

## **The Sacredness of Some Seals and its Relationship to God Thoth**

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### **Abstracte:**

Seals played an important role in ancient Egypt. They were not only used as administrative securing devices for the state bureaucracy, private individual, documents, containers, places, but also as amulets during daily life and in the netherworld. There are some features confirmed the sacredness of seals such as:

- Seals as devices of protection.
- The crime of breaking the seal.
- The seal and sacredness of the place.
- The sacredness of the process of sealing.

Beside the sacredness of seals, there are some texts confirmed the relationship between seals and the god Thoth, the relationship through which it can be suggested that as Thoth was the god of wisdom, magic, and writing , he also the god who was responsible for seals and sealing in ancient Egypt religion.

### **Keywords:**

- Sacredness, Seals, Sealing, Amulets, Protection, Securing, Relationship , The god Thoth.

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## Introduction:

Seals, these small objects incomparable with great temples, bluff pyramid, huge statues, and the invaluable charming jewelry in ancient Egyptian civilization, however, these small objects are not less important than these all great objects.

In the Ancient Egyptian documents, the seals were called:

 *htm*<sup>1</sup>,  *sd3yt*.<sup>2</sup>

Generally, the shapes of seals may be divided into the following groups:<sup>3</sup>

1- Cylindrical shape seals<sup>4</sup>, the earliest type of seal commonly used in Egypt from Pre-Dynastic Period<sup>5</sup>, by the first Intermediate period, cylinders seem to be treated more as a type of amulet rather than as a working symbol or badge of rank.

2- Flat base seals, this group contains , hemi-cylinder and cone shaped seals, button shaped seals, scarab shaped seals<sup>6</sup>, plaques and other miscellaneous forms and signet rings.<sup>7</sup>

Sealing is the impression made by impact of hard engraved surface on a softer material, such as clay. The materials for seals are widely available,<sup>8</sup> for example they were made of wood,

<sup>1</sup> *Wb* III, 350,3-12; *LDLE*,I,377.

<sup>2</sup> *Wb* IV,379 ,17-21.

<sup>3</sup> P. E.Newberry, *Egyptian Scarabs*, p. 43;A. Sparavigna , *Ancient Egyptian Seals and Scarabs*, ,p.9 ff.

<sup>4</sup> M.V. De Mieroop, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, p. 48; M. R. Bunson, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* ,p. 9; A. Sparavigna ,*op. cit* ,p.16-18; D.Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in Ancient Near East*, p.179 ff.

<sup>5</sup> U. Hartung,"Prädynastische Siegelabrollungen aus dem Friedhof U in Abydos (Umm el-Qaab)", p .187–217.

<sup>6</sup> For more about scarab shaped seals see: E.A.Evans, *Sacred Scarab* (McClung Museum,2013); D.C. Patch, *Exhibitions, Magic in Miniature :Ancient Egyptian Scarabs, Seals & Amulets*(Brooklyn,2013);T. G. Wilfong, *Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals, and seals Impression from Medinet Habu*,(Chicago, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> For more details about the two groups, see Newberry, *op.cit*, p.43-95;W.A.Ward, "The Origin of Egyptian Design-Amulets (BUTTON SEALS)", p. 65ff.

<sup>8</sup> Sparavigna ,*op.cit* , p.13ff.

bone, clay, or stone<sup>9</sup>, (e.g. limestone, steatite ....etc.) or easy to produce faience.<sup>10</sup>

Practically ancient Egyptians used seals to stamp scripts onto a papyrus scroll or clay tablet, and they allowed them to quickly write the information needed over and over again without having to handwriting each hieroglyphic signs.<sup>11</sup>

The original use of the seals was for securing workshops and store-rooms of food from dishonest servant.<sup>12</sup> They were used in tombs, palaces, houses, and temples, in addition, they were used on jars,<sup>13</sup> and pots containing food such as honey or wine with might spoil if they were left open.<sup>14</sup>

The primary purpose was to reveal any unauthorized tampering with the contents of the letters, pottery vessels, baskets, boxes, sacks, storerooms, or tombs that had been sealed.<sup>15</sup> Ownership of documents, jars and others commodities was indicated by means of clay seals, also papyrus rolls were folded and thread which was fastened with a clay seal.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover the archaeological context of sealing is firmer indication of date because, once broken, sealing were not reused. Both sealing and seals provide significant chronological data,<sup>17</sup> so the labels which were held on the jars, pots, and other objects

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<sup>9</sup> R. G. Johnson and Others, *Were Ancient Seals Secure?*, p. 2; B. J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt, Anatomy of Civilization*, p.113.

<sup>10</sup> S. Quirke, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt*, p.119-120.

<sup>11</sup> M. Beyer & M. Keams, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> Newberry, *op. cit*, p12-22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22-26.

