

# The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Moon: Coffin Texts Spells 154–160

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## Preface

The text of this book is essentially identical to my PhD thesis, the first draft of which I submitted to Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, in 2017. My work there was warmly encouraged by my supervisor, Gábor Schreiber, and I wish to express my deepest gratitude to him for his cooperation. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank him for letting me participate in his archaeological mission in western Thebes, thus from time to time giving me – the ‘archetypal desk scientist’ – a taste of real Egyptological research in the field. I am also very much indebted to my reviewers, Katalin Kóthay from the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, and Zoltán Imre Fábián from Károli Gáspár University, Budapest, for their astute remarks and suggestions concerning the different manuscripts of my dissertation during the doctoral process at Eötvös Loránd University. They, no doubt, greatly contributed to presenting my work in a more intelligible and scholarly way. Naturally, any mistakes, errors, or unsubstantiated claims left in the book are entirely my fault. I also say a warm thank you to Tamás Bács, head of the Egyptological programme of the Doctoral School of History at Eötvös Loránd University, and the other members of the panel hearing the final defence of my thesis, for their help and assistance in bringing my doctoral studies to a conclusion. Finally, I am extremely grateful to the many colleagues and friends with whom I have discussed the ideas, or some of the ideas, that are put forward in the present book.



# 1. Introduction

This book is about seven Coffin Texts spells (154–160) that were written in ancient Egypt at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE.<sup>1</sup> My initial interest in them arose when, as part of my master’s course at Eötvös Loránd University, I decided to focus my scholarly attention on the role of the moon in ancient Egyptian thinking. An early result of my research was the translation and interpretation of Coffin Texts spell 155.<sup>2</sup> Since this text bears a title which expressly mentions a lunar phenomenon, the invisibility of the moon (*psdn.tjw*), it naturally fitted into my agenda. With time, however, I came to realise that this text did not stand alone but was part of a series of spells that all dealt with the moon. So I extended the scope of my enquiries to this group of spells, which I started to call the ancient Egyptian Book of the Moon. While I was working on the material, I published two short summaries of my preliminary findings,<sup>3</sup> predicting the appearance of a detailed analysis of the texts with extensive commentary. The present volume fulfils this pledge, giving a new translation of the spells that brings out their lunar character more pronouncedly than any of the existing renderings.<sup>4</sup> This is of course not to disparage the achievements of previous translators; the lunar allusions of the texts are often quite obvious from their works, too.

Certainly, spells 154–160 of the Coffin Texts have long been known to form one composition because in their titles all of them, mostly in connection with different localities, promise the knowledge of the *bas*,<sup>5</sup> that is the powers or essential qualities (‘souls’) that make a thing distinctively what it is.<sup>6</sup> These spells are also frequently cited in discussions about the lunar concepts of the ancient Egyptians,<sup>7</sup> yet so far these two quite noticeable aspects of the spells have not been intertwined more tightly. My major claim here is, however, that the purpose of these spells is to describe the moon. A careful reading of the texts will reveal that – underlying the thematic unity postulated in the first place by the references to the *bas* – the real editorial principle of this group of spells is a chronologically ordered account of the phenomena that happen during a lunar month. After the introduction (spell 154) which explains the origins of the month, the separate texts represent the successive stages of the monthly cycle: the period of invisibility (spell 155), waxing (spell 156), events around the full moon (spell 157), waning (spell 158), the arrival of the last crescent at the eastern horizon (spell 159), and again the conjunction of the sun and the moon when a solar eclipse can occur (spell 160).

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<sup>1</sup> CT II, 266a–388c.

<sup>2</sup> Priskin 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Priskin 2015b: 182–185; Priskin 2016a.

<sup>4</sup> Sethe 1922; Speleers 1946: 86–92; Faulkner 1973: 132–139; Barguet 1986, 571–578; Carrier 2004, 370–397.

<sup>5</sup> Sethe 1922: 1–4; Lapp 1990: 229; Bickel 1994: 266–267; Quirke 2003: 173; Hays 2008: 190; Robinson 2008: 128.

<sup>6</sup> Allen 2001a: 161.

<sup>7</sup> Parker 1950: 12; Derchain 1962a: 24; Leitz 1994: 269–271; Servajean 2003: 446; Lieven 2007: 199; Eaton 2011: 236–240; Arquier 2013: 122–126.

Despite giving a systematic description of the lunar events as they unfold along the month, and thus being the oldest written composition about the earth's satellite anywhere in the world, the Book of the Moon was in all probability not spurred by what we would now call scientific interest. It must be noted, nevertheless, that it belongs to the rare class of ancient Egyptian literary works that treat all aspects of a particular topic in depth.<sup>8</sup> What prompted the writing of the Book of the Moon is obvious from the circumstances where we encounter it. It is part of a large collection of spells, the Coffin Texts, that represent the second great wave of literary production in terms of Egyptian funerary literature.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the oldest corpus of religious spells, the Pyramid Texts, were initially – as their name suggests – carved on the walls of Old Kingdom pyramids,<sup>10</sup> the Coffin Texts augmented and superseded their antecedents at the end of the Old Kingdom, and especially during the Middle Kingdom. They were – and here the appellation is also quite revealing – primarily written in ink on the different surfaces of coffins that were made for the members of the elite at various places throughout Egypt, most notably among them Asyut, Beni Hasan, Deir el-Bersha, el-Lisht, and Meir.<sup>11</sup>

Whether there was a clear divide between the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, as earlier research opined,<sup>12</sup> or they represented an essential continuity, as is now often emphasised,<sup>13</sup> the two corpora were surely created to enhance the chances of the deceased for resurrection by enabling them to overcome the difficulties that unfolded in connection with the transition from one life to the next one. This is the context in which the Book of the Moon was born. Numerous concepts existed side by side about rebirth, in accordance with the ancient Egyptian mindset that saw no irreconcilable differences between notions that would for us often seem mutually exclusive. Even if we only consider the astral aspects of resurrection, the analysis of funerary texts and monuments shows us that three intertwined strands of tradition were perpetuated. Although the emphasis put on them may change with time, it is clear that all three of them permeate Egyptian thought throughout the different stages of mortuary literature. One is connected with the stars,<sup>14</sup> and claims that eternal life is possible as a star in the sky, especially in the company of the 'imperishable ones' (*jhm.w-sk*, literally 'those who do not know destruction'), that is the circumpolar stars that are always seen in the night sky and never set below the horizon.<sup>15</sup> According to another set of beliefs resurrection could be effected by repeating the life-cycle of the sun.<sup>16</sup> Each night the sun enters the netherworld and thus dies, but at dawn it triumphantly

<sup>8</sup> Baines 2007, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Hornung 1999: 7–12; Willems 2014: 124–135.

<sup>10</sup> Hornung 1999: 1–6.

<sup>11</sup> Hornung 1999: 7.

<sup>12</sup> Breasted 1912; David 2002: 154.

