forth of the sem-priest on the fourth day following every instance of the moon’s invisibility’ (*wn Hr.w jr.tj=fj m33=f jm=sj ... ʕ3 ph.tj=fj prj.hr=f m hḏ-t3 pr.t-sm hr.tw r=f hr hrw 4 n psdn.tjw nb*).⁴⁵ One may not be far from the truth to interpret this poetic description as referring to the appearance of the new crescent – in the evening of the third day of the lunar month at the latest – and to a corresponding ceremony heralding the waxing phase of the moon at the end of that evening (dawn of the fourth day). Therefore the expression *sm.y* also evokes that stage of the lunar cycle when the crescent of the moon is seen waxing.

This interpretation is reinforced by the second part of line 4 which seems to be connected with the other side of the lunar cycle, waning. For *hbs h.t* three possibilities may be considered. First, suspecting a more abstract sense behind *hbs* ‘to clothe things, to cover things (with cloth)’ the phrase may mean ‘to keep things secret’, and that is the understanding of almost all previous translators.⁴⁶ For this compare Wb. 3, 65.10, and CT III 311c where *h3p* ‘to hide, to keep secret’ and *hbs* are used interchangeably on different coffins. Secondly, it can of course have the literal meaning, ‘to cover’, just as I translated it here. However, I believe that covering here is not just a general term, but – and that is the third possibility – it has some quite sophisticated lunar connotations, which can again be understood in connection with the lunar day names.

³⁹ Faulkner 1973: 134.

⁴⁰ Wb. 5, 318.1–8; Sethe 1922: 29.

⁴¹ Wb. 4, 120.7.

⁴² Wb. 4, 120.9.

⁴³ Barguet 1986: 572.

⁴⁴ Parker 1950: 11–12; for a recent edition of one list from Dendera see Cauville 2008: 32–34.

⁴⁵ Meeks 2006: 14 (pBrooklyn 47.218.84, IV, 5–6).

⁴⁶ Sethe 1922: 27; Faulkner 1973: 133; Barguet 1986: 572; Carrier 2004: 377.

The verb *hbs* occurs in one name variant for the sixteenth day of the lunar month, *hbs tp* ‘covering the head’, though of course, the attestations of this designation also date from the Graeco-Roman Period.⁴⁷ Already Ludwig Borchardt conjectured that covering here describes the appearance of the first narrow strip of darkness on the lunar disc after full moon.⁴⁸ More interestingly, the term *hbs* is found closely associated with *psdn.tjw* in the mythological papyrus already mentioned, where we read: ‘As for the covering of [...] in Heliopolis until the third day after the moon’s invisibility – Seth seizes the eye of Horus’ (*jr hbs [...] m Jwn.w hr hrw 3 n psdn.tjw Sth jtj.n=f jr.t-Hr.w*).⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the object of the verb is lost in this manuscript, but a marginal note to the text does refer to *hbs tp*. The association of the expression with both the sixteenth and third day of the lunar month can only be explained if we assume that it designated the entire period when the moon first gradually became covered (waning) and then remained totally covered (invisible) during conjunction.⁵⁰ Similarly, in line 4 of CT 155 the phrase *hbs h.t* may actually refer to a specific activity in the cult of the moon – a reenactment of the process by which increasingly larger portions of the lunar disc turned dark during the second half of the month – and not just more generally to keeping secrets or clothing ritual objects. If this is the case, then it must also be surmised that the house of Osiris was a place where some events concerning the lunar cult were unfolded. It must be added that in the expression *hbs h.t* the second element, *h.t*, may also have some lunar connotations, as some Graeco-Roman texts used this word to denote the constituent parts of the lunar eye,⁵¹ for which the most commonly employed expression was of course *dbh.w*. So it is surely not by coincidence that this latter word makes an appearance in the next line (see below).

That the statements about the respect for the observed one and the act of clothing or covering should be understood in a lunar context is strongly suggested by line 5 which in my opinion contains further unmistakable references to lunar phenomena in general, and to the names of lunar days in particular. The key word here is *sj3*, written  on Sen’s coffin. Since this word is missing from the Asyut texts, where it has been corrupted into a form that has little resemblance to its original, most of the existing translations fail to grasp its significance. Only Servajean takes it into consideration,⁵² and he renders it as *sj3.t* ‘cloth’.⁵³ Dirk van der Plas and Joris F. Borghouts are apparently of the same opinion, as in their word index to the Coffin Texts they list the reference to CT II 294c under the same word.⁵⁴ However, it is very unlikely that the sign  should be read *sj3.t*, though Servajean’s justifiable conjecture that this particular type of cloth was later associated with the waxing moon should be kept in mind.⁵⁵ The word *sj3.t* is always written with the clothes determinative  in the Coffin Texts, and only once is it not spelled out phonetically  (CT V 373a). On its own  once stands for the verb ‘to know, to perceive’ (CT II 116s), and once in a very fragmentary text perhaps for *Sj3*, the divine personification of the concept ‘knowledge, perception’ (CT IV 286d), though there too an ensuing stroke very probably belongs to it.⁵⁶ Neither word would be satisfactory here.

⁴⁷ Parker 1953: 50.

⁴⁸ Borchardt 1935: 23 and 40.

⁴⁹ Meeks 2006: 14 (pBrooklyn 47.218.84, IV, 2–3).

⁵⁰ Meeks 2006: 79.

⁵¹ Aufrière 1991: 199.

⁵² Servajean 2003: 446.

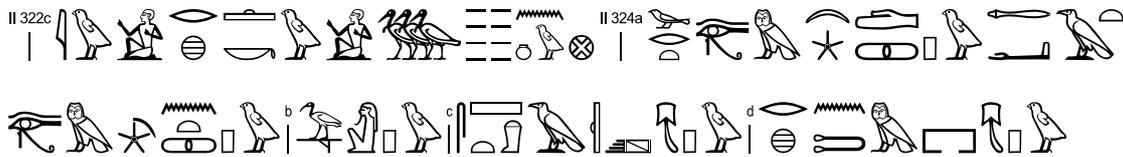
⁵³ Cf. Wb. 4, 29.3–7.

⁵⁴ Plas and Borghouts 1998: 244.

⁵⁵ Servajean 2003: 453–456.

⁵⁶ *Contra* Molen 2000: 449.

However, a clue to understand the sign is provided by CT 156 which claims to offer enlightenment about the bas of Hermopolis and thus also gives information about the moon. At the end of the spell we read (B4L^b):



iw=j rḥ.kw b3.w Ḥmn.w šr.t m 3bd pw ʿ3.t m smd.t pw Dḥw.tj pw sšt3 sj3 pw rḥ.n=t m pr-grḥ pw

I know the bas of Hermopolis. It is the small eye on the second day of the lunar month, it is the great eye on the fifteenth day of the lunar month. It is Thoth. It is the secret of the full moon. It is what you have learnt in the house of the night.

So here  appears with the determinative , but it must be noted immediately that in the Coffin Texts this sign is often not the animal hide but the variant of the hieroglyph representing the night , i.e. the misreading of the pertinent hieratic sign.⁵⁷ That this is surely the case here is shown by the fact that on two Deir el-Bersha coffins (B2P and B17C) the word is indeed written with  (another variant of ), while in most other inscriptions the intermediate form  is used (the same as is found in CT II 302b on Sen's coffin).⁵⁸ I must emphasize that I take the combination  as one word with the latter sign as determinative, and think that the rendering of the clause in CT II 324c as *sšt3 sj3 grḥ pw* 'it is the secret of the knowledge of the night' with a double direct genitive is unnecessarily protracted.⁵⁹ The word replacing *sj3* in the Asyut versions of CT 155,  *3w* 'leather document case', having  as a determinative, also suggests indirectly that in CT II 294c  once had the same determinative too. Therefore the unity of the sign *sj3* with the night hieroglyph as a determinative in CT II 324c can hardly be doubted – all the more so, because the word *sj3* can perfectly be made sense of in a lunar setting.