<sup>13</sup> P. T. Nicholson & I. Shaw, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, p .291.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p .291.

<sup>15</sup> S. B. Smubert, " Seals and Sealing ", *OEAE*, III, p. 253.

<sup>16</sup> P.T. Nicholson& I. Shaw, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, p. 291; A. R. David& A. E. David, *A biographical Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, p.xvi; Newberry, *op. cit*, p.22-26.

<sup>17</sup> Smubert ,*op.cit*, p. 253.

like funerary furniture considered one of the most important historical resources.<sup>18</sup>

Beside its principal practical use, symbolically the Sacredness character of seals is supposed and it is easily proved by their archaeological contexts. Overwhelming associated with female and child burials, Seals were often worn on necklaces or rings and thus functioned as jewelry or amulets, they are usually found at the neck, either alone or at the center of a bead necklace; a number were found clasped in the hand or on a string around one finger, a few others among toilet articles usually in a small toilet box.<sup>19</sup>

The seal amulets appear in circular, oval and rectangular shapes , they are made of glazed and unglazed steatite, limestone, faience, pottery, bone, ivory and crystal rock; a number of these seals have small ring-shanks on the back, images on it are carved in several types such as: decorative patterns , individual element as hieroglyphic signs,<sup>20</sup> inscriptions with names of kings and gods,<sup>21</sup> geometric patterns and floral designs,<sup>22</sup> shapes of sacred symbols such as the Djed - pillar, the Uraeus, the eye of Hours "Udjat",<sup>23</sup> and sphinxes,<sup>24</sup>

a wide variety of human and animal figures; crocodile, hippopotamus, frog, lizard ,ape, hawk, cat,<sup>25</sup> goats and antelopes,

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<sup>18</sup> W.B. Emrey , *Archaic Egypt, Culture and Civilization in Egypt, Five Thousand Years Ago*, p. 194; for more details about labels, see M. Ohshiro , " Decoding the Wooden Label of King Djer", p.57-64; D. Wengrow, *The Archeology of Early Egypt,Social Transformations in North-East Africa,10,000 to 2650 BC*,P.1-366.

<sup>19</sup> M.Ohshiro , "Decoding the Wooden Label of King Djer", p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> L. D. Morenz, *Bild-Buchstaben und symbolische Zeichen. Die Herausbildung der Schrift in der hohen Kultur Altägyptens*, p.60-68; J. A. Hill,*Cylinder Seal Glyptic in Predynastic Egypt and Neighboring Regions* (BAR. International Series 1223),p. 99ff.

<sup>21</sup> Sparavigna, *op. cit*, p.8.

<sup>22</sup> J.Wegner, *The Mortuary Temple of Senwosret III at Abydos*, p.299 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Beside its symbolic use "the eye of Hours" was a counting tool used by scribes in their accounting calculations, see: M. Ezzamel ,*Order and Accounting as a Performative Ritual: Evidenced from Ancient Egypt, Accounting Organisations and Society*,vol. 34, p.356.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p.31ff.

<sup>25</sup> M. Beyer & M. Keams ,*op.cit*, p.97.

and the most popular seal amulet "scarab beetle", Which was fashioned by its magical powers in to amulet, jewelry, and seals.<sup>26</sup>

Wearing amulets protect the body either in the form of a god, or a seal with a royal name, the meaning of seals, amulets, and votive objects is frequently explained with reference to texts and imagery.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The Egyptians regarded the scarab as a symbol of renewal and rebirth. The beetle was associated closely with the sun god because scarabs roll large balls of dung in which to lay their eggs, Its young were hatched from this ball, a behavior that the Egyptians thought resembled the progression of the sun through the sky from east to west., and this event was seen as an act of spontaneous self-creation, giving the beetle an even stronger association with the sun god's creative force. The scarab pushing its ball was an earthly manifestation of the sun god Re as young sun god, known as Khepri, "the god of creation", he brought light and life to the earth. The first documented use of scarab (dung beetle) by the ancient Egyptians in the early First Dynasty ,Scarab amulets were used for their magical rejuvenating properties by both the living and the dead. Scarabs were used by living individuals as seals from the start of the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055 BCE) onwards, see: C. Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*,P.50-60;Id.,*Ancient Egyptian Jewelry*, p.191-196 ;H.R.Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, etc., in the British Museum*,p. 35-524.; for more details see: J. Sarr, *Highlights of the Gayer-Anderson Scarab Collection*(Portland,2001); A. F.Gorton. *Egyptian and Egyptianizing Scarabs, A typology of steatite, faience and paste scarabs from Punic and other Mediterranean sites* (Oxford,1996); B.Klausnitzer,*Beetles*,Exeter Books(New York.NY,1981); F.S.Matouk, *Corpus du scarabee egyptien, Tome premier* (Beyrouth, 1971); G. Martin, *Egyptian Administrative and Private-Name seals, Principally of the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period* (Oxford, 1971); S. Robard, "The Heart Scarab of the Ancient Egyptians," in: *American Heart Journal* (1953); A. Rowe, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum*(1936); H. R. Hall, *Scarabs* (London, 1929);W. M. F. Petrie, *Buttons and Design Scarabs Illustrated by the Egyptian Collection in University College*(London, 1925);Id.,*Scarabs and cylinders with names: illustrated by the Egyptian collection in University College* (London, 1917); *Id., Amulets, illustrated by the Egyptian Collection in University College*(London, 1914); P. E. Newberry, *The Timins Collection of Ancient Egyptian Scarabs and Cylinder Seals*(London, 1907);Id., *Scarabs: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian Seals and Signet Rings*(London, 1906); J. Ward, *The Sacred Beetle, A Popular Treatise on Egyptian Scarabs in Art and History*(New York, 1902) G. Fraser, *A Catalog of the Scarabs belonging George Fraser* (London, 1900);W. M. F. Petrie, *Historical Scarabs Chronologically Arranged: A series of drawings from the principal collections*(London, 1889).