<sup>13</sup> Mathieu 2008; Willems 2008 and 2014; Smith 2009b; Hays 2011; Morales 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Wallin 2002: 90–100.

<sup>15</sup> This is the common understanding of the term. Rolf Krauss believes that the imperishable ones included all the stars north of the ecliptic, see Krauss 2001: 86–130.

<sup>16</sup> Wallin 2002: 101–127



re-emerges from the eastern horizon to illuminate the world of the living; it is, in essence, reborn every day. Finally, rebirth is to be achieved by acquiring the ability of the moon to renew its cycle, by copying its successful transition from waning and total invisibility (death) to waxing and flourishing.<sup>17</sup>

### *The moon in funerary literature*

At this point, to put the Book of the Moon into perspective, we may take a brief overview of how the moon appears throughout time in Egyptian funerary literature. A short summary of this kind may help to highlight the delicate changes by which the role of the moon shifted and its importance grew. We have to bear in mind, however, that the passages in the large corpora of funerary literature having something to say about the moon can be classified into two groups, one comprising the texts whose lunar content is obvious, while the other encompassing those descriptions that modern researchers suspect to have lunar connotations (i.e. their lunar content is a matter of interpretation, and thus it sometimes can be contested). Obviously, into the first group belong such texts that expressly mention the moon or lunar feast days, while the second group can deal with a wide range of subjects.

Although the earliest collection of mortuary spells, the Pyramid Texts, are usually associated with the ideas of stellar and solar rebirth,<sup>18</sup> it does not mean that references to the moon are entirely absent. It is true, however, that these mostly do not go beyond simply mentioning lunar feasts or just naming the moon in a context that otherwise is not predominantly lunar. The Egyptian name for the moon was *j'ḥ*, and we encounter this designation three times within the Pyramid Texts. The king is said to be born in his months as the moon,<sup>19</sup> or the moon is his brother as he is ferrying over to the imperishable stars,<sup>20</sup> while at the third place the moon is identified as the king's father.<sup>21</sup> In every case the moon is associated with the Morning Star, or more literally, the Morning God (*ntr-dw3,j*), a celestial entity whose exact identity is debated, but nevertheless belongs to the eastern side of the sky,<sup>22</sup> so the moon in these passages seems to be strongly linked to the idea of astral rebirth in the east.

Another group of spells with a clear-cut lunar content are the texts that mention different feast days of the lunar month. It must be pointed out, however, that only sixteen spells in the Pyramid Texts include references to such feasts, making up about two percent of the total number of utterances,<sup>23</sup> so lunar feasts by no means play a crucial role in early mortuary literature. The five monthly feast days mentioned in the Pyramid Texts – blacked-out moon, first-crescent day, the sixth day, the seventh day,

<sup>17</sup> Wallin 2002: 56–89.

<sup>18</sup> Allen 2002: 62.

<sup>19</sup> *Pyr.* §732.

<sup>20</sup> *Pyr.* §1001.

<sup>21</sup> *Pyr.* §1104.

<sup>22</sup> Krauss 1997: 217–226; Goebis 2008: 21.

<sup>23</sup> Eaton 2011: 231–232.

and the fifteenth day (half-month) – occur mostly in connection with offerings made to the deceased and purification rituals.<sup>24</sup> Two interesting spells link the beginning and the middle of the lunar cycle (the first-crescent day and the day of the full moon, the fifteenth day) with the idea of baldness and its remedy in the form of hair-spittle.<sup>25</sup> These descriptions no doubt testify to an ancient concept that understood the monthly waxing of the moon as a head gradually becoming bald after being fully covered by hair during invisibility, when the moon is totally dark.<sup>26</sup>

Lunar gods also make their appearance in the Pyramid Texts, though, again, they are only scarcely referred to. Khonsu is mentioned only once, in the framework of the so-called ‘cannibal hymn’.<sup>27</sup> Recently it has been claimed that this text, rather than being connected with a gruesome offering ritual, is the description of the cosmic phenomenon by which the rising sun cancels out the lights of the nocturnal celestial bodies.<sup>28</sup> In this context Khonsu is described as a blood-thirsty divine being that slays the enemies of the deified king (i.e. the sun), so we must suppose that he in fact here is identified with the sickle of the moon, and perhaps more particularly, with the sickle of the waning moon in its final phases, when the thin crescent of the moon, rising shortly before sunrise from the eastern horizon, indeed presages the appearance of the solar disc in the morning.

Thoth, the lunar god par excellence of the ancient Egyptians,<sup>29</sup> gets more numerous mentions in the Pyramid Texts. In connection with lunar phenomena, Thoth can either be the moon itself, or he can act as a protector or assistant of the moon.<sup>30</sup> Since, however, he can fulfil various roles in different mythological cycles, he does not always appear in the spells in connection with his lunar connotations, or at least these connotations are not straightforward. Nevertheless, there are some particular passages in which he seems to feature almost certainly because of his close associations with the moon. A very good example for this is utterance 210 that speaks about two companions ‘who cross the sky, [and] who are Re and Thoth’,<sup>31</sup> and in which the speaker identifies himself with the statements: ‘I go round the sky like Re, I traverse the sky like Thoth’.<sup>32</sup> From the parallels with the sun god Re it seems highly likely that in these passages Thoth represents the moon.

Thoth is sometimes involved in helping the deceased to get from one side of the sky to the other, as for example in utterance 270, in which the celestial ferryman is linked with two divine entities: Thoth and ‘He-who-looks-backwards’ (*Hr-f-ḥ3ꜥf*, *M3ꜥf-ḥ3ꜥf*),

<sup>24</sup> Eaton 2011: 232.

<sup>25</sup> Utterances 324 and 684, see Pyr. §§320–321, §§2055–2056.

<sup>26</sup> Derchain 1962a: 20; Eaton 2011: 236.

<sup>27</sup> Pyr. §402.

<sup>28</sup> Goebs 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Derchain 1962a: 36.

<sup>30</sup> Boylan 1922: 62.

<sup>31</sup> Pyr. §128; Faulkner 1969: 39.

<sup>32</sup> Pyr. §130; Faulkner 1969: 39.

who is in all probability the designation of the waning moon.<sup>33</sup> This latter being also has a counterpart named ‘He-who-looks-forward’ (*H3f-m-h3f*, *Hr3f-m-hn.t3f*), and together these two figures seem to refer to the opposite facets of the moon during waxing and waning.<sup>34</sup> Thus it may be said that in the Pyramid Texts the moon most characteristically appears as a celestial ferryman that facilitates the deceased’s voyage in and between the different regions of the netherworld. It is usually assumed that this ferryman transports the deceased across the Winding Waterway, the band of the sky where the sun, moon, and the planets move,<sup>35</sup> from the south to the north, that is to the region of the circumpolar stars, a prime area for netherworldly existence.<sup>36</sup> Having said that, it is equally possible that the moon as a celestial ferryman likewise also assists the dead soul to depart from the west and reach the eastern part of the sky (the place of sunrise, and thus that of rebirth), as during its monthly cycle the moon gets from the west (first crescent after sunset) to the east (last crescent before sunrise).<sup>37</sup>

Another spell of the Pyramid Texts (utterance 359) that talks about the lunar ferryman also contains references to the eye of Horus, which was of course – as can be deduced primarily from later sources – a very important symbol of the moon.<sup>38</sup> There are numerous references to the eye of Horus in the Pyramid Texts, but as it was the general designation for offerings and also had solar connotations,<sup>39</sup> it is again not always clear whether a particular reference to it should be interpreted in lunar terms or not. Since the general tone of utterance 359 – with its allusions to the fight between Horus and Seth, their injuries, Thoth, and the ferryman called He-who-looks-backwards – seems to be lunar, it is quite probable that this spell is one of several passages in the Pyramid Texts in which the eye of Horus is the equivalent of the moon.