In the Graeco-Roman lists of lunar days the fourteenth and the seventeenth days of the month are equally called *sj3.w*, spelled either  or .⁶⁰ I believe therefore that in spells 155 and 156 of the Coffin Texts the same expression occurs, and I translate it 'full moon period' in accordance with the astute observation of Richard A. Parker that the fourteenth and the seventeenth days of the lunar month bear the same name because, due to the complexities of lunar observation, the full moon appears within this time window.⁶¹ In other words, if the first day of the lunar month is established by, say, the invisibility of the last crescent in the morning, it is not a foregone conclusion that full moon will occur on day fifteen – it may be observed on either the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, or seventeenth day, but never before day fourteen or after day seventeen. Parker's original conjecture is also backed up indirectly by Plutarch (second century CE) who says that 'the Egyptians have a legend that the end of Osiris's life came on the seventeenth of the month, on which day it is quite evident to the eye that the period of the full moon is over'.⁶²

⁵⁷ Faulkner 1981: 173.

⁵⁸ See Faulkner 1981: 173.

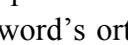
⁵⁹ For this rendering see Carrier 2004: 383.

⁶⁰ Wb. 4, 31.12; Cauville 2008: 33.

⁶¹ Parker 1950: 13.

⁶² Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride*: ch. 42.

In further support of my interpretation of *sj3* as ‘full moon period’ I should here call attention to the presence of a widely used ancient Egyptian literary device, the thought couplet, in the rubric of CT 156. The two clauses containing the verb *rh* ‘know’ frame the nucleus of the assertion which clearly consists of two parallelisms. Thus both ‘it is the small eye on the second day of the lunar month’ and ‘it is Thoth’ refer to the beginning of the month – the connection in the first clause is obvious, while in the second one the name of the god invokes the feast of Thoth that was held on the first day of the lunar month (*psdn.tjw*).⁶³ Similarly, ‘it is the great eye on the fifteenth day of the lunar month’ and ‘it is the secret of the full moon’ both describe the middle of the lunar month, and here the allusions are more palpable. It must be added that – at least for the Graeco-Roman lunar day lists – technically speaking a more appropriate translation of *sj3* would be ‘the window of time in which full moon may be observable’. It is not altogether impossible, however, that the fourteenth and seventeenth days of the lunar month gained their names from an antecedent expression meaning just ‘full moon’, and I think *sj3* is used in that sense here. I see of course no contradiction between the mention of the full moon and the primary focus of the spell, the moon’s invisibility, as these two events are inherently interrelated. From the later sources it is also evident that the Egyptians generally had a predilection for the waxing phase of the moon and its apotheosis, the full moon, as for example the scenes showing the fourteen stairs leading up to the full lunar disc indicate.⁶⁴ The reasons for this are not difficult to see: it is this part of the lunar cycle that exhibits the powers of regeneration most forcefully.

Another key word that needs some explanation here is *dbh.w*. One of the lexical items it can be associated with is the verb *dbh* ‘to ask for, to require, to need something’, and its derivative *dbh.w* ‘cult objects, paraphernalia’.⁶⁵ Thus in CT 155 it may be understood in a general sense, describing the totality – or any – of the things that are needed during the performance of a ritual. Since in the Asyut texts the word is followed by a clothes determinative, the interpretation of most previous translators has been to render it as ‘ritual robe’.⁶⁶ However, the word’s orthography on Sen’s coffin, , is quite different and I think that van der Plas and Borghouts are justified in connecting it with the expression that occurs in CT V 190g and VII 17q.⁶⁷ They translate it as ‘halyard’, that is a rope for raising and taking down the sail of a ship. Rami van der Molen is more cautious in his hieroglyphic dictionary of the Coffin Texts and does not venture to offer a translation.⁶⁸ Neither does he cite CT II 294c as a source for the word, but that may be due to an oversight of the Deir el-Bersha text variants. While van der Molen’s reluctance to translate the word indicates that the two remaining attestations are equally opaque, they may nevertheless shed some additional light on the meaning of *dbh.w*.

That both in CT V 190g and VII 17q *dbh.w* refers to some nautical equipment is quite apparent, as spell 404 lists the parts of the boat that ferries the deceased over to the island of the Field of Rushes, and a section of spell 818 is also about this journey on water in the underworld. In both spells *dbh.w* collocates with *sgrg.w* (cf. CT V 190c and VII 17q itself), but the meaning of the latter is equally elusive (‘yards? of ship’),⁶⁹ so this connection does not add significantly to our understanding of *dbh.w*. Interestingly enough, in spell 404 – which catalogues the secret names of the underworld ferry – we read that ‘the name of its (i.e. the boat’s) *dbh.w*: they are the staffs of Ra which are in Hermopolis’ (*rn n dbh.w=s m3w.wt pw*

⁶³ Cf. Cauville 2008: 32.

⁶⁴ Herbin 1982: 239–243.

⁶⁵ Wb. 5, 439.6–440.1 and 5, 440.3–14.

⁶⁶ Cf. especially Faulkner 1973: 134, n. 4.

⁶⁷ Plas and Borghouts 1998: 319.

⁶⁸ Molen 2000: 790.

⁶⁹ Molen 2000: 568.

n.t R^c jm.jt Wnw; CT V 190g–h, B5C), so here for some reason *dbh.w* is associated with the lunar cult centre, Hermopolis. Though van der Plas and Borghouts make a separate entry for it,⁷⁰ I think the same word occurs in CT V 169e, with a slightly different spelling : ‘the Great One’s stern-post and tiller when he is with the *dbh.w*’ (*jm.j-tp wr hr.j-^c wr jw=f hn^c dbh.w*; S1C). From the use of the preposition *hn^c*, Faulkner believes that people are meant here (and he of course makes a derivation from ‘ask for’).⁷¹ But whatever the precise meaning of *dbh.w* when used in a nautical setting, this word clearly does not fit the context of CT 155, so I think there, despite the orthographic similarities, a different translation is required.

Some spellings of the word on the Deir el-Bersha coffins (B1L and B4Bo) – – are, if anything, more suggestive of a connection with another lexical entry, that of *dbh* ‘a measure, measuring vessel’.⁷² Indeed, I think this is the word used here, but in a more restricted sense that is usually thought to be first attested from the Graeco-Roman Period. When talking about the eye of Horus or the *wd3.t*-eye late texts often make references to the *dbh.w*, that is the constituent parts of the eye that are needed to make it whole (for an example see the excerpt from Esna below). As the foregoing definition implies, this expression is commonly seen as a specialized use of the general word *dbh.w* ‘requirements’.⁷³ However, such late writings as etc.⁷⁴ suggest that the components of the eye were also conceived as being contained in a vessel.