<sup>27</sup>A.B.Wiese, *Die Anfänge der Ägyptischen Stempelsiegel-Amulette:eine Typologische und Religions Geschichtliche Untersuchung zu den "Knopfsiegein" und Verwandten Objekten der 6 bis Frühen 12.Dynastie*,p.144ff; G. Dreyer, *Elephantine VIII;Der Temple Satet,Die Funde der Frühzeit und des Alien Reiches*, p.76.

Probably using seals as amulets appeared as a result to some beliefs according to ancient Egyptian religion, such as:

1- The ancient Egyptians believed that each human consisted of essential entities, *ht*, *k3*, *b3*, *3h*, *šwt*, *ib* and *rn*, and to enjoy the afterlife, some of these elements had to be sustained and protected from harm<sup>28</sup>. One of these elements was "*rn*" which means "Name and reputation", it was closely bound up with magic<sup>29</sup>, it was believed that knowledge of somebody's name gave one insight into his being and power over him,<sup>30</sup>

and the erasing of the name was considered to be equivalent to the destruction, so the deceased was believed to be immortal, and the greatest horror was to have one's name destroyed, and he would live for as long as his name was spoken, which explains why efforts were made to protect it.

Consequently it could be suggested that the main reason of using the seals as amulets depended on bearing one of the essential elements of the person "the name", which were responsible for securing the person's afterlife.

There are some texts confirmed the important role of the name in ancient Egyptians beliefs, such as a part of some inscriptions from the tomb of Petosiris, the high Priest of Thoth in Hermopolis, which said:

"A man is survived when his name is pronounced".<sup>31</sup>

2-The seals were buried with the deceased among other materials and tools which were used in magical practices<sup>32</sup>, in order to ensure his resurrection in the netherworld.

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<sup>28</sup>F. Fleming & A. Lothian, *Ancient Egypt's Myths and Beliefs*, p.9; H. Glennys & O. Leaman, *Encyclopedia of death and dying*, p.238.

<sup>29</sup> W. Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, p.157-181.

<sup>30</sup> For more about the name and other elements see :G.C. Borioni, "Der Ka aus religionswissenschaftlicher Sicht", *Veröffentlichungen der Institute für Afrikanistik und Ägyptologie der Universität* (Wien, 2005); F.M.D. Friedman, "Akh". In: *OEA*, I, p. 47-48.

<sup>31</sup> M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol III, p.45f

<sup>32</sup> D. Rankine, *Heka: The Practices of Ancient Egyptian Ritual and Magic*, p.1-196.

3-Some seals bore the names of gods which means- according to the Egyptians beliefs- that the knowledge of how to use and to make mention of names which possessed magical powers was a necessity both for the living and the dead. It was believed that if a man knew the name of a god or a demon, and addressed him by it, he was bound to answer him and to do whatever he wished.

So, it could be suggested that seals gained its sacredness character mainly through the power of the illustrated Images and the inscribed names and other material on it, the power that remained effective as long as they physical existed.<sup>33</sup>

### **Some features confirmed the sacredness of seals**

#### **•Seals as devices of protection.**

Referring to a later papyrus, demonstrates that seals and amulets were used in conjunction with medical treatment and spells for the protection especially of the mother and child, fertility, birth and child-care<sup>34</sup>; so the majority of them-as mentioned previously- were found in burials of women and children, who wore seals since late Old Kingdom in conjunction with amulets and beads strung on necklaces, whereas men wore them no earlier than the beginning of the Middle Kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Concludes the seals in burials of women and children were understood to function as part of amulets as opposed to administrative devices when found in male burials.<sup>36</sup> Seals and amulets were worn on the body during lifetime and populated the dead body in the burial for protection.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> S. I. Johnston, "Magic" in: *Religious of the Ancient World*, p.142-147; D.T.M. Frankfurter, "The writing of Magic and the Magic of Writing", p.189-221.

