

Lasso and its Role as Nets in Religious Texts

Magda Gad

ملخص:

Many words referring to the action of to ‘tie’, or to the ‘names of the tools’ with which any undesirable things could be bounded, were used in the Egyptian texts.

These words could be classified into two categories; the first of which are the words that could be translated into ‘bonds or fetters’ and as also ‘to tie or to bind with ropes or bonds’.¹

The other is that which bears the meaning of ‘to lasso or to capture/constrain with the lasso’ next to the previous meaning and which is to be the focus of this study.

In his article, Ogdon has mentioned that ‘lasso’, which was a prehistoric ‘weapon’ as an element of the chase-equipment,² is one of the most recurrent means to paralyze the action of an enemy whether of this or the Otherworld; and this opinion depends on his interpretation of the word ‘lasso’ as ‘any tied cord that binds’.

So, the essential function of the lasso is to ‘tie’ the prey,³ to immobilize its movement, deprive of its power, to make it impotent and unable to act.⁴

Apart from that role; the current paper is mainly concerned with the ‘lasso’ as an instrument, used instead of the ‘net’, whereby one can catch.

Accordingly, to that, and through studying texts and scenes, it can be concluded that Lassoes are confined and involved only in:

1. Catching the deceased.
2. Catching the enemies of the gods.

1. Catching the deceased

The dangers that face the deceased being caught, are not confined to nets,⁵ but also to lassoes; one of the ways used by fishermen, fowlers and hunters⁶ to capture fish, birds, and animals.

The soul of the deceased is exposed to be lassoed, as is the case with the net, in many incidents, the first of which is:

1.1 Lassoing the deceased while ascending to Heaven

The deceased always wishes not to get entangled with a lasso, lest he should be prevented from his ascension to the Afterlife.⁷ An ascension text of the *Pyramid Texts* starts with a speech of the goddess Nut. She asserts that her son, the king, is coming in peace, without being withheld:

n hry ndh⁸ hr s3.f n hry ht dwt hr °.f

‘On whose back no lasso has fallen, on whose arm nothing bad has fallen’.⁹

1.2 Inside the realm of the deceased

The soul of the deceased could be exposed to be caught by a lasso, carried out through the demons, with whom the underworld is swarmed:

I sph¹⁰ b3w m hrw m-hnw dw3t

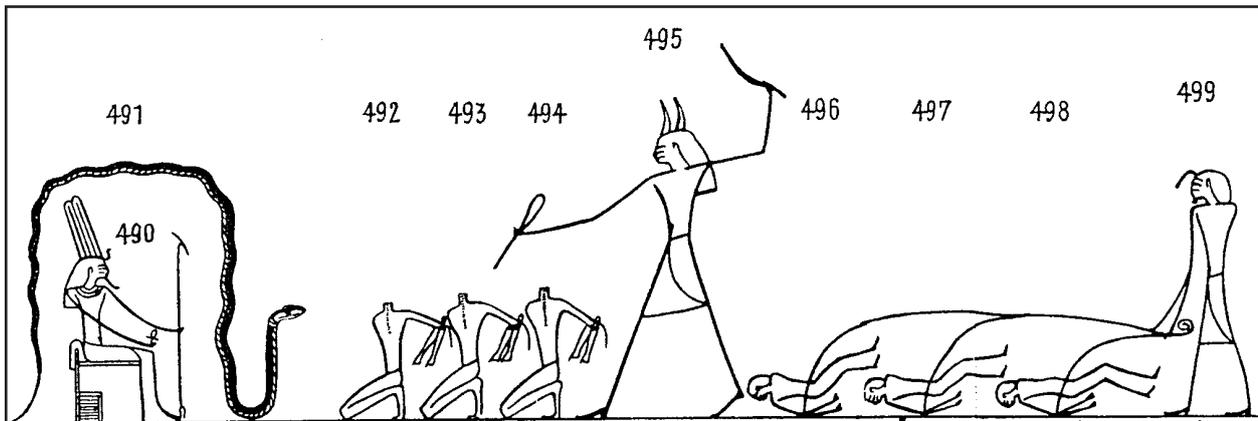
‘O, you who lassoes the souls at the daytime in the interior of the Netherworld’.¹¹

So a god who is responsible for protecting the deceased, is now threatening those demons saying:

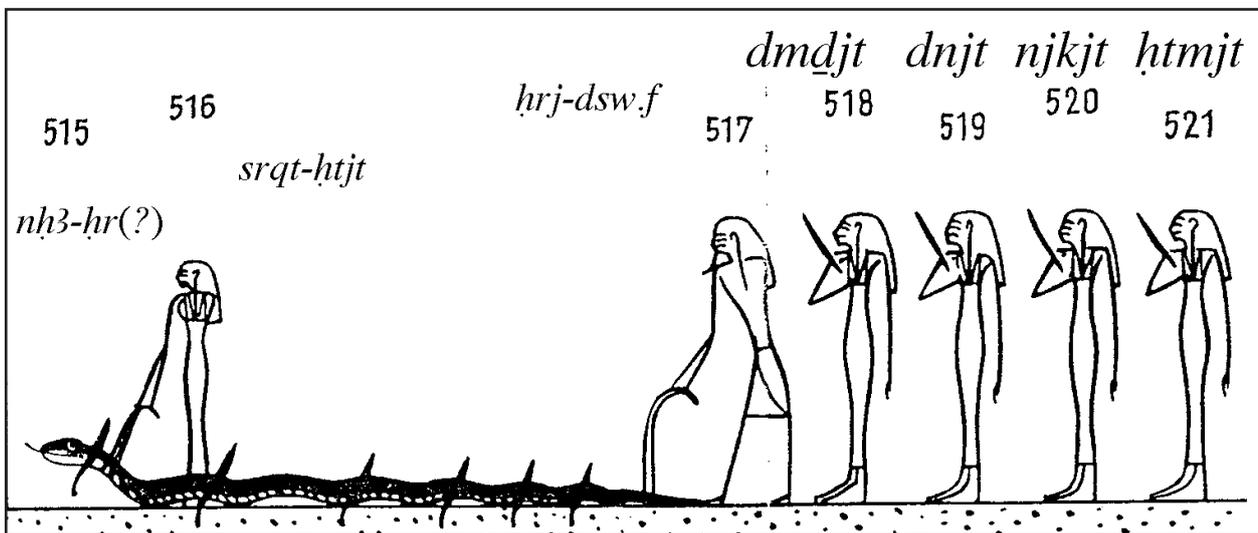
*iy r sph nn di.i sph.k iy r wdi n.i nn di.i wdi.
(k) iw.i r wdi t(w) iw.i r sph t(w) iw.i m s3 n NN*

‘O you who come to lasso, I will not let you lasso; O you who come to harm, I will not let (you) to do harm. I will harm you, and I will lasso you; for I am NN’s protection’.¹²

A similar spell is found on an amuletic papyrus dating back to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, where the potential enemies or rather the demons are not personified but identified.



(Fig. 2)



(Fig. 3)

‘May you grant that all his members repose in the Necropolis: in other words, the Realm of the Dead. He is divine, his corpse is complete, he is saved from the ‘Evil-place’ (one of the places of judgment),¹⁷ and he does not lasso him’.¹⁸

1.2.2 Using lassoes to catch the deceased being a repast for the King

In a Cannibalistic passage, the deceased fears that he could be caught with the lasso like a cow to be offered to the king, who eats men and gods, and through this way he estimates their strength:

N pw wnm rmt ʿnh m ntrw In hmʿ wpwt imy kh3w sph sn n N

‘The king is one who eats men and lives on the gods It is the Grasper-of-top knots¹⁹ who is in *kh3w*?²⁰ who lassoes them for the king’.²¹

2. Catching the enemies of the gods

In his biography *Rekhemire* speaks about the king depicting him with some qualities as being god Re, lord of the sky, and king of the two lands the black and red lands (coming) to his place, the Greats

of which are subjugated to him, and too:

*rmt nbt p^ct nbt rhyt nbt m hyhnw²² hr sph ph sw
šnt sw*

*‘All men, all patricians, and all subjects are in jubilation when lassoing (catching with a lasso) those who dare to approach him, surrounding him’.*²³

According to that, people who might form a threat are to be considered enemies, equated sometimes with demons as in a Late-Period text:

*Šhm šmzyw n Šhmt im.k sph tw imyw sphw
di.n.tw sdb n h3ytyw rnpt*

*‘(Now), the Nomads of Sekhmet have power over you, and those who are in sphw- fetters lasso you. Harm was given to the h3ytyw²⁴ - demons of the year (at the epagomenal)’.*²⁵

This idea of catching people with a lasso to make them impotent and unable to act, deprived of their power lest they hurt others; is the concept upon which the deceased, classified as enemies through this tool might be punished.

As stated, there is a twofold judgment of the deceased; the righteous are protected, and the sinners are punished.

So the deceased who have sinned generally on Earth, being classified later when judged as enemies of the god Osiris or of the god Re, are among other punishments, caught with a lasso and taken to the slaughter places as cattle:

Ir.i shrw n ntyw m db3t s[p]h.i hftyw r Htmyt

‘I take care of those who are in the Netherworld. I catch the enemies with the lasso for Htmyt- the Place of Destruction’.