It would of course be all too easy to dismiss the significance of this pictorial representation and say that it arose from a late pun between the words *dbh.w* ‘requirements’ and *dbh* ‘measuring vessel’ were it not for the evidence supplied by the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus. According to its colophon, this papyrus is a copy of an older document that was recorded under Amenemhat III,⁷⁵ and it is generally accepted that the contents of the papyrus reflect Middle Kingdom knowledge,⁷⁶ and thus they belong to the same intellectual milieu as the Coffin Texts. Problem 80 has a direct bearing on CT 155, as it specifies the *dbh* in terms of two measures for grain, the hekat and the hin. The term in the introduction to the problem is usually understood as referring to a measuring vessel,⁷⁷ but as the problem itself is no more than the listing of six fractional values, it may equally be rendered ‘series of fractions’. Thus the beginning of problem 80 should be read: ‘As for the set of fractions one measures with for the governors of the storehouse’ (*jr dbh h3y.w jm=f n jr.jw-^c.t n sn^c*).⁷⁸

The fractional values then recorded in the rest of the problem correspond to the dimidiated series ($\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, $\frac{1}{16}$, $\frac{1}{32}$, $\frac{1}{64}$) known as the Horus-eye fractions in Egyptology. Thus Peet transcribes the subdivisions of the hekat with the hieroglyphs for the relevant parts of the eye. It must be noted, however, that the identification of the hieratic signs with these hieroglyphs has been questioned lately.⁷⁹ Going into the details of this debate here would cause us to stray too far from the subject in question, but I must point out that in my opinion CT 155 provides indirect evidence in favour of maintaining the Horus-eye notation, for the consistent presence of the grain determinative in the expressions *j3t.t*, *mḥ.t* and *hqs.t* that occur in subsequent lines of the text (CT II 296a, 298a, and 300b) in relation to the eye of Tebi clearly creates a link between a celestial eye and the *dbh*. We have seen that in a roughly

⁷⁰ Plas and Borghouts 1998: 319.

⁷¹ Faulkner 1977: 44, n. 11.

⁷² Wb. 5, 441.10–13; Pommerening 2005: 62–65.

⁷³ Wb. 5, 440.12.

⁷⁴ Dumas 1988: 775–777.

⁷⁵ Peet 1923: 3.

⁷⁶ Robins and Shute 1987: 58.

⁷⁷ Peet 1923: 122–123; Pommerening 2005: 64.

⁷⁸ See Peet 1923: pl. W.

⁷⁹ Ritter 2002.

contemporaneous document, the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus, this term can be understood either as a measuring vessel the contents of which are to be divided by the dimidiated fractions, or as these fractions themselves. That the word in CT 155 should have the same sense is strongly suggested by the reference to counting the parts of the eye in line 6.

Considering all this, it is not impossible that the *dbh.w* was an actual cult object in Hermopolis, originally ‘a vessel containing the fractional elements of the eye’. After all, CT 155 unambiguously describes it as something that can be stored in a room (for this see also the comments to line 23 below). The fractional elements may have been represented by different amounts of grain equal to a half, a quarter etc. of the vessel. The completion of the eye – representing the time elapsing during the month (note the night determinative in *dbh.w* on B4Bo!) – was ritually enacted by filling the vessel with these amounts. The question persists whether this cultic device was created by conforming to an already existing capacity measuring system, or conversely, whether it had served as a model for grain measuring using dimidiated fractional amounts. Later on *dbh.w* came to mean the ‘fractional elements of the eye as conceived to be contained in a vessel’, and hence more generally ‘components of the eye’. While this scenario seems quite likely to me, I must add that the precise etymological or semantic relationship between the similarly written ‘vessel’, ‘requirements’, ‘components of the eye’, and even perhaps ‘piece of nautical equipment’, still remains open for conjecture. On the last point it should be noted that the spelling of *dbh.w* in CT 155 as if it was a rope for shipping may have been deliberately used as a device to distract from, or to mask, the real sense of the word.

So, despite the difficulties posed by some obscure expressions, the meaning of lines 4 and 5 has now become clear. The lunar setting is obvious and the speaker emphasizes his constant allegiance to the moon. In so doing, he equates himself with a god who, given the nature of the clues, can be no one else but Thoth. A later hint dropped in line 9 will make it absolutely certain that the speaker assumes the identity of this divinity. He is proud to assert his ability to keep track of all the phases of the lunar cycle, and especially that of waxing, which he evokes through subtle allusions. Line 5 ends with an emphasis on the responsibilities concerning the components of the lunar eye, because now the speaker goes on to hint at the more precise nature of his outstanding knowledge about them.

Lines 6–8

jw=j rh.kw j3t.t m jr.t Tby jp r.w=s

w3š ʿndw r wš3.w wh.w

r 5-nw n gs twt n jp r.w=s m jmj.t mh.t r hqs.t

I know what is missing from the eye of Tebi when its parts are counted,

and when dawn is stronger than the glow of the darkened night.

The fifth part of an entire half for counting its parts between what is in the filling eye and the ailing eye.

I have already highlighted the peculiar spelling of *j3t.t* with the grain determinative, and the significance of this detail. This word is usually written with the determinative of mutilation, compare  in the Asyut texts, but three other Deir el-Bersha coffins (B2P, B1L, and B1C) follow suit and repeat Sen’s orthography. The grain determinative is surely a deliberate feature of the spelling of the word, and not something that resulted from the confusion of hieratic signs, because – as also pointed out above – it likewise appears in the semantically kindred words *mh.t* and *hqs.t*.

comprised exactly 309 lunar months.¹⁰² The first unequivocal proof for the recognition of this relation, a scheme listing the beginnings of lunar months, either 29 or 30 days long, in terms of the civil calendar over a 25-year period, Papyrus Carlsberg 9,¹⁰³ dates from the second century CE but the discovery may have been effected much earlier.

The irregularity of lunations, as indicated in the previous paragraph, shows up in the structure of lunar calendars as the alternation of 30-day ‘full’ months and 29-day ‘hollow’ months; in this framework *mḥ.t* and *ḥqs.t* would stand for these periods respectively. Since in writing the feminine active perfective participles looked the same as their imperfective counterparts, now the static, finished nature of the expressions would be acted upon. The term ‘full month’ would have been particularly apt in ancient Egypt, as it in fact filled out the 30-day month that was idealized in the civil calendar. Some support for this interpretation may be offered by the use of the phrase *gs twt* ‘entire half’, which presupposes that there was also a half that was not whole, corresponding to the hollow month of 29 days. All in all, if it is accepted that $\overline{\Xi}$ stands for $\frac{1}{32}$, then the description of conjunction is more abstract and it alludes to the realization that the lunations are always ‘injured’ insofar as they never comply with exactly thirty days in reality.

While from the two interpretations presented above, the one pointing to three days is certainly more conventional and harmonizes well with the rest of the spell, I would not categorically rule out the second one, even if it could be met with serious objections. For one thing it is purely hypothetical that *mḥ.t* and *ḥqs.t* denoted the full and hollow lunar months. On the other hand, the Horus-eye fractions did exist in ancient Egypt, and they were indeed closely associated with the geometric sphere of the moon, so they may have been put to use in a numbers game about conjunction. Therefore I intend to preserve the possible ambiguity of the original text by the rendering ‘the fifth part’, because with some contrivance it may be fit into both reasonings. Whichever way we look at the issue, one thing is for certain: these lines of spell 155, though cloaked in cryptic vocabulary and writings, do propagate the astronomical skills of the speaker. They can in fact be juxtaposed with the autobiographical inscriptions of a Deir el-Bersha official from the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, Djehutinakht (not identical with the owner of B2Bo). In his tomb he asserts: ‘I know the hours of the night in all its seasons’ (*jw=j rh.kw wnw.wt n.t grḥ m jtr.w=f nb*).¹⁰⁴ The precise understanding of the rest of the inscription is again hampered by the use of obscure terminology. The publisher of the text, Harco Willems, thinks that it concerns the determination of the decans on the first days of the three Egyptian seasons.¹⁰⁵ The exact details in this case may also remain undiscovered, but Djehutinakht’s tomb inscription stands witness to the willingness of the local elite at Deir el-Bersha to publicize their specialized skills in astronomy. It is this intellectual climate in which lines 6–8 of CT 155 were also born.