<sup>34</sup> K. Szpakowska, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt: Recreating Lahun*, p.69-70; L. Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt*, p.69-79.

<sup>35</sup> U. Dubiel, *Amulette, Siegel und Perlen: Studien zu Typologie und Tragesitte im Alten und Mittleren Reich*, p.145.

<sup>36</sup> C. Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture*, in C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.3ff.

<sup>37</sup> U. Dubiel, op-cit, p.71-74; E. Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, p. 167-170.

There are some texts confirmed the sacredness character of seals as devices of protection, for instance a hymn that describes the creator god Amon-Re in the role of a magician states that "Anything harmful is under his seal". The harmful forces would be unable to pass this symbol of divine authority and images of hostile forces might be placed in sealed boxes to restrain them. One of the rites performed in temples was known as The Book of Sealing the Mouths of the Enemy. Some anti-venom spells promise to seal the mouths of poisonous snakes. Sometimes it might be desirable to "seal" the magician or a patient to prevent harmful forces from entering them. Symbolic sealing of the seven natural orifices of the body is mentioned in texts of the late first millennium BC. The gesture of laying a hand on the patient is sometimes linked with sealing. One spell to safeguard a child promises "My hand is on you, my seal is your protection".<sup>38</sup>

#### •The crime of breaking the seal:

In the papyrus of Imhotep son of Pshentohe from the Ptolemaic Period mentioned that the breaking of the seal regarded as a misdeed as which the god of evil Seth had done, that among his many misdeeds he was accused of breaking the seal, so the texts said that breaking the seal was a crime caused the punishment by the god Re and destroying the *b3*, without which the person could not get resurrection in the after world,<sup>39</sup> as follows:

"you have opened the secret chest (coffin) which is in Heliopolis in order to see what was in it ,(although) it had been sealed with the seal of seventy-seven deities ...Re smites (you on) your head ,he will destroy your *b3*".<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p. 84.

<sup>39</sup>J. P. Allen, *Oxford Guide: The Essential Guide to Egyptian Mythology*,p.28 ;J. P. Allen, "Ba", in: *OEAE*,I,P. 161–162; J. F. Borghouts, "Divine Intervention in Ancient Egypt and Its Manifestation (b3w)",p.1–70; L.V. Žabkar, "*A Study of the Ba Concept In Ancient Egyptian Texts*", p.162–163.

<sup>40</sup> See papyrus of Imhotep son of Pshentohe, New York, MMA 35,9.21,3; J. L. Foster, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 240; J. C. Goyon, *Le Papyrus d'Imoathès, Fils de Psintaès*

Consequently the deceased had to keep seals from damage in order to secure his *b3*, by which he would secure his resurrection in the after world.

•**The seal and sacredness of the place:**

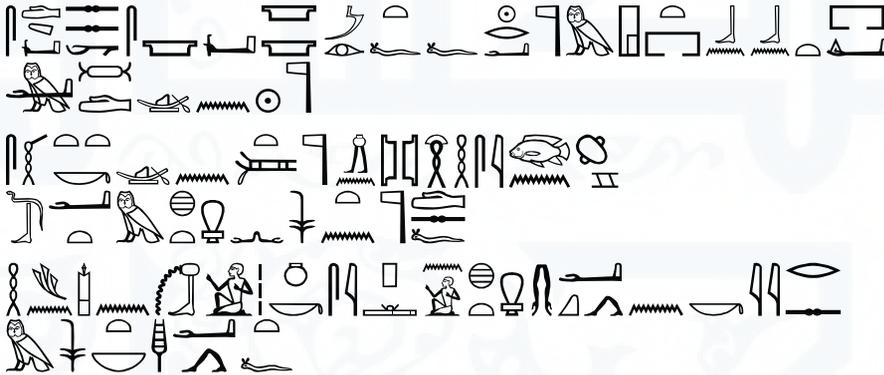
It could be suggested that a sealed place had its sacredness as a result that breaking the seal was regarded as a crime which caused the punishment of the god and destroying the *b3* in the afterlife. There is a text from the victory stela of king Piye from the temple of Amon at Napata (Cairo JE48862, 47086-47089)<sup>41</sup> cleared that sealing any place with a seal donate this place a specific sanctity and a special sacredness, as after sealing any place no one can enter it even kings themselves as the king Piye said when he visited sanctuaries of Heliopolis:<sup>42</sup>

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au Metropolitan Museum of Art de New York (Papyrus MMA 35.9.21),( New York,1999);J.H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* ,IV , P. 992, 25.