In the Coffin Texts references to the moon are not only more numerous, but they also become longer and more sophisticated. This is precisely one of the reasons why we can identify one distinct set of these texts – the subject matter of the present volume, spells 154 to 160 – as a composition that gives an extended account of the lunar cycle. There are, however, further spells that – based either on their title or content – concern themselves 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 – the ‘feather’ in the sky – on the western horizon following the blacked-out moon,<sup>40</sup> spell 207 in which two goddesses are invoked with the hope of being reborn as the

<sup>33</sup> Krauss 1997: 75.

<sup>34</sup> Krauss 1997: 67–85; Allen 2002: 63.

<sup>35</sup> Krauss 1997: 49–63.

<sup>36</sup> Krauss 1997: 17–48; Allen 2002: 63.

<sup>37</sup> For the motif of the eastward crossing of the Winding Waterway, see Krauss 1997: 34–37.

<sup>38</sup> Derchain 1962a: 20–24.

<sup>39</sup> Westendorf 1980.

<sup>40</sup> Goedicke 1989; Willems 2005.

moon,<sup>41</sup> spell 246 in which the speaker assumes the identity of the invisible moon,<sup>42</sup> and spells 824 and 1096 that associate the moon with Thoth and the eye of Horus.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it is in the Coffin Texts that the eye of Horus first appears as the undisputed symbol of the moon, as for example spell 1096 specifies: “This is Thoth who is in the sky; the Eye of Horus is on his hands in the Mansion of the Moon’.<sup>44</sup>

Lunar feast days continue to be mentioned, and the Coffin Texts include references to seven of them: blacked-out moon, first-crescent day, the fourth day, the sixth day, the seventh day, the eighth day, and half-month day.<sup>45</sup> Some of the spells that talk about these feasts are leftovers from the Pyramid Texts, but new spells are also created, so that the number and proportion of the spells mentioning lunar feasts slightly increase (sixteen in the Pyramid Texts as opposed to forty in the Coffin Texts).<sup>46</sup> In addition to offerings and purification, which were the primary contexts of these spells in the earlier corpus, a new role emerges for the lunar feast days in the instructions that give information on the performance of the texts: spell 695 is prescribed to be recited on certain days of the lunar month.<sup>47</sup> Lunar days are also associated with themes that are connected with protection, transformations, and the adverse conditions of the netherworld: not eating excrement and not walking upside down.<sup>48</sup> These conditions, though they were also described in other contexts in the Pyramid Texts, had not been elaborated in connection with the lunar feast days earlier.<sup>49</sup>

Just as in the Pyramid Texts, the moon is expressly mentioned in several spells of the Coffin Texts. In two very similar spells (93 and 152) the speaker addresses an entity that is called the ‘Sole One’ (*W<sup>t</sup>*), and is identified as someone who shines or rises in the moon.<sup>50</sup> Since the purpose of these spells, as their titles suggest, is to go forth by the day and live after death, they seem to testify to a belief that resurrection in the next life was comparable with the behaviour of the moon, though the dead are not yet directly identified with the moon itself. Spell 176 also refers to some divinities who are in the great moon, and probably alludes to the situation when the moon is in conjunction with the sun, because the stated purpose of the spell is to go forth to the place in the sky where Re is.<sup>51</sup> A very similar statement is made in spell 853.<sup>52</sup> In an obscure passage the mansion of the moon is identified as the place where Thoth makes judgement.<sup>53</sup> Spell 467 describes the topography of the Field of Rest (or, alternatively,

<sup>41</sup> Willems 1996: 253–255.

<sup>42</sup> See my interpretation of this spell below.

<sup>43</sup> Faulkner 1978: 14, 152.

<sup>44</sup> Faulkner 1978: 152.

<sup>45</sup> Eaton 2011: 233.

<sup>46</sup> Eaton 2011: 231, 233.

<sup>47</sup> CT VI, 329q–r; Eaton 2011: 233.

<sup>48</sup> Eaton 2011: 233.

<sup>49</sup> Eaton 2011: 233.

<sup>50</sup> CT II, 64b, 260c–d.

<sup>51</sup> CT III, 62g.

<sup>52</sup> CT VII, 56l–57e.

<sup>53</sup> CT III, 339e.

Field of Offerings), an area in the netherworld where the deceased spend their days, and the moon here appears in connection with verdant vegetation.<sup>54</sup> In a series of spells that deal with fishing nets, the moon is referred to in connection with lunar festivals,<sup>55</sup> and again with its mansion.<sup>56</sup> These spells, it must be emphasised, introduce a new theme because the fishing net and lunar motifs did not feature together in the Pyramid Texts. The moon is also mentioned twice in spell 824 that was supposed to make the effective spirit of the deceased powerful.<sup>57</sup>

As for the lunar gods, Khonsu appears in about fifteen spells.<sup>58</sup> A recurring motif in spells 187 and 195 is that the deceased meets him on his way back from Punt, the mythical land that in funerary literature represents east, that is, the place of sunrise.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly enough, both in spells 195, and 573, the Coffin Texts variant of the cannibal hymn, Khonsu features in a passage which also makes a reference to the time of lunar invisibility (*psdn.tjw*). This may offer further support for the identification of Khonsu with the sickle of the waning moon in the east, at least in the particular contexts of the Pyramid and Coffin Texts. Spell 311 is concerned with becoming Khonsu himself,<sup>60</sup> showing the increased importance of the god. The violent nature of Khonsu is still alluded to, since in spell 994 he is said to live on heads (*nhj m tpw jnk Hnsw*).<sup>61</sup>

Thoth is mentioned much more frequently than Khonsu in the Coffin Texts, and this is no doubt partly due to the relatively large portion of spells that were recorded in his chief cult centre, Hermopolis (or its necropolis at the time, Deir el-Bersha).<sup>62</sup> Again, Thoth may be included in a text because of his many roles in different mythological cycles. However, it is in the Coffin Texts that his identity with the moon is first expressly stated, because one variant of spell 1096, which was already mentioned above, identifies the god holding the eye of Horus in the mansion of the moon as Moon-Thoth (*Jh-Dhw.tj*).<sup>63</sup> It may be added that the role of Thoth in saving the lunar eye (the sound eye, *wḏʕt*) is also emphasised in a preceding spell (1094).<sup>64</sup>

At the beginning of the New Kingdom, a new collection of spells, known as the Book of Going Forth by Day (Book of the Dead), supersedes the older corpus of the Coffin Texts.<sup>65</sup> In it the lunar themes that already appeared in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts continue to be perpetuated. The relative proportion of texts mentioning lunar day

<sup>54</sup> CT V, 371b–g.