Lines 9–10

wn n=j b3.w psdn.tjw jnk mḥ=j s(j)
wr rh.t.n=j r wtj m ḥnt r-pr pn

Open to me, the bas of the moon’s invisibility, for I am the one who completes the eye,
 for what I know is more than the embalmer of the temple knows.

¹⁰² Priskin 2002: 78–79.

¹⁰³ Neugebauer and Parker 1969: 220–225 and pl. 65.

¹⁰⁴ Willems 2006: 437.

¹⁰⁵ Willems 2006: 440–442.

The appearance of the construction *jnk sdm=f* in line 9 is just another grammatical feature that shows the closely related nature of CT 155 with the autobiographies of Middle Kingdom officials, as this kind of nominal sentence is most characteristic of such texts.¹⁰⁶ The imperative at the beginning of the line, just as in lines 4, 17, and 20, indicates that a new section of the spell is started. The exaggeration that the speaker's knowledge exceeds that of the embalming priest's and the appearance of Anubis in line 13 suggest that the setting in which the statements of the following section of the text should be interpreted is the embalming of the corpse and the rituals associated with it. Unfortunately, from the time when the Coffin Texts were written no documents detailing the ritual procedures of embalming have come down to us. A potential hint in the Coffin Texts of the ties between mummification and lunar phases will be mentioned in the next section, but if we want to seek out further possible clues as to the role of the moon in the embalming rituals, we must rely on much later papyri that are more voluble in describing mummification. The chief sources are pBoulaq III and pLouvre 5125, both dating from the first century CE.¹⁰⁷

The two types of texts recorded on these papyri, technical instructions for different, ritually charged embalming procedures and recitations to be spoken along with these actions, cannot be said to be particularly revealing about an emphatic role of the moon during mummification. This is of course not to deny that some lunar references are made. For example on a piece of cloth destined for the right hand it should be inscribed that this hand has seized the moon (*3mm.n=k j^ch*).¹⁰⁸ The involvement of the moon in this rite may be much loftier than it seems at first sight, as the cloth in question is the one called *sj3.t*, and it resonates well with 'full moon'.¹⁰⁹ In one of the recitations the deceased's identity with the moon is also established: 'Your ba will look upon your corpse forever since you keep on renewing like the moon' (*m33 b3=k hr h3.t=k d.t jw=k whm rnpj mj j^ch*).¹¹⁰ This idea is of course well known from late sources, and its first clear indications show up in New Kingdom material. The iconographic evidence will be discussed below, but the concept is also expressed verbally in the Book of Going Forth by Day, where for example in a spell about Hermopolis (BD 8) the dead person claims: 'I am the moon among the gods, I will never perish' (*jnk j^ch jm.jw ntr.w nn tm=j*).¹¹¹ Although, as I mentioned in the introduction, the moon was a potent symbol of regeneration already in the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts, the direct identification of the deceased with the moon seems to have come about during the New Kingdom.

So, apart from equating the dead with the moon and some sporadic references, the late mummification manuals do not establish a strong connection with lunar phenomena. By this I mean there are no indications that for example certain rites or procedures were performed in observation of particular phases of the moon. Either the relevant body of knowledge was lost or such information has never existed. Why then would the speaker of CT 155 compare himself to the embalmer priest? As it will turn out, the answer to this question has more to do with the eye, and the epithet of Thoth that he earned as the healer of the eye of Horus, for now from the statement 'I am the one who completes the eye' it becomes absolutely unambiguous that the speaker assumes the identity – and responsibilities – of Thoth. In spell 17 of the Book of Going Forth by Day it is stated about the deceased that 'he filled the *w3.t*-eye after its illness on the day when the two companions fought ... and it is Thoth himself who did this with his fingers' (*jw mh.n=j N w3.t m-ht h3b=s hrw pwj n h3 rh.wj ... jn gr.t Dh.w.tj jrj nn m*

¹⁰⁶ Allen 2001b: 273.

¹⁰⁷ See Sauneron 1952.

¹⁰⁸ Sauneron 1952: 30, col. 8,19.

¹⁰⁹ Servajean 2003: 446–457; though he fails to make the connection with the lunar day names.

¹¹⁰ Sauneron 1952: 11, col. 4,4.

¹¹¹ Budge 1913: pl. 18, col. 8,4.

db^c.*w=f ds=f*).¹¹² Accordingly, in Ptolemaic temple inscriptions Thoth has the epithet ‘the one who fills the eye with its components’ (*mḥ.w wd3.t m dbḥ.w=s*).¹¹³ However, as the manipulator of the eye, Thoth was also a doctor and a medical papyrus dated to the Eighteenth Dynasty calls him ‘the physician of the eye of Horus’ (*swn.w pwj n jr.t Hr.w*).¹¹⁴ This role of Thoth makes a comparison with the embalming priest more than appropriate.

Lines 11–13

jw=j rh.kw j3t.t hnt ht.t m^c Jnpw
hrw pw n swdwd wr-m-^cn.wt=f
grh pw n k3p3p jmj.w r=f

I know what is missing from the eye canal in the hand of Anubis
 on this day of covering his great fingernails,
 on this night of hiding his teeth.

Anubis is here of course mentioned in his pre-eminent role as the god supervising the embalming process, but the reference may at the same time be more concrete and point to the priest who – wearing a jackal mask – impersonated him during the embalming rituals.¹¹⁵ That these rituals in the time of the Middle Kingdom were somehow tied to lunar phenomena is well illustrated by a passage in Coffin Texts spell 45 which informs us that ‘Anubis turns your (i.e. the deceased’s) stench pleasant before your seat in the embalming booth, he gives you incense at all seasons, from which nothing is deducted on the day of the new moon’ (*sndm Jnpw stj=k hnt s.t=k m sh-ntr rdj=f n=k sntr r tr nb n hbj jm n psdn.tjw*; CT I 195g–196c). Obviously here it is implicated that the day of the moon’s invisibility had a distinguished place in the time-frame determining the anointing of the dead body. The connection of Anubis the embalmer with the moon becomes more pronounced in some later scenes in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri, the mammisi of Nectanebo I, and the Graeco-Roman birth houses. These depictions show Anubis bending over the lunar disc essentially in the same posture as he is usually represented attending the corpse of Osiris on his mummification bier.¹¹⁶ Thus it seems that the mummified body in its entirety could be seen as the representation of the lunar disc, the point of course being to imbue the physical remains of a person with the inherent qualities of rebirth associated with the moon. This identification serves as a background for the detailed references of CT 155 to the acts of mummification.

The word  *ht.t* makes it clear that the speaker is still rephrasing his knowledge of the missing parts of the celestial eye of the moon. While both Faulkner and van der Molen believe that elsewhere in the Coffin Texts (cf. CT VII 83d and 453c) *ht.t* is a variant of  *hty.t* ‘throat’,¹¹⁷ I think that in CT 155 it is a different word, or perhaps the same word used in a different sense, that can be related to an expression occurring in spell 301 of the Pyramid Texts where it undoubtedly has ophthalmological – and eventually lunar – connotations: ‘Behold, the king has brought to you (i.e. Horus) your great left eye ... Accept it from the hand of the king whole, its fluid whole, its blood whole, its canals whole’ (*mk jnj.n n=k N jr.t=k wr.t j3b.t ... šsp n=k sj m^c N wd3.t mw=s jm=s wd3.t tr.w jm=s wd3.t ht.w jm=s wd3.t*; PT §451). Acting on an earlier remark of Sethe, Faulkner surmises that here *ht.w*, written as

¹¹² Budge 1913: pl. 8, cols. 17,64–69.