<sup>41</sup>R. B. Gozzoli, *The Writing of History in Ancient Egypt during the First Millennium BC*, p.54-67;O.Perdu,"*La Chefferie de Sébehnytos de Piankhyà Psammétique Ier*", P.95-111; For more about the stela see: A.K. Ritner, *The Stela of Piye,in the Literature of Ancient Egypt. Anthology of Stories Instruction, Stela, Autobiographies and Poetry*, ed.W. K. Simpson (Yale,2003); R. B.Gozzoli, Piye Imitates Tutmose III: Trends in a Nubian Historiographical Text of the Early Phase, *in: Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, vol. 3, p.204-217;N.Grimal, *La Stèle Tromphale de Piankhy* (Le Caire, 1982).

<sup>42</sup> *Urk*,III,39,5-16



*sd swy sn ʕwy m33 it.f R<sup>c</sup> m hwt-bnbnt dsr m<sup>c</sup>ndt n R<sup>c</sup> <m>sktt  
n Itm in ʕwy w3h sin db<sup>c</sup>t m htm n nsw<sup>43</sup> ds.f hn.n w<sup>c</sup>bw ink  
sip.n.i htm n ʕk . n ky r.s m nsw nb ʕh<sup>c</sup>.t (y). f(y).*

"Breaking the (seal of) the bolts , opening the double doors , beholding his father Re in the holy compound - of - pyramidion , the morning bark of Re and the evening bark of Atum closing the double doors , applying the clay, and sealing with the king's own seal .He charged the priests: I have proved(examined) the seal; No other shall enter in to it, of all the kings who shall arise".<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Due to the importance of the seals there were some titles attached to both royal and divine seals such as: " *sd3wty-bity*" and " *htm-bity* ", "The seal bearer "it was one of the most common convental title ,For more about the title see:S.Quirke,"The Regular Titles of the Late Middle Kingdom" , p.123; M. Baud, *Famille royale et pouvoirsous l'Ancien Égyptien*, p. 241; W. Grajetzki, "Die höchsten Beamten der ägyptischen Zentralverwaltung Zur Zeit des Mittleren Reiches: prospographie, Titel und Titelreihen", *Acht Schriften zur Ägyptologie* 2, p.107, 114-115; S. Quirke, *Titles and Bureaux of Egypt 1850-1700 BC*, *Egyptology* 1, p.6; O.Berlev , "Contemporary of King Sewa H – EN – RE" , p.109; PM V,231,235, 240; E. P. Uphill, *Brief Communications* , p.250.

The title " *sd3wty-ntr*" and " *htm-ntr*" "Divine Sealer" it was attached to service of various gods as *Imn sd3wty-ntr* "Divine Sealer of Amon" , or they were employed by the religious authorities of certain districts For more see : P. E. Newberry, *Ancient Egyptian scarab*,p. 31-32.

<sup>44</sup> T. Eide and others, *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum (Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD* vol. 1 ,p.100-111; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literatures*, vol. III, p.77; J.H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV, p. 816ff .

## •The sacredness of the process of sealing:

The demotic Insinger papyrus<sup>45</sup> makes an admonition from speaking during the process of sealing, which refers to the holiness of the process of sealing alike other religious rites. The writer of papyrus mentioned that instruction: "Don't cheat at the time of sealing".<sup>46</sup>

## The relationship between the seals and the god Thoth

There are many texts confirmed the relationship between seals and the god Thoth such as:

- According to Spell 8 from book of the dead<sup>47</sup> the god Thoth was not only responsible to seals during daily life but also in the netherworld, and he was responsible to seal the deceased' head as follows:



*wn n.i wnyw htm tp.i Dhwti ikr*

Open to me (O), Shmounein<sup>48</sup>, seal my head, O, the great Thoth.

Sealing the head of the deceased probably refers symbolically that the god Thoth put all his knowledge of writings, magic and secrets in it, the knowledge by which the closed doors of netherworld would be opened to the deceased, and also helped him in accessing its hazards. There are many texts Consolidate this assumption, for instance some spells from book of the dead

<sup>45</sup> Insinger papyrus contains writing about Egyptian wisdom teaching (*sb3yt*), the manuscript is dated to second century AD, For more about the papyrus see: K. T. Zauzich, in: M. Lichthiem, *Wisdom Literature in International Context*, p.107-109. F. Lexa, *Papyrus Insinger*, p.1-113; W. R. James, *The Morphology and Syntax of Papyrus Insinger* (Chicago, 1948).

<sup>46</sup> M. Lichthiem, *Ancient Egyptian Literatures*, vol III, p.206.

<sup>47</sup> *BD*, I, 31; R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, P.36.