<sup>55</sup> CT VI, 25c, 45c.

<sup>56</sup> CT VI, 27n.

<sup>57</sup> CT VII, 24g–25s.

<sup>58</sup> Molen 2000: 395.

<sup>59</sup> Meeks 2000: 57–58.

<sup>60</sup> CT IV, 67r.

<sup>61</sup> CT VII, 208b–c.

<sup>62</sup> Gestermann 2004.

<sup>63</sup> CT VII, 380a–b (B1L).

<sup>64</sup> CT VII, 372d–379b.

<sup>65</sup> Hornung 1999: 13–22.

feasts increases, as seventeen of the 192 chapters include such references.<sup>66</sup> On the one hand they often emphasise the deceased's knowledge about these feasts, while on the other the rubrics of some spells stipulate that the rituals described should be performed on specific days of the lunar month.<sup>67</sup> Spells addressing the moon as the Sole One made their way into the Book of Going Forth by Day (chapters 2 and 65), just as the moon keeps being mentioned in its role as the celestial ferryman, and in connection with fishing (chapters 99 and 153). Chapter 99 also includes references to the eye of Horus falling on the eastern side of the sky, thus it is a direct descendant of utterance 359 of the Pyramid Texts. While Khonsu only appears twice in the Book of Going Forth by Day (spells 83 and 153), Thoth is frequently mentioned. It is quite clear that for example in spell 80 he features in his lunar capacity, because the deceased claims that he has equipped the god in the mansion of the moon.<sup>68</sup> Spell 80 also talks about the filling of the eye in relation to the sixth or fifteenth day of the month,<sup>69</sup> so it is clearly one of the truly lunar spells of the Book of Going Forth by Day.

There are further important new developments. It is in the Book of Going Forth by Day that the deceased first undoubtedly assumes the identity of the moon when he claims that he will never perish because he is the moon among the gods (chapter 8, see the papyrus of Ani).<sup>70</sup> Osiris is now unequivocally associated with the moon, since for example in one variant of spell 183, dated to the 21st/22nd dynasty, he is named as the 'Lord of the Blacked-out Moon' (*nb psdn.tjw*).<sup>71</sup> The identity of the moon with Osiris is also apparent from one variant of chapter 162 (Ptolemaic Period), a hymn to the god in which he is likened to the rising moon.<sup>72</sup> It is also very important that in the vignettes attached to the spells of the Book of Going Forth by Day the pictorial representations of the moon start to occur. The vignette to chapter 186 for example shows the lunar crescent over the western mountains from which a cow goddess and a hippopotamus goddess emerge.<sup>73</sup> In another vignette known as chapter 143 and belonging to spells 141 and 142, the blacked-out moon is shown to travel aboard the barque of Re,<sup>74</sup> as is suggested by the instructions for spell 141 which prescribe it to be recited on the day of lunar invisibility.<sup>75</sup>

In the New Kingdom, primarily in the royal mortuary sphere, new compositions began to be inscribed on the walls of the tombs and on funerary equipment. These compositions, though their main theme was the nocturnal journey of the sun,<sup>76</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Eaton 2011: 234.

<sup>67</sup> Eaton 2011: 234.

<sup>68</sup> Allen 1974: 70.

<sup>69</sup> Lepsius 1842, pl. 30; Allen 1974: 70.

<sup>70</sup> Faulkner 1994: pl. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Budge 1912: pl. lxxii; Allen 1974: 202.

<sup>72</sup> Allen 1974: 158.

<sup>73</sup> Allen 1974: 210 n. 327.

<sup>74</sup> Lepsius 1842: pl. lix. The larger disc in the barque is the sun, the smaller one is the moon, see Priskin (forthcoming).

<sup>75</sup> Lepsius 1842: pl. lviii; Allen 1974: 117.

<sup>76</sup> Hornung 1999: 26–111.

also featured pictorial representations of the moon. In the Book of What is in the Netherworld (Amduat), the moon appears in the second hour of the night, sailing in its own barque in the wake of the barque of the sun god.<sup>77</sup> In the tomb of Ramesses VI the lunar disc is also depicted in one of the corridors as part of an enigmatic composition.<sup>78</sup> The lunar disc also appears in private tombs, for example on the vaulted ceiling in the tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1), set against the background of the starry sky.<sup>79</sup> It is then not surprising that in the tombs of Maya (Saqqara) and Khaemhat (TT 57) a hymn to the moon rising on the eastern horizon was also inscribed on the walls.<sup>80</sup> Another composition that devoted a chapter to the moon was the Fundamentals of the Course of the Stars (Book of Nut) that made its debut on the walls of the Osirion in Abydos (under Seti I), and was also preserved and annotated in hieratic/demotic papyri later in Graeco-Roman times.<sup>81</sup>

In the tomb of Senenmut (reign of Hatshepsut), on some water clocks, and then in some Ramesside memorial temples and royal tombs a pictorial representation of the sky, known as the astronomical diagram, came into use.<sup>82</sup> It was a pictorial composition, rather than a textual one, so its lunar contents were represented by a procession of divinities who corresponded to the days of the lunar month and converged from the two sides on the drawings of the northern constellations in the middle. Similar processions, the constellations being replaced by a symbol of the moon, were frequently depicted later in the temples of the Graeco-Roman Period.<sup>83</sup> Some astronomical diagrams are also thought to have incorporated the representations of the lunar months as well.<sup>84</sup> The use of the astronomical diagram in the funerary sphere, just as is the case with many of the compositions originally appearing around the middle and second half of the 2nd millennium BCE, continued after the demise of the New Kingdom.<sup>85</sup>

While the Book of Going Forth by Day continued to be used into Ptolemaic times, from the Late Period onwards yet another set of new compositions started to augment or replace it. Some of these picked upon a theme that had already been alluded to in the earlier mortuary spells and elaborated it further, so that in the end whole new compositions were created.<sup>86</sup> The moon frequently occurred in these new compositions, too. For example, in one of the commonly used later texts, which was centred around the topic of breathing, The Letter for Breathing Which Isis Made for Her Brother Osiris, we read that Isis compiled the lines of this work, *inter alia*, to make

<sup>77</sup> Hornung 1999: 43 fig. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Darnell 2004: 224–230.

<sup>79</sup> Porter and Moss 1960: 4; Hodel-Hoernes 2000: 259 fig. 186.

<sup>80</sup> Bosse-Griffiths 2001: 137–138.