¹¹³ Chassinat 1935: 26.

¹¹⁴ Reisner 1905: 6 (pHearst XIV, 6).

¹¹⁵ DuQuesne 2001: 14–16; Seeber 1980: 1197.

¹¹⁶ Ritner 1985: 152.

¹¹⁷ Faulkner 1978: 44 and 164; Molen 2000: 361.

𓂏𓂏𓂏, is also connected with ‘throat’ and describes some ducts or vessels (‘throats’) of the eye.¹¹⁸ I concur with his view, adding that perhaps the most obvious candidate would be the tube in the eye that connects the optical nerve disc with the lens (hyaloid canal).

When seen in cross section,¹¹⁹ this canal dissects the eyeball into two halves, and the analysis of the rest of the sentence will unravel why the speaker intends to draw attention to the concept of duality and the existence of complementing semicircles in connection with the eye, that is the lunar disc. Of course the hyaloid canal is a minute detail in the structure of the eye, and would only be readily recognizable to a keen observer of this organ. This fact puts further stress on the speaker’s statement that he – in the disguise of Thoth – knew more than the embalming priest. If there were people in ancient Egypt who had immensely deep knowledge about human anatomy, they must have been those attending to the mummification of the deceased, as in fact their daily chores would have been comparable to the work of a modern forensic pathologist. The speaker’s familiarity with the ‘throat of the eye’ (the eye canal) means that he must have seen an eye cut open, so he does have such experience in the treatment of dead bodies that can emulate or even outdo the expertise of professional embalmers. An officiant of Thoth, as the example of Sen shows, could bear the title ‘Chief Physician’ *wr swn.w*, and Anubis in his role as embalmer was also called *p3 wr swn.w* in later demotic texts,¹²⁰ so this again shows that the comparison made in CT 155 is not at all inappropriate.

Still alluding to the role of Thoth as an eye specialist, three coffins (B2Bo, B4Bo and B9C) replace *j3t.t hnt ht.t* with 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 *hd(.t) hnt qn.t* in CT II 300b, which should be translated ‘the missing part of the eye fat’. In the medical papyri of the Twentieth Dynasty *qn.t* describes the fat of the eye as the symptom of an eye disease, possibly pinguecula,¹²¹ so this variation also underlines the connection of this part of the spell with the description of the eye. Perhaps even a pun is intended between *hdj* ‘missing, lacking’ and ‘white’.¹²² The word *hd.t* for the white of the eye is attested from the New Kingdom onwards,¹²³ and as the fat of the eye is basically a condition that leads to the swelling of the white or yellowish part of the eye, it is not difficult to provide an explanation for such a wordplay.

Lines 12 and 13, forming a split column in the hieroglyphic original, present great difficulties of interpretation. Followed by the clothes determinative, both *swdwd* and *k3p3p* at face value refer to putting or laying a piece of textile over something, thus covering or even bandaging something. The expression *k3p3p* may be linked with *k3p* ‘to cover, roof over’ or perhaps more closely to 𓂏𓂏𓂏 *k3p.t* ‘patch of linen to cover the opening of a pot’, and it is a noteworthy detail that an etymologically related word 𓂏 is used in the medical papyri to denote the drooping of the eyelid.¹²⁴ It is, however, even more likely, that *k3p3p* was a sort of ‘abracadabra’ word,¹²⁵ specially coined for the purposes of CT 155 because of its resemblance to the general word *k3p* ‘to hide, to take cover’, which as we have seen could be used, at least in Graeco-Roman times, in a lunar context to describe the disappearance of the moon at conjunction.¹²⁶ The singular nature of *k3p3p* is accentuated by the lack of attestations for the word *swdwd* – it remains an enigma, even in its Asyut variant, spelled with *d*’s (*swdwd*).¹²⁷ It

¹¹⁸ Faulkner 1969: 91, n. 11.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Gray 1918, 1006, fig. 869.

¹²⁰ Ritner 2008: 56.

¹²¹ Wb. 5, 41.3; Nunn 2002: 202.

¹²² Wb. 3, 212.16 and Wb. 3, 206.16 ‘von Fett’!

¹²³ Wb. 3, 211.9.

¹²⁴ Wb. 5, 104.11–13.

¹²⁵ Cf. the modern translation of Carrier 2004: 379.

¹²⁶ Cauville 1997: 283; see also above.

¹²⁷ Molen 2000: 468.

also needs to be pointed out that *k3p* is the name of the ninth day of the lunar month,¹²⁸ but I must admit that it completely eludes me whether this fact has any relevance here, and if so, what it would be.

Nor is it entirely clear what are being covered. Since on Sen's coffin at the end of this section the phonetic elements and the determinative of the word  'n.t' 'claw, fingernail' are distinctly visible, I take the whole group of hieroglyphs following *swdwd* to be part of a composite construction starting with the adjective *wr* 'great' as for example in the epithet *wr-m-j3w.t=f* 'great in his office'.¹²⁹ Thus by analogy here we have 'great in his fingernails', which for reasons of style I rephrased as 'his great fingernails' in my translation. After *k3p3p* we have  *jmj.w-r* 'what are in the mouth' and because of the determinative without doubt the teeth are meant here (I take the appearance of the viper after the mouth sign as a scribal error, though for  the alternative reading *jmj.w-r=f jbh.w=f* 'what are in his mouth, his teeth' may also be considered). In support of these interpretations I must mention that teeth and fingernails are mentioned twice side by side in the Pyramid Texts (PT §791c and 1358d), though the contexts there do not seem to be related to our passage.

The expressions 'covering his fingernails' and 'hiding his teeth' may have referred to actual moments in the embalming process, but it is more likely that in spell 155 these activities are mentioned in order to bring out the pictorial contrast between two hieroglyphs used in the writing of these phrases, the signs  and . These representations can very easily be seen to form a contrastive pair, as the first sign has a downward pointing end, in opposition to the upwardly curved tip of the latter sign. The duality – and yet at the same time, the essential identity – of the two clauses in which they appear is made prominent in the original by the split column. Obviously, the moon does have a very characteristic dual nature of opposing qualities, that of course being the periods of waxing and waning. Therefore, despite all the obscurities of the wording of this passage (but remember that *k3p* does later refer to the new moon), these hieroglyphic characters – and the sentences containing them – in all probability make a figurative allusion to the disappearance of the lunar disc at new moon.

To understand this, we only have to recall precisely how this event unfolds. Immediately before conjunction, the thin crescent of the waning moon – with a curvature bulging to the left – is seen on the eastern horizon in the morning hours, just before dawn breaks. After the period of invisibility lasting one to two and a half days, the new moon – here in the literal sense denoting the first showing of the thin crescent of the waxing moon, now curving in the rightward direction – appears in the evening sky above the western horizon. Now, if we equate 'fingernails' (the sign ) with the last phase of the waning crescent, and conversely, 'teeth' (the sign ) with the first phase of the waxing crescent, even the times assigned to the acts of 'covering' and 'hiding' them match the temporal aspect of the moon's invisibility, as the disappearance of the last crescent is a morning event (*hrw*), while the invisibility of the would-be first crescent is associated with the evening (*grh*), as it will in fact reveal itself after sunset. Thus lines 12 and 13 describe in figurative language the transitory nature of the moon's invisibility from the two viewpoints of the old moon and new moon, represented by the liminal qualities of the last crescent and first crescent respectively. In short, these two clauses refer to the time when no part of the lunar disc is seen (conjunction).

¹²⁸ Parker 1950: 11.

¹²⁹ Cf. Jones 2000: 380–381 (no. 1411).