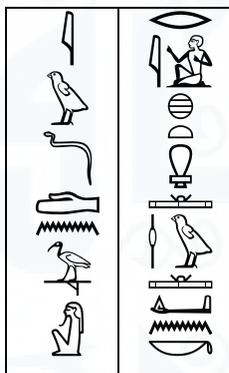
<sup>48</sup> Hermopolis is "Shmounein" in Coptic rendering, see M. Verner, *Temples of the World: Sanctuaries, Cult, and Mysteries of Ancient Egypt*, p.149; also there are many texts related between *Dhwti* and the eight spirits of Hermopolis for example chapter 114 from book of the dead see: *BD*, II, 109; R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, P.113.

which confirmed that the god Thoth had all knowledge , writings , magic and secrets, and he can hide them from all people.<sup>49</sup>

- A part of papyrus Setne I,12-14 mentioned that the deceased would charm the netherworld when he recite a spell which Thoth wrote with his own hand, as follows:

"I will have you taken to the place where that Thoth wrote with his own hand.....two spells are written in it. When you recite the first spell, you will ] charm the sky, the earth, the netherworld".<sup>50</sup>

- According to spell 134<sup>51</sup> of coffin text the god Thoth was responsible to seal the decrees as follows:



*-Iw dd n. Dhwtj r.i htm .(i)wd di.(tw) n.k.*

"Thoth has said to me "I seal the decree which is given to you".

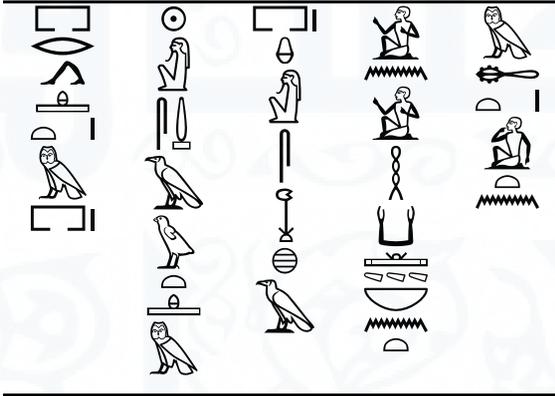
- According to Spell 657 of coffin text<sup>52</sup> the house of Thoth is the place where letters was sealed in as follows:

<sup>49</sup>BD ,II, ch.CXVI,111-112; BD ,III,ch.CLXX,52;R.O. Faulkner. *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, P.170; D. Kurth,"Thot", *LÄ IV*, p .497-523.

<sup>50</sup> M. J. Raven, *Egyptian Magic the Quest for Thoth Book of Secrets*,p.75.

<sup>51</sup> CT, II, 159; R.O. Faulkner .*The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, I , 116.

<sup>52</sup> CT, VI, 278;R.O.Faulkner .*The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, II, 228.



*pr md3t m pr R<sup>c</sup> sd3wt m pr Dhwtj sh3.n.i hk3w nb(w) nt (i) m ht.i tn.*

The letter goes out from the house of Re, having been sealed in the house of Thoth, and I have called to mind all the magic which is in this my belly".

Probably the relationship between the god Thoth and the seals came from both the relationship between the seals and writing, and the close relationship between the god Thoth and magic, writing, and all its affections, including seals , as he was the god of writing, the creator of language, and the inventor of hieroglyphic writing ,<sup>53</sup> so he was the patron deity of scribes<sup>54</sup> , and he was described in many texts as the skilled scribe such as:

*"Ink Dhwtj sš-ikr<sup>55</sup>."*

"I am Thoth the skilled scribe".

Thoth was illustrated holding the script'tools,<sup>56</sup> and he was regarded as the sealer of medical texts in late periods.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> J. Černý, "Thoth as a Creator of Language", p.121-22.

<sup>54</sup> D. Kurth, "Thot", *LÄ* VI, p. 496- 523; Boylon, *op. cit.*,p.124; J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, p.80-81;G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p. 61ff.

<sup>55</sup> Chapter 182 from book of the dead, see *BD*, III, 101 ; R. O. Faulkner. *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*,p.181.

<sup>56</sup> L. Spence, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, p.106.

<sup>57</sup> *Wb*, III, 351, 18-21.

According to Clement of Alexandria, the Egyptians had forty-two secret books of wisdom, written by Hermes (Thoth), which were kept in temples, and included collections of laws, hymns and rituals, books about the gods and the training of priests, and works on astrology, cosmology, geography and medicine.<sup>58</sup>

According to Egyptian mythology Thoth apparently wrote a lot, and all his writings were put into a book called 'the Book of Thoth'. It apparently had a great sum of secrets of the universe in it, apparently if you read it you would get awesome magical powers, but you would also be troubled by a life filled with disaster.

Beside the texts which confirmed the relationship between seals and the god Thoth, there are many seals and impressions of seals engraved either with the symbols of the god Thoth such as a small plaque with two monkeys on its back Egyptian Museum<sup>59</sup> or with the name of the god Thoth, especially some clay seals from Tuna al-Gebel necropolis which accumulate between the sacred relationship between the god Thoth and seals, and the god Thoth's function as the main god at "Hermopolis Magna" Tuna al-Gebel.