<sup>81</sup> Lieven 2007: 94–106.

<sup>82</sup> Neugebauer and Parker 1969: 8–38; Symons 2014: 99.

<sup>83</sup> For these processions, see Priskin 2016c: 112–113.

<sup>84</sup> Symons 2014: 99.

<sup>85</sup> Neugebauer and Parker 1969: 38–84.

<sup>86</sup> Smith 2009a: 17–18.



the *ba* of Osiris appear in the sky as the disc of the moon.<sup>87</sup> A special composition that grew out of the Book of Going Forth by Day was the hypocephalus, which was essentially a disc made of cartonnage, bronze or other material, and put under the head of the deceased, displaying excerpts from chapter 162 and relevant drawings (vignettes) ordered in a number of registers.<sup>88</sup> One of these showed the encounter between the barques of the sun and the moon, most probably on the day when the latter became invisible due to its closeness to the rising sun.<sup>89</sup>

A crucial stage in the funerary procedure, mummification, has also received a lot of attention and a manual entitled *The Embalming Ritual*, preserved on three papyri from the 1st century ce,<sup>90</sup> was composed. It contained two types of texts: instructions for the different, ritually charged embalming techniques and recitations to be spoken along these actions. According to one of these, the deceased's *ba* will rejuvenate like the moon.<sup>91</sup> As part of mummification, a cloth is also to be placed in the right hand of the deceased with the images of Re (the sun) and Min (the moon) depicted on it.<sup>92</sup> Since Min is often associated with the invisible moon,<sup>93</sup> this cloth in the grasp of the right hand most probably evokes the conjunction of the sun and the moon in the east, although later on reference is also made to the rising of the full moon on the fifteenth day of the month,<sup>94</sup> and the text also specifies Min's role as the instigator of the appearance of the moon in the west (i.e. the first crescent of waxing).<sup>95</sup>

Other texts that were now used in the mortuary sphere had been originally conceived for temple use, especially in connection with the cult of Osiris.<sup>96</sup> These compositions reinforce that by this time (Late Period/Ptolemaic Period) the identification of Osiris with the moon was firmly established. In a text entitled *The Rite of Introducing the Multitude on the Last Day of Tekh*,<sup>97</sup> Osiris is called the lunar pillar, that is the moon, who as a phoenix goes forth to the sky and becomes the left eye to spread light over the earth with his rising.<sup>98</sup> According to another papyrus, belonging to the genre known as the glorifications of the god, Osiris emerges as the moon, and also as the bull of the sky on the day of the sound eye, that is the day of the full moon.<sup>99</sup> The motif of Osiris, or his *ba*, appearing as the sound eye or the left eye of Atum (the full moon) is repeated in other similar compositions.<sup>100</sup> The texts also intimate that Osiris

<sup>87</sup> Smith 2009a: 469.

<sup>88</sup> Varga 1998: 29–31.

<sup>89</sup> Priskin 2015a.

<sup>90</sup> Smith 2009a: 215.

<sup>91</sup> Smith 2009a: 230.

<sup>92</sup> Smith 2009a: 240.

<sup>93</sup> Cauville 2011: 42–43.

<sup>94</sup> Smith 2009a: 241.

<sup>95</sup> Smith 2009a: 243.

<sup>96</sup> Smith 2009a: 18–19.

<sup>97</sup> Tekh (*th*) was an alternative name of the first month of the Egyptian calendar, see Smith 2009a: 152.

<sup>98</sup> Smith 2009a: 157.

<sup>99</sup> Goyon 1965: 100, 140.

<sup>100</sup> Smith 2009a: 76, 112, 131–132, 140, 144–145, 189.



is rejuvenated at the beginning of the month, perhaps more specifically on the second day of the lunar month, when the first lunar crescent appears.<sup>101</sup>

### *The moon outside the funerary sphere*

Besides the vast corpus of funerary literature, there are of course other sources that tell us a lot about the significance of the moon in ancient Egypt. These start to surface right from the beginnings of ancient Egyptian history. While there are not many direct references to the moon in the written records of the Old Kingdom, one cultural achievement of this period strongly suggests that the Egyptians were already keenly observing lunar phenomena from the earliest times. It is the civil calendar, and although it totally disregarded the actual lunar cycles, that is it was in no way synchronised 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 3rd millennium BCE, as, after some sporadic instances under the 3rd dynasty,<sup>102</sup> civil dates began to be recorded in large numbers during the 4th dynasty<sup>103</sup> – the Egyptians must have accumulated quite an extensive body of knowledge on the moon. In modern Egyptological literature this obvious conclusion has led to wide speculations about the possible existence and precise workings of an Egyptian lunar calendar in the Old Kingdom or perhaps even earlier.<sup>104</sup> The discussion of this debate falls outside the scope of this introduction, but it should be noted that the civil calendar does stand witness to an early familiarity with the lunar world on the part of the Egyptians.

Intertwined with the introduction and use of the calendar is the celebration of festivals. Sources from the New Kingdom indicate that the Egyptians distinguished between two types of festivals: the ‘feasts of heaven’ (*ḥ3b.w n.w p.t*) that were set according to lunar phenomena and recurred every month, and the ‘seasonal feasts’ (*tp trw*) that were tied to the civil calendar and occurred only once a year.<sup>105</sup> Monthly feasts, as we could see, were regularly referred to in the spells of funerary compositions. From the earliest times they also appear in feast lists that were at the beginning, in the Old Kingdom, recorded on the walls of tombs, but later on also in temples and other contexts.<sup>106</sup> Some seasonal feasts were also influenced by the moon; a good example from the New Kingdom is the annual Beautiful Feast of the Valley that commenced on the day of the blacked-out moon (*psḏn.tjw*) in the second month of

<sup>101</sup> Smith 2009a: 136, 140, 168, 171, 190.

<sup>102</sup> Depuydt 2001: 89.

<sup>103</sup> Verner 2006.

<sup>104</sup> Depuydt 1997: 16–17.

<sup>105</sup> Spalinger 1996: 1–2.

<sup>106</sup> Spalinger 1996.

the Shemu season.<sup>107</sup> The observance of festivals was therefore also largely a matter of the observation of the moon, and since feasts seem never to have been neglected throughout Egyptian history, knowledge about lunar phenomena must have been cultivated and appreciated continuously.