Lines 14–16

jw m jw.tjt hnt Wsjr
ts.n.tw h3.t=f n ph.wj=f
m mdh.t n.t s3w

It is a void out of Osiris,
 when one has joined his front with his back
 as the hewn out part of the beam.

Here we also encounter some difficult vocabulary, especially in line 16. The meaning of *jw.tjt* ‘void’ (literally ‘that which does not exist’), still describing the injury to the eye, that is the disappearance of the lunar disc, is corroborated by an assertion made in spell 80 of the Book of Going Forth by Day: ‘I have saved the eye of Horus from its nothingness as the fifteenth day of the month has come’ (*šdj.n=j jr.t hr.w m jw.tj=s jj.n smd.t*).¹³⁰ The joining of Osiris’s front with his back may again refer to an actual stage in the mummification process, as the verb *ts* ‘to tie, to join’ is well known from funerary texts to refer to the assemblage of body parts.¹³¹ However, underneath the simple practical meaning of the words it is not difficult to see once again the poetic description of the transition from the waning phase of the moon to the waxing one. Then the body of Osiris here is clearly identical with the moon, and thus these lines express verbally the same idea that is later represented iconographically with the depictions of Anubis bending over the lunar disc-cum-Osiris. In fact, the later temple scenes could be seen to form a vignette to the text of CT 155. Consequently, the circle that Anubis tends in these illustrations is not just the lunar disc in general, or the full moon brought as a gift to the newborn child, but the representation of the invisible new moon.¹³² To resolve the dichotomy of this statement, just compare a schematic figure showing the lunar phases in any modern astronomical textbook.

For the full appreciation of the poetic metaphor involving Osiris’s body it would be advantageous to grasp the exact meaning of the next phrase in line 16, but at the moment the lack of evidence supporting a good definition for the word *mdh.t* prevents us from doing so. It is surely a derivative of *mdh* ‘to hew wood’, and though it may be taken to mean woodwork or wood that has been processed by hewing,¹³³ for reasons that will become clear shortly I think here it designates the part of a wooden beam or board that has been hewn out. The word *s3w* no doubt refers to a larger piece of wood, a beam,¹³⁴ and the whole expression ‘the hewn out part of the beam’ is quite reminiscent of the Osiris beds that in some burials accompanied the dead from the New Kingdom onwards. One type of these beds was prepared by carving out the shape of Osiris from a piece of wood, itself forming an Osirian silhouette, thus creating a hollow space in the material.¹³⁵ This hollow space is more pronounced in the related group of objects known as Osiris bricks, though in these the figure of the god was sunk into pottery, not wood.¹³⁶ The god was brought to life symbolically by filling this depression with mud and seeds of barley that eventually sprouted. I therefore think line 16 may be interpreted as drawing a parallel between the impressions in Osiris beds and the moon. Just as Osiris is clearly there yet invisible in the hollow part of the beds, so the moon is hidden yet still continuing its existence during conjunction.

¹³⁰ Lepsius 1842: pl. 30, col. 80.4.

¹³¹ Wb. 5, 397.15.

¹³² *Contra* Ritner 1985: 151.

¹³³ Wb. 2, 190.6 and 192.6–7.

¹³⁴ Wb. 3, 419.14.

¹³⁵ See Tutankhamon’s specimen; Carter 1933: 81 and pl. lxii.

¹³⁶ Tooley 1996.

A very late source may also offer some guidance for the understanding of this passage. The second century CE Greek author Plutarch relates that for the burials of Osiris the Egyptians cut wood in order to fashion a crescent-shaped coffin ‘because of the fact that the moon, when it comes near the sun, becomes crescent-shaped and disappears from our sight’.¹³⁷ The link between the hewing of wood and the moon’s invisibility could not be more direct, and the burials of Osiris which Plutarch mentions were surely connected with the interment of Osiris effigies made of – similarly to the contents of the earlier Osiris beds – a paste of mud and sprouting barley during the Khoiak festivals. A possible point of connection between these properly mummified figures and the description of Osiris in CT 155 is that the effigies were in fact made in two halves and they acquired their final shape when these separate parts were joined.¹³⁸

In another passage Plutarch suggests that the light of the moon was seen in Egypt as beneficial for the sprouting of plants,¹³⁹ and the same idea also appears in some Egyptian records.¹⁴⁰ This again prompts the inference that the joining of Osiris’s front with his back has multiple connotations. On one level it is a metaphorical expression of the transition from old moon to new crescent because of the references to front and back, while on another it captures the moment of inertness in the making of a corn Osiris: his shape has been formed in the wood (understanding the whole phrase *ts.n.tw h3.t=f n ph.wj=f* to express the establishment of the intactness of the body), yet it is only an empty receptacle now, a silhouette as devoid of life as a seed without the vivifying light of the moon. When this light manifests itself, i.e. the waxing of the moon begins, so do the seeds spring to life and animate the figure of Osiris. The time of inertness is therefore synonymous with the moon’s invisibility. The different layers of meaning are thus in unison and complement each other quite nicely.

At this point it is worth stopping for a moment to look back at lines 4–16 again. It must be noted that a clear parallelism exists between the two sections of the text, lines 4–8 and lines 9–16. The first unit, making allusions to the counting of the components of the eye of Tebi, and the second one, cloaked in the language of mummification, both describe the events unfolding around the time of the new moon. While lines 4–8 refer to the temporal aspect of this natural phenomenon, lines 9–16 portray how one visually observes the arrival of the new moon. Within the two main sections, even the semantically analogous clauses can be distinguished:

1. Pride in knowledge

Open to me because I am one who respects the observed one, because I am one who makes the covering in the house of Osiris,

Open to me, the bas of the moon’s invisibility, for I am the one who completes the eye,

2. Reference to priestly duties

and because I am the god in charge of the full moon period in the room where the vessel containing the fractional components of the eye is stored.

for what I know is more than the embalmer of the temple knows.

¹³⁷ Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride*: ch. 42.

¹³⁸ Cauville 1997: 28.

¹³⁹ Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride*: ch. 41.

¹⁴⁰ Smith 2002: 126.

3. Hinting at knowledge of the missing part of the eye

I know what is missing from the eye of
Tebi when its parts are counted,

I know what is missing from the eye
canal in the hand of Anubis

4. Specifying the time of mutilation

and when dawn is stronger than the glow
of the darkened night.

on this day of covering his great
fingernails,
on this night of hiding his teeth.

5. Specifying the exact nature of the mutilation

The fifth part of an entire half

It is a void out of Osiris,

6. Hinting at the bilateral nature of mutilation

for counting its parts between what is in
the filling eye and the ailing eye.

when one has joined his front with his
back
as the hewn out part of the beam.

Lines 17–19

*wn n=j jnk rh(.w) r=f
jw=j bsj.kw hr n3
n whm=j n h3k.w-jb*

Open to me because I am one who knows his spell.
I have been initiated into these matters,
and I will not reveal it to ill-intentioned people.

This part of the text does not pose difficulties of translation, except for perhaps *n3* in line 18 and *h3k.w-jb* in line 19. As for the latter, its usual translation is ‘rebel’ or ‘enemy’,¹⁴¹ but these words would not make much sense here, so I translated as ‘ill-intentioned people’, as this expression, while having roughly the same meaning, better suits the present context. In line 18 *n3* is clearly the neutral plural demonstrative pronoun,¹⁴² but because in the Asyut texts it is followed by the sign , previous scholars suspected that it might refer to some embalming materials or unguents.¹⁴³ However, all the other Deir el-Bersha coffins write , indicating clearly that the word originally pointed to some intangible concepts, knowledge, and the replacement of  with  is only a corruption. In this instance it was possibly not brought about by the misreading of hieratic signs; more likely the hieroglyph  has seeped into the text through some copyists who only grasped the medical undertones of the spell.