I expose hereunder -for example- three congruent black oval base clay seals<sup>60</sup> which were excavated during the regular excavations of Cairo University under the directorship of S.Gabra in the Tuna al-Gebel necropolis.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup>G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p.61.

<sup>59</sup>A. Sparavigna, *Ancient Egyptian Seals and Scarabs*, P.16.

<sup>60</sup> For more about the clay seals, See: M. Depauw, *The Demotic Letter. A study of Epistolographic Scribal Traditions against their Intra-and Intercultural Background*, p. 42-43 ;H. De. Meulenaere, "Egypte Pharaonique, Trois Empreintes de Sceaux", P.25-29.

<sup>60</sup> L. Spence, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, p.106.

<sup>61</sup>Tuna el Gabel necropolis at Mallawi center about seven km from El-Ashmunein, it was the capital of the fifteenth district, which was known *Wnt*  "The rabbit district", and it was known "Hermopolis" in Greek. Also it was known *Hmnw* , which means the eights district; this name was related to the creation myth of El-Ashmunein which concept that eight gods which structured as four males and females couples personified

They are kept now in the Mallawi museum under the inventory number 479, engraved on their base with brief hieroglyphic text.<sup>62</sup>

**The text:**



**Transliteration:**

1-s3 R<sup>c</sup> n h.t.f Nk3.w.

2-Ntr nfr nb t3.wy Whm-ib-r<sup>c</sup>.

3-Mry Dhwtwy 3 3 nb Hmnw di ʿnh mi R<sup>c</sup> dt.

**Translation:**

1-The son of Re from his body Nekau.

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entities within the primeval matter ,with the gods envisaged as frogs and snakes created the universe, The name Tuna el Gebel is derived from the ancient Egyptian word "t3 hnt" which means" the lake", For more see: D. Kessler, "Hermopolis", *OEA*,II,P.94; G.Hart, *Egyptian Myths*,p.19-22;U. Kaplony-Heckel, "Demotika in Mallawi" ,P. 57–58 ; D.Kessler ,"Tuna el Gebel", *LA* VI ,p.797 ; J. Baines& J. Malek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*,p.126 ;D. Kessler,"Hermupolis Magna", *LA* II,P .1137;*Wb*, III,283,2; L.Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian myth and History*, ,p.16; S. Morenz , *Egyptian Religion*,p.178;*Wb*, III,105;K. Sethe , *Amun und die Acht Urgötter von Hermopolis*,p.84; H .Gauthier, *Dictionnaire des les Noms Geographique Contenus dans les Textes Hieroglyphiques*,I,p.197.

<sup>62</sup>There are similar eight clay seals which were also kept in the Mallawi Museum on the second floor under Inv. No. 487, see U.Kaplony-Heckel, "Demotika in Mallawi" ,P. 57–58; H. Mesiha & M. El-Hitta, *Mallawi Antiquity Museum. A Brief description*, p. 20; S. Gabra, *Chez les derniers adorateurs du Trismegiste, La necropole d'Hermopolis. Touna el-Gebel. Souvenir d'un Archéologue* ,p.177.

2- The lord of two lands *Whm-ib-R<sup>c</sup>*.

3- The Beloved of Thoth, the twice great, the lord of Hermopolis, giving life like Re eternity.

**Comment:**

- These seals were used in sealing the demotic documents from the Tuna al-Gebel necropolis which are kept in the Mallawi Museum, especially sealed demotic papyri and letters written on papyrus from the subterranean galleries of the sacred animals (Gallery C).<sup>63</sup>

- They were found inside the oldest Gallery "D", which is dated -in general - to the Saite period (664-525 B.C.),<sup>64</sup> specifically the reign of the king Nekau the son of Psametik (610-595),<sup>65</sup> except a part from its northern area of G-D-D, which dated to the Persian period.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore these seals could be dated either to the Saite period,<sup>67</sup> or the Persian, while I suggest that they are dated to the Saite period, by comparison the way of writing the hieroglyphic writing , especially the way of writing the cartouche of the pharaoh " Nekau" (  ) and his title 'Wehem-Ib-Re' with some impressions of seals engraved with the name of Nekau and

his title 'Wehem-Ib-Re' (  ), which are dated to the Saite period (the XXVIth Dynasty ) , such as Plaster outer Jar-sealing with four impressions of a seal engraving with the name of Nekau from Tell Dafnah, Handle of a jar on which is impressed a seal

<sup>63</sup> El-Hussein O. Zaghoul, *Frühdemotische Urkunden aus Hermopolis*, p.10–11 Taf. I– II.