While literacy in the Old Kingdom was quite limited, and only the Middle Kingdom saw its more widespread development with the arrival of truly literary genres,<sup>108</sup> it must be said that apart from funerary literature our sources on the moon from this era are rather meagre. In one of the characteristic compositions of the period, preserved on papyri and foretelling *a posteriori* how the founding father of the 12th dynasty, Amenemhat I, would come into power, entitled The Prophecies of Neferti, the moon appears in the propagandistic description of chaos preceding the new golden age of the said dynasty. During these wretched times, the text goes, the sun is much like the moon, a pale replica of itself that fails to dazzle the living and is beset with some irregularities.<sup>109</sup> The lack of lunar attestations may possibly be due to the fact that the temples erected in Middle Kingdom times, which would have presumably yielded some lunar texts and scenes, largely perished because they were built mostly of mudbrick, and because in many cases later edifices replaced them.<sup>110</sup>

However, it must also be noted that a series of lunar dates have come down to us from the Middle Kingdom in the so-called Illahun papyri that preserved much information concerning temple service in this town at the entrance to the Fayum region.<sup>111</sup> This indicates that cult activities, just like important feasts, continued to be regulated by the phases of the moon. A rather small object also strongly suggests that a cult of the moon was flourishing. It is a container in the shape of a half-cylinder, partitioned into five compartments; at both ends a circle or disc is inscribed onto the surface, and it encloses the figure of a pig surrounded by fifteen dots.<sup>112</sup> Both the pig and the number fifteen have strong lunar connotations (the full moon putatively arrives on the fifteenth day of the month),<sup>113</sup> so this rather peculiar bowl was in all probability used for some cult activities connected with the moon.

With the advent of the New Kingdom the sources on the moon seem to explode. This in part results from the better preservation of monuments and records, but other factors must also have been at play. For one thing, most of the pharaohs at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th dynasties, and also often their immediate kin, bore names that alluded to the moon or the lunar god Thoth – Jahmes, Jahhotep,

<sup>107</sup> The Epigraphic Survey 1934: pl. 142.

<sup>108</sup> Lichtheim 1975: 3–12.

<sup>109</sup> Lichtheim 1975: 142–143.

<sup>110</sup> Shafer 1997: 4.

<sup>111</sup> Luft 1992.

<sup>112</sup> Friedman 1998: 137, 218.; Lieven 2007: 178 n. 987.

<sup>113</sup> For the association of the pig with the moon, see below and my discussions in Priskin 2015b: 170–171; Priskin 2016b: 86–88.

Thutmose being the most salient examples.<sup>114</sup> This possibly shows that the lunar cult was in the ascendancy at the time. A heightened interest in the moon around this period is probably also indicated by the introduction of a new sign in the writing of *psdn.tjw*, the day of lunar invisibility, most likely depicting how the lunar disc is absorbed by the sun during conjunction.<sup>115</sup> Before long a depiction of the lunar disc in the company of Anubis also appears in the memorial temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari.<sup>116</sup>

Besides their allegiance to the lunar gods Jah and Thoth, the founding dynasties of the New Kingdom, originating and being seated in Thebes, were also under the protection of the main local god, Amun, who with time – and assimilating the nature of the sun god, Re – became the official state god of the period.<sup>117</sup> The triad of Amun, besides his consort, Mut, included the child Khonsu, who was also one of the pre-eminent lunar gods.<sup>118</sup> Thus a lunar dimension became an inseparable element of the Theban cultural and theological landscape and it manifested itself in various ways. Khonsu had a temple built within the main enclosure of Amun at Karnak (construction started under Ramesses III), though some parts of it were only decorated in later times.<sup>119</sup> Since theological doctrines in Thebes were inextricably connected with the idea of kingship, through Khonsu lunar rituals were also incorporated into the ceremonies that symbolically represented and advertised the power of the pharaoh.<sup>120</sup>

In the second half of the 18th dynasty the deification of Amenhotep III meant not only his identification with the solar god, but also with the moon, as his inscriptions in the temple of Soleb in Nubia attest to it.<sup>121</sup> Later, after the interlude of Akhenaten, the jewellery of Tutankhamun, recovered from his famous and almost intact tomb in the Valley of the Kings, includes some pieces that feature lunar motifs, for example the elaborate pectoral showing a beautifully represented scarab as it lifts a barque with the left eye and lunar disc on board, the latter encompassing the figures of Thoth, the pharaoh himself, and Re-Harakhty.<sup>122</sup> It was also in the reign of Tutankhamun that his general and later successor Horemheb had a statue made with inscriptions including a hymn to Moon-Thoth.<sup>123</sup> In his famous decree, aimed at restoring law and order after the Amarna upheaval, Horemheb declares that he will be reborn like the moon.<sup>124</sup>

In the memorial temple of Ramesses II on the Theban west bank, also known as the Ramesseum, the New Kingdom astronomical diagram decorated the ceiling of one of

<sup>114</sup> Bryan 2000: 209.

<sup>115</sup> Depuydt 1998.

<sup>116</sup> Ritner 1985.

<sup>117</sup> Tobin 2001: 82–83.

<sup>118</sup> Tobin 2001: 84.

<sup>119</sup> Baines and Malek 2002: 92.

<sup>120</sup> Goyon 1983.

<sup>121</sup> O'Connor 2001: 147–148.

<sup>122</sup> James 2000: 230–231.

<sup>123</sup> Lichtheim 1976: 100–103.

<sup>124</sup> Galán 2000: 259 n. 30.

the vestibules in front of the sanctuary.<sup>125</sup> It is there that this composition was first depicted outside a tomb, and as far as the moon is concerned, it should be noted for two things. First, in the procession of lunar divinities the pharaoh himself is included, suggesting that in one form or another Ramesses II participated in the lunar cult, and he deemed it important to have himself represented in such a context. This ambition is also underlined by the text running at the edge of the whole celestial diagram, as it expresses the wish that Re should create for the king his forms as the moon.<sup>126</sup> Second, unlike any other astronomical diagrams, the one in the Ramesseum shows the ancient Egyptian constellation of the boat together with the drawings of discs, and some of these – judged from a comparison with later images of some decans that featured in the zodiacs of the Graeco-Roman era – represent the full moon and the blacked-out moon at the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, respectively.<sup>127</sup>

From the Third Intermediate Period perhaps the most interesting source on the moon that should be mentioned is the historical document known as the Chronicle of Prince Osorkon.<sup>128</sup> It reports that in a certain year a rebellion or some sort of unrest broke out in the country, although the sky did not swallow the moon.<sup>129</sup> As pointed out by many commentators, this statement most probably refers to the fact that although a lunar eclipse – which was surely seen as an ominous event – did not take place, the peace and quiet of Egypt was disturbed.<sup>130</sup> The sentence about the moon thus implies that its behaviour in general, and irregular behaviour in particular – i.e. a lunar eclipse – had a direct effect on the well-being of the land of Egypt. A golden bracelet owned by one of the sons of the 22nd dynasty pharaoh, Sheshonk I, also testifies to the currency of lunar ideas at the time.<sup>131</sup> Its external decoration shows the squatting figure of the divine child as he is emerging from a lotus bud, which is the visual representation of the child's birth. On his head he wears the lunar disc and crescent, so the whole scene possibly attests to the role of the moon in divine birth. Since the bracelet was worn publicly, it surely carried a message that was easily recognisable for those seeing it.