On the other hand, this oversight and all the other cases of textual corruption that characterize the Asyut texts illustrate well the point that the speaker makes in this passage, since the misconstrued expressions crept into spell 155 precisely because the copyists

¹⁴¹ Wb. 3, 363.14–16; Wilson 1997: 761–762.

¹⁴² Wb. 2, 199.2.

¹⁴³ Faulkner 1973: 133; Barguet 1985: 572; Carrier 2006: 379.

working with the text had only a limited understanding of what the contents of the spell were really about. There are of course differing views on the role and extent of initiation in ancient Egypt,¹⁴⁴ but I think the textual vagaries of CT 155 give a good example of how the restriction of knowledge actually worked. For it may reasonably be assumed that the cult of the moon was not widespread in the Middle Kingdom, and those echelons of the elite that happened to live outside the Hermopolis area were unfamiliar with the details of ritual activities or the special vocabulary involved in the cult.

For these people the comprehension of spell 155 would have been an especially arduous task, because this text – quite in harmony with the claims made in the lines under discussion – intentionally veiled its message under a cloak of subtle allusions and a series of inside metaphors. If the modern researcher can begin to penetrate the text deep enough to uncover its multiple levels of meaning, it is only because the academic discipline of Egyptology has collected – from quite disparate sources that range over three millennia – much more information than was available to a person of average education at a particular point of time in ancient Egypt. Thus I believe that the speaker does not make an empty claim here: he indeed kept the secrets of his trade, as his words were only truly understandable to the high-ranking officials of the lunar cult. Most of those actually copying the lines, though they must have recognized the prestige of the text, were left in the dark as to the true significance of its contents.

Lines 20–21

wn n=j ntjw m psdn.tjw

jw m33.n=j wp.w pr(.w) m sh.w n.w Wr.t

Open to me, those in the moon's invisibility.

I have seen the gelder come out of the slaughterhouse of the Great Eye.

The two main sections of spell 155, lines 4–8 and 9–16, describe the state of affairs at new moon. The next three lines about the initiation of the speaker are inserted into the text to separate those descriptions from what he is saying now, because here something markedly different is hinted at. In short, line 21 – appearing quite appropriately at the end of a text whose main concern is the invisibility of the moon – expresses the joy of getting the first glimpse of the new crescent and celebrates the arrival of the first sign that makes the renewal of the moon assured. On a funerary level it is the realization of rebirth and the expression of the happiness the deceased feels about their own regeneration.

The *sh.w n.w Wr.t* 'the slaughterhouse of the Great Eye' is yet another graphic metaphor for the new moon, now building on the idea that the moon was also seen as a bull (see the excerpts from Esna and Dendera above). This concept is best expounded in a Ptolemaic inscription about Khonsu, the Theban moon god, on the pylon of his temple at Karnak.¹⁴⁵ It states that the sun and the moon are two bulls that traverse the sky and when they are born in the east they meet each other as the two great luminaries of the sky (*snsn k3.wj*). This encounter of the two bulls no doubt describes the events at full moon, because then both the sun and the moon travel the entire span of the celestial dome from east to west, by day and night respectively. Subsequently we read that 'the forms of the moon are, when it is young, a fiery bull, and when it is old, a steer, because he has darkened' (*j^ch m jr.w=f dr*

¹⁴⁴ Baines 1990: 1–2; Jasnow and Zauzich 2005: 54–55.

¹⁴⁵ Derchain 1962: 43.

shrd=f k3 psj m khkh=f s^cb pw hr jrj.n=f snk).¹⁴⁶ So when the moon grows old, that is when it wanes, the lunar animal is called *s^cb* ‘a steer, a castrated bull’,¹⁴⁷ and this designation immediately elucidates the whole message of line 21.

wp.w ‘the one who cuts up corpses, flesh-cutter’¹⁴⁸ must surely have a more restricted meaning here, and it refers to a person who castrates bulls, a gelder. When he leaves the slaughterhouse, it means that he can no longer carry out his duties, that is the castration of the bull – the waning phase of the moon, including the time of its total invisibility during conjunction – is over. In other words, claiming to have seen the emergence of the gelder from the slaughterhouse is a cleverly formulated assertion intimating that the most eagerly awaited event around the time of the new moon is about to happen or has already taken place. This spectacle is of course the sighting of the newly illuminated crescent. When it appears just after sunset above the western horizon, it is a sure sign of the fact that darkness has been overcome, the lunar bull will rejuvenate itself and a new cycle of regeneration will be started.

Lines 22–23

ju=j rh.kw b3.w psdn.tjw

Wsjr pw Jsds pw Jnpw pw

I know the bas of the moon’s invisibility.

It is Osiris, it is Isdes, it is Anubis.

The last lines of the spell name the gods who act as the bas of the moon’s invisibility. As for Osiris, the first records that explicitly identify him with the moon date from the New Kingdom.¹⁴⁹ There has been at least one attempt to seek out the possible allusions to such an identification in the Pyramid Texts,¹⁵⁰ and Derchain contemplated the possibility that some passages in the Coffin Texts (CT IV 372a–b, 373a–b) may point in this direction.¹⁵¹ However, these reasonings do not constitute conclusive evidence for the existence of direct links between the moon and Osiris at an early stage, and are rightly met with reservations.¹⁵² It is in this light that we have to judge the references to Osiris in spell 155. Although in the closing line he is listed as one of the bas of the new moon, this does not necessarily mean a great deal – after all, Anubis also features in the list and he has never been especially closely associated with the moon. More convincing are lines 14–16 where Osiris does appear as a substitute image for the new moon, and it must also be remembered that the act of covering – referred to in line 4 with definite lunar connotations – is also done in the house of Osiris.

Therefore it seems to me quite plausible that the involvement of Osiris in the lunar cult had already been effected to some degree when CT 155 was written. It may not have gone as far as the thorough identification of Osiris with the moon, but the fundamentally common essence of these two entities must have been acknowledged. As later sources unanimously agree, we have to suspect that the basis for such an association was the similar regenerative capabilities of both Osiris and the moon. In all likelihood spell 155 documents the early development of this concept when it was certainly not widespread. The general tone of the spell – the deliberate use of cryptic language that is hard to follow – can even be understood

¹⁴⁶ Sethe and Firchow 1957: 74.

¹⁴⁷ Wb. 4, 44.1.

¹⁴⁸ Wb. 1, 302.5.

¹⁴⁹ Ritner 1985: 152; Griffiths 1980: 240.

¹⁵⁰ Kees 1956: 145.

¹⁵¹ Derchain 1962: 45.

¹⁵² Griffiths 1980: 239–240.

to intimate that the recognition of the close ties between Osiris and the moon was limited at this time to an exclusive group of officials, set apart from the rest of the learned elite either on account of their exalted positions in the cult, or their particular locality, or perhaps both. Certainly, the Hermopolitan origin of CT 155 suggests that the main instigators of the Osiris-moon ideology resided in the fifteenth Upper Egyptian nome.