<sup>64</sup> D. Kessler & M.A., Nur EL-Din, *Tuna al-Gebel. Millions of Ibises and Other Animals*, p. 120-163; A.Von Den Driesch and Others, 'Mummified Baboons and Other Primates from the Saitic-Ptolemaic Animal Necropolis of Tuna el-Gebel, Middle Egypt', p. 235.

<sup>65</sup> A. Dodson & D.Hilton, *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt*, p. 242ff; J.Vercoutter, *L'Egypte Ancienne*, p.120.

<sup>66</sup> D. Kessler & M.A., Nur EL-Din, *Tuna al-Gebel. Millions of Ibises and Other Animals*, p.139-140; D. Kessler, "Die Galerie C von Tuna el-Gebel", *MDAIK* 39, p.120-123.

<sup>67</sup> The twenty-sixth dynasty (664-525 B.C) was the strongest dynasty in the late period, which was known "Saite period", for more see: S. Ikram, *Ancient Egypt*, p.110.

in form of a plumed and disked cartouche , containing the name of Nekau from Tell Dafnah ,and a blue faience cartouche-plaque, inscribed on the obverse 'king of upper and lower Egypt 'Wehem-Ib-Re , son of the sun Nekau'.<sup>68</sup>

- The god Thoth is described here "*Dḥwty ʿ3 ʿ3 nb Ḥmnw*", "Thoth, the twice great, lord of Hermopolis", the most popular epithet of the god Thoth in Hermopolis, while his famous epithets were the lord of the Ogdoad, and "the great triple", and the great five-times.<sup>69</sup>

In sum, seals played an important role in ancient Egypt. They were not only used as administrative securing devices for the state bureaucracy, private individual, documents, containers, places, but also they had a sacredness character which is confirmed by using them as protective amulets during daily life and in the netherworld, the relationship between seals and sacredness of places, and the sacredness of the process of sealing itself.

Additionally there are some texts confirmed the relationship between seals and the god Thoth, the relationship through which it could be suggested that as Thoth was the god of wisdom, magic, and writing , he also the god who was responsible for seals and sealing in ancient Egyptian religion.

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<sup>68</sup> W. Budge, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs*, p.291-294.

<sup>69</sup>R. K. Ritner,"Hermes Pentamegistos",P.73-75;*Id.*,"Additional Notes to Hermes Pentamegistos", 67-68; J. Parlebas, L'origine Égyptienne de L'appellation "Hermès Trismegiste",p .25-28; For further details on this epithet, see:*Wb* ,I, 163,5; the same epithet mentioned in many texts such as: O Hor 25,4; O Hor 28,12;P.OL 19422,1; For discussions of the name and epithets of Thoth see: Maria-Theresia Derchain-Urtel, "Thot à Akhmim" Hommages à Francois Daumas, p.173-180; *Id.*, *Thot à travers ses épithètes dans les scènes d'offrandes des temples d'époque gréco-romaine* (Rites Égyptiens, 3)( Bruxelles ,1981); J. Quaegebeur, "Thot-Hermes, le dieu le plus grand!" Hommages à Francois Daumas , p. 525-544; J. Ray, *The Archive of Hor* ,p.158-161;D.C.J. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thot, Two Keys Figures of the Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p.112;W.Helck,"Der Name des Thot",SAK4 (1976);W.Budge, *op. cit.*, p.157.

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*Plates of the seals from the Mallawi museum (Inv.Nr.479)*





*Photos from the Mallawi museum*

## قدسية بعض الأختام وعلاقتها بالمعبود جحوتى

د. هيام حافظ رواش\*

### الملخص:

لعبت الأختام دوراً هاماً فى مصر القديمة، فالأختام لم تكن تستخدم فقط إستخداماً إدارياً كأدوات لتأمين الممتلكات الحكومية والخاصة، والوثائق، والأماكن ولكنها أستُخدمت أيضاً كتمايم سواء فى الحياة الدنيا او فى الحياة الآخرة. وقد توافر لدينا بعض الدلائل التى تؤكد على قدسية الأختام فى مصر القديمة منها على سبيل المثال:

- الأختام كتمايم للحماية.
- جريمة فض الختم.
- الختم وقدسية المكان.
- قدسية عملية الختم.

والحقيقة أنه بالإضافة إلى قدسية الأختام فهناك بعض النصوص التى توضح لنا العلاقة الوثيقة بينها وبين المعبود جحوتى، تلك العلاقة التى تجعلنا نفترض أنه إلى جانب دور الرئيسى للمعبود جحوتى كمعبود للحكمة، السحر، والكتابة، فقد كان أيضاً هو المعبود المسئول عن عملية الختم والأختام فى العقيدة المصرية القديمة.

### الكلمات الدالة:

قدسية، الأختام، عملية الختم، تمايم، حماية، تأمين، علاقة، المعبود جحوتى .

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