In the Late Period bronze figurines showing the god Osiris with the lunar disc and crescent on the head appeared.<sup>132</sup> According to the captions that were written on these objects, they show the composite deity Osiris-Moon, and they were no doubt deposited in temples as votive offerings, seeking the benevolence of the god. The production and use of these statuettes certainly indicates that by this time Osiris was not only closely associated with the moon, but was straightforwardly identified with it. Although the Osiris-Moon figurines were primarily intended for cult activities that

<sup>125</sup> The Epigraphic Survey 1963: pl. 478.

<sup>126</sup> Priskin 2016b: 99.

<sup>127</sup> Priskin 2016b.

<sup>128</sup> Caminos 1958.

<sup>129</sup> Caminos 1958: 88–89.

<sup>130</sup> Caminos 1958: 88, with references; Thijs 2010: 181.

<sup>131</sup> Russmann 2001: 218–219.

<sup>132</sup> Griffiths 1976.

took place in temples, since Osiris was the lord of the netherworld par excellence, they also testify to the increasing selenisation of afterlife beliefs.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, from the royal sphere we may mention that in the 26th dynasty Egypt once more had a pharaoh with the name Jahmes (Amasis),<sup>134</sup> though the choice of this king for such a throne name was probably dictated by a deference to the great founding ruler of the 18th dynasty, rather than by his great enthusiasm for and strong involvement in the lunar cult.

Most of our Egyptian records with substantial lunar content date from the Graeco-Roman Period. Possibly the earliest of these is the texts and scenes on the propylon at Karnak that was built under Ptolemy III Euergetes to the south of the temple of Khonsu.<sup>135</sup> A well-known passage here likens the different phases of the lunar cycle to the life stages – infancy, childhood, and old age – of a human being.<sup>136</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Khonsu temple was erected in the New Kingdom, surely in the place of an earlier building that already stood there in the Middle Kingdom, but some parts of the decoration were reworked in Ptolemaic times. Unfortunately, the major temple precinct of Thoth at Hermopolis has all but disappeared by the time serious and modern studies could have been effected on it, though some parts of it were still standing just around the middle of the 19th century CE.<sup>137</sup> As for Jah, it seems that this divinity, if he was in fact ever more than just the deified form of the moon,<sup>138</sup> did not have a local cult, so no temple enclosure was devoted to him anywhere in Egypt.

Apart from the temples of the lunar gods, the moon also became an important element for other temples that were built in Ptolemaic and Roman times, and in this respect two developments are worth noting. On the one hand, as the figure of Osiris had taken on ever more lunar attributes, the information on the moon – both written and pictorial – formed an essential part of the Osirian chapels that were customarily placed on the roofs of the major temples at this time.<sup>139</sup> The best example for this is of course found at Dendera, where these sanctuaries and their decoration are well-preserved.<sup>140</sup> Numerous lunar motifs occur there, including the ones in the famous round zodiac on the ceiling of the second room in the east.<sup>141</sup> On the other hand, since temples were generally envisaged as the architectural representations of the cosmos, including the sky, the ceilings or upper registers of walls in the pronaos now displayed appropriate astronomical scenes.<sup>142</sup> These were much more intricate than the blue ceilings of the New Kingdom temples dotted with stars, and thus included the

<sup>133</sup> Koemoth 1996: 203–204.

<sup>134</sup> Josephson 2001.

<sup>135</sup> Clère 1961.

<sup>136</sup> Clère 1961: pl. 60; Derchain 1962a: 43.

<sup>137</sup> Baines and Malek 2002: 126–127.

<sup>138</sup> Derchain 1962a: 51.

<sup>139</sup> Zivie-Coche 2008: 10.

<sup>140</sup> Cauville 1997.

<sup>141</sup> Cauville 1997: pl. 60.

<sup>142</sup> Finnestad 1997: 194.

complex representations of the lunar cycle, for example in Edfu, Dendera, and Esna.<sup>143</sup> In the pronaos of the Edfu temple the pictures of the lunar scenes on the eastern and western walls are also accompanied by lengthy horizontal lines that expound the movement of the moon in relation with the sun.<sup>144</sup> This text was possibly copied from a composition that was kept in the temple library, and contained the core knowledge on the subject that a priest was expected to be familiar with.<sup>145</sup>

From the Late Period onwards Egypt's contacts with the Aegean proliferated, and as a result Greek authors started to write accounts of the land in the Nile valley, viewed by them as a cradle of civilisation and wisdom. The moon is mentioned several times in these descriptions, which augment our knowledge about the Egyptians' view of lunar phenomena. Three of these descriptions may be cited here to hint at the kind of information they contain. Herodotus visited Egypt during the first Persian occupation (5th century BCE), and he paints a vivid picture about the great lunar feast of the month of Pachons (the month named after the lunar god Khonsu) by reporting on the consumption of pork at this particular event.<sup>146</sup> Plutarch, working at the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, wrote a lengthy treatise on the cult of Isis and Osiris, and in it he repeatedly stressed the close connections between the moon and the god who ruled the netherworld.<sup>147</sup> Finally, the Christian apologetic writer, Clement of Alexandria (2nd century CE), informs us about the procession of priests at an Osirian festival, possibly as he witnessed it on the streets of his own town, and he relates that one of the officiants – the hour watcher – carried four papyrus rolls, two of which dealt with the movements and encounters of the sun and the moon.<sup>148</sup>

The overview of Egyptian lunar knowledge on the previous pages, which is of course far from exhaustive, clearly indicates that the Book of the Moon had a wide background on which it could rely for its descriptions, themes, and motifs. We sometimes tend to overlook the importance the moon played in the ancient Egyptians' world view. This is partly due to the common perception that Egyptian thought was preoccupied with the sun god Re, and the cult built around him. The moon thus could only have had a limited role. Perhaps nothing epitomises this bias more than the simple fact that the pharaoh had a 'son of Re' name, and not a 'son of Jah' or 'son of Thoth' name. While of course it is true that the solar cult reigned supreme all throughout Egyptian history, the lunar attestations collected above also prove that as a strong undercurrent the moon had a significant presence in a number of Egyptian records, and it was acknowledged that the moon had a profound influence on the world in general, and on the lives of the Egyptians in particular. The Book of the Moon provides one of the earliest insights into this sometimes neglected area of Egyptian thought.

<sup>143</sup> Priskin 2016c: 113–143.

<sup>144</sup> Chassinat 1928: 207–208, 211–212.

<sup>145</sup> Depuydt 1998: 79.

<sup>146</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories* II.47, see Godley 1920: 335.

<sup>147</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, see Griffiths 1970.

<sup>148</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateia* 6.4.35, see Stählin 1906: 449.