Isdes is one of the divine forms in which Thoth can appear, but most of the texts that contain information about him date from the Graeco-Roman Period.¹⁵³ Apart from spell 155, he appears only twice in the Coffin Texts, in CT 27 where he is addressed by a hymn of the deceased, and also in CT 349 in a corrupted passage (CT IV 384c).¹⁵⁴ I think that this rarity is precisely the reason why he is included among the bas of the moon's invisibility. Quite possibly, only a very few readers of spell 155 could work out at the beginning of the second millennium BCE that he was identical with Thoth, so the mention of his name was yet another device to mask the real message of the text. Neither in CT 27 nor in the later sources does Isdes seem to be particularly connected with the lunar capacity of Thoth.¹⁵⁵ If the role of Isdes in CT 155 is only to act as a pointer to Thoth, then of course this latter deity must also be counted among the bas of the moon's invisibility. Given the overwhelming evidence showing Thoth as a lunar god,¹⁵⁶ this perhaps does not require further explanation; I can only recapitulate here that one of the most graphic descriptions of Thoth as the moon is found in the rubric of Coffin Texts spell 156 translated above.

The role of Isdes in relation to the moon, however, may be much more significant if his close connection with a seemingly other god, Isden, is accepted. These two divinities were surely identical in Graeco-Roman times,¹⁵⁷ and it is quite likely that the name Isden is only a variant of Isdes that arose from mistaking the *ds*-jar in the hieroglyphic spelling of the latter for a *nw*-jar.¹⁵⁸ In certain texts at Dendera accompanying ritual scenes it is said of the pharaoh: 'As Isden, he is in the Mansion of the Bird Net filling in the wedjat-eye with its fractional components' (*sw m Jsdn hnt Hw.t-jbt.t mh(.w) wd3.t m dbh.w=s*).¹⁵⁹ So in this late inscription Isden/Isdes appears precisely in the role of completing the lunar eye with its elements, which explains quite nicely why he is included among the bas of the moon's invisibility at the end of a Coffin Texts spell which itself makes reference to the fractional components of the lunar eye and to the act of counting them (lines 5–6). Since the sanctuary in Hermopolis identified as the Mansion of the Bird Net in the Dendera text was also called the 'Mansion of the Moon' or 'Mansion of the Month' (*Hw.t-jbd*),¹⁶⁰ one may even wonder if the room housing the components of the eye (line 5) was indeed found in that building.

Anubis has never been seen as a deity having particularly close ties with the moon.¹⁶¹ The contents of CT 155, the later temple scenes showing him bending over the lunar disc, and also the much later papyri detailing the mummification rituals all indicate that he earned his place among the bas of the moon's invisibility through his embalming role. As Osiris, and all the people who upon their death assumed his identity, came to be imbued with the regenerative powers of the moon, Anubis the embalmer was not only tending a divine or human corpse, but also a celestial body. His expertise about the former was extended to the latter, and his actions could have been seen as especially congruent with the new moon, as the

¹⁵³ Boylan 1922: 201.

¹⁵⁴ See Faulkner 1973: 283, n. 9.

¹⁵⁵ Leitz 2002a: 560–561; Stadler 2009: 278.

¹⁵⁶ Boylan 1922: 62–75.

¹⁵⁷ Leitz 2002a: 558–561.

¹⁵⁸ Stadler 2009: 278.

¹⁵⁹ Chassinat 1934: 139; for a similar passage see also page 107.

¹⁶⁰ Gauthier 1927: 48–49.

¹⁶¹ See Altenmüller 1975.

state of death corresponded to that particular lunar phase for obvious reasons. So this is perhaps why the author of the text made him accompany Osiris and Isdes.

Conclusion

At the outset of the present work one of the key suppositions I made was that the inscriptions on the Deir el-Bersha coffins represent the most authentic versions of Coffin Texts spell 155. The detailed analysis of the text on Sen's coffin has, I think, borne out the soundness of this starting point very well. I believe I have successfully demonstrated that the whole of spell 155 is just what it claims to be in the title: an elaborate account of *psdn.tjw*, that is the invisibility of the moon. The recognition of this simple truth has been blurred in the past by the ill-judged focus of scholars on the Asyut text variants. However, they can hardly be blamed for misunderstanding the contents of the spell. As can be seen in the above comments, the message it was intended to convey was deliberately cloaked by the ancient author in cryptic language in which the phrases used often meant something quite different from what the constituent words would, at their face value, have suggested. Thus in CT 155 covering is not putting a textile over something but the darkening of the lunar disc, ropes of a ship do not refer to nautical equipment but stand in for the homophonous components of the eye, the thing that does not exist is not a missing body part but the invisible moon, and so on.

If, however, we are able to overcome these deceptions, either by sheer luck or careful scholarly scrutiny, the text will reveal its true nature and will give us insights into areas of knowledge the existence of which has been little suspected so far. The sophisticated puns on lunar day names in the first lines of the spell seem to indicate that the peculiar terminology concerning the moon – the detailed accounts of which have come down to us only from much later sources – was already in use some two millennia earlier. While the instances of wordplay in the case of *sm.y-pr.t-sm* and *hbs-hbs tp* are only suggestive, it is perhaps not too much off the mark to state that spell 155 offers the earliest attestation for the word *dbh.w* 'components of the eye'. As for *sj3*, not only do Coffin Texts spells 155 and 156 constitute the first texts in which this astronomical term appears, but they also reinforce the modern hypothesis that in the later lists the names of lunar days fourteen and seventeen were connected with the full moon.

Spell 155 is not only a rich mine for vocabulary about the moon, but also provides attestations for a series of concepts that are mostly developed in greater detail in later documents. The message of the text would have remained unintelligible without realizing that counting the parts of an eye described the observance of lunar phenomena, that Thoth was regarded as a doctor highly skilled in the diseases of vision, or that the different stages of the lunar cycle were apprehended as bulls with varying tempers. Yet the detailed explanations of all these ideas only appear in later sources, very few of which date before the Graeco-Roman Period. So, while some precaution is of course always needed, the example of CT 155 once more proves that the use of Graeco-Roman records to understand the ideological preoccupations of earlier eras may be justified in certain cases.

Since our text quite naturally differs greatly from a modern astronomical treatise, it will perhaps always be contested whether it testifies to the development of a concept in ancient Egypt akin to the modern notion of mean synodic month. I for one believe it does but as the gap separating the Egyptian formulation of scientific truths from the contemporary language of science is so vast, I can understand that the evidence I put forward will not satisfy everyone. The same remark applies to the question of whether spell 155 makes the identification of Osiris with the moon. The evidence here is again subject to interpretation, and requires some leaps of faith – for one thing, Osiris beds in their physical reality are only

known from the New Kingdom. However, it would not be unrealistic to assume that they had existed earlier and that the first finds of these beds date from the New Kingdom because – as with other types of objects – they were appropriated for funerary use at the time, but until hard evidence comes about, an element of doubt must remain.

These uncertainties notwithstanding, I think that my explorations of Coffin Texts spell 155 have illuminated its message to a far greater degree than any previous attempts of a similar kind. There are of course territories still left uncharted. In my analysis I made references to the different variants of the text only to the extent that seemed fit for my purposes of making Sen's inscription comprehensible. A systematic collation of all the available versions would perhaps one day yield equally interesting results, and would eventually lead to establishing the precise genealogical relationship between the existing text variants. But for the moment, at the end of my study, I would advise my readers to forget about the strict philological approach with which ancient texts are usually dealt with, and would just call them upon to enjoy the sheer beauty of the multifarious associations that reflect the mindset of an ancient author living some four thousand years ago.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Gábor Schreiber, Balázs Irsay-Nagy and Gábor Takács for their useful comments on the manuscript of this paper.

Abbreviations

CT = de Buck, A. 1935–1961. *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* vols. 1–7.

De Iside et Osiride = Babbitt, F. C. (transl.). 1969. *Plutarch's Moralia* vol. 5.

PT = Sethe, K. 1908–1910. *Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums* vols. 1–2.

Wb. = Erman, A. and Grapow, H. (eds.). 1926–1931. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* vols. 1–5.

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