### *The Book of the Moon*

The synoptic edition of the hieroglyphic texts constituting the Book of the Moon – i.e. Coffin Texts spells 154–160 – can be found in Adriaan de Buck’s seminal work recording the Coffin Texts known in his time.<sup>149</sup> Ten coffins have preserved the complete composition, one of which has come down to us from Asyut, while the rest originate from Deir el-Bersha. Fragmentary copies that lack some parts or entire spells exist on yet another coffin from Deir el-Bersha and six coffins from Asyut, plus there is a short fragment of spell 154 from Meir. The distribution of the texts strongly suggests that the Book of the Moon was created in Deir el-Bersha (on this subject, see also chapter 3.2. on the textual layers of the composition). Therefore I have chosen one of the texts from this location as the basis for my new annotated translation. The choice I have made is also dictated by my previous work on the subject. As I have already mentioned, first I focused on Coffin Texts spell 155, and I had the impression that this particular chapter of the Book of the Moon had been best preserved on the coffin of Sen (B4LB according to the siglum in *CT II*).<sup>150</sup> He 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 Senwosret III.<sup>151</sup> Since, however, the Book of the Moon is a complex composition, its individual spells deriving from different sources (see the relevant chapter below), what is true for one spell may not hold fast for the entire composition. Indeed, we shall see that Sen’s text is at some points inferior to other versions and has to be augmented. Despite this, and since the mistakes in it are not really numerous, I still deem the text on Sen’s coffin the best starting point for the overall presentation of the composition. To make things clear, at the appropriate places I shall indicate the necessary emendations.

As for the new translation that I here offer for Coffin Texts spells 154–160, two further things should be noted. First, the translation of these spells, just like perhaps the translation of almost any passage in the Coffin Texts, is inevitably fraught with many difficulties. In my opinion, apart from the fact that the spells ‘resemble disconnected scraps of conversation for which the context has been lost’,<sup>152</sup> the most serious obstacles to full comprehension stem from four major factors. These are (1) the use of a specialised 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. In fact, the spells of the Book of the Moon have been pinpointed as perhaps the ones presenting the most difficulties in terms of understanding and interpretation within

<sup>149</sup> *CT II*, 266a–388c.

<sup>150</sup> Priskin 2013: 28.

<sup>151</sup> Willems 1988: 76–77.

<sup>152</sup> Mueller 1972: 99.



the entire collection of the Coffin Texts.<sup>153</sup> So, while I believe that my translations of the spells make a great contribution to understanding these texts better, by no means do I claim that every detail of them has become thoroughly intelligible for me.

On the other hand, one circumstance really offers help to understand a treatise about the moon written at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE. While our modern world is miles apart from that of the ancient Egyptians, and our concepts of what we see around us are shaped by the fact that we live in a secular, urbanised social environment, in contrast to the rural and religious intellectual landscape of ancient Egyptian society, at the root of things we experience the same reality. When we look up the sky and see for example the crescent of the waxing moon, we think of it as the earth's satellite, a smaller sphere of solid material orbiting our planet, whose surface is lit up by the sun to various degrees according to the moon's position along its orbit. When the ancient Egyptians looked up, they saw the feather of the west or, probably when the crescent was seen in the day sky, the wing of Thoth, or the opening of an eye. Yet on their face value the developments that unfold on the 'giant screen' of the sky are essentially the same: after one or two days when only stars can be observed in the night sky, a thin white crescent appears in the west just after sunset; then – as the month progresses – it grows bigger and is spotted increasingly to the east at nightfall. Following the day of the full moon, when the complete lunar disc emerges from the eastern horizon and crosses the sky in its entirety, the white disc begins to dwindle, rising closer and closer to dawn on successive days. This cycle, no matter how it is explained away by different cultures, repeats itself continuously, and it is this relentless visual display that we have in common with the ancient Egyptians which helps us to understand how they made sense of it.

Secondly, none of the standard collections of Coffin Texts translations – all based on de Buck's hieroglyphic edition (*CT*) – uses a Deir el-Bersha coffin as their source text for spells 154–160. Louis Speleers gives a synoptic translation without specifying a particular coffin,<sup>154</sup> Raymond O. Faulkner presents the text variant on Nakht's inner coffin coming from Asyut (S2P in de Buck's designation),<sup>155</sup> Paul Barguet does the same,<sup>156</sup> and Claude Carrier still adheres to the same coffin as his starting point.<sup>157</sup> 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, we now would be reading translations of a quite different kind. Whatever prompted the popularity of Nakht's text, it means that a new rendering of spells 154–160 based on Sen's copy will unavoidably be different from the translations most researchers are currently

<sup>153</sup> DuQuesne 1998: 619.

<sup>154</sup> Speleers 1946: 87–88.

<sup>155</sup> Faulkner 1973: 133–134.

<sup>156</sup> Barguet 1986: 572–573.

<sup>157</sup> Carrier 2004: 376–379.



familiar with, irrespective of my agenda to highlight the inherent lunar character of these texts. This fact in itself adds to the justification of my enterprise here.

In connection with this last statement, the remark is perhaps worth making here that in ancient Egypt the concept of the authorship of a written composition – and consequently, the concept of the originality of a given composition – was quite different from modern European categories.<sup>158</sup> This means that the Egyptians did not view their literary works as the single, unalterable products of individuals, but rather as the pieces of a common cultural memory that could be shared and worked on by those who perpetuated the texts.<sup>159</sup> While I firmly believe that the Book of the Moon was originally compiled in Hermopolis, this does not imply that the composition recorded there – any of the ten copies – should be viewed as an *Urtext* in the modern sense, that is, a literary work that later copyists necessarily vied to emulate or faithfully reproduce. In fact, as I just made the hint above, the Asyut version of the Book of the Moon displays some marked differences in comparison with the texts coming from Deir el-Bersha. It is somewhat corollary to this ancient Egyptian approach to literature, and the varied contents of the composition, that the Coffin Texts sequence 154–160 could legitimately be analysed in other contexts as well, such as for example the distribution of the offerings, mummification, or the nature of temple cults and festivals. However, my aim here is not to offer an all-encompassing description of the spells under scrutiny, which would anyway inevitably result in a cumbersome large volume, but to underline the primary lunar character of these texts.

The structure of the present book follows a simple pattern. After the introduction, I will look at the individual spells, one after the other, and offer a detailed commentary on them. Each chapter in this section is introduced by the hieroglyphic transcription of the spell, as is given in de Buck's edition of the Coffin Texts. It is followed by the transliteration, translation, and the comments about the different lines. The next section offers a more general commentary on the composition and comprises four chapters. The first one reiterates the main lunar themes of the Book of the Moon for making its structure and logic clearer. The next chapter analyses the contents of the spells in relation to each other in order to distinguish the different textual layers that exist within the composition.<sup>160</sup> The following chapter examines the copies of the Book of the Moon that have come down to us from Deir el-Bersha and Asyut, and establishes the chronology of their creation. The final section in the general commentary looks at the survival of the Book of the Moon by examining how the spells made their way into the corpus that superseded the Coffin Texts, i.e. the Book of Going Forth by Day. At the end of the book, a short conclusion closes the discussion, summarising the major findings and once more highlighting the uniqueness of the composition.

<sup>158</sup> Derchain 1996; Parkinson 2002: 24–25.

<sup>159</sup> Luiselli 2003: 343.

<sup>160</sup> See also Priskin 2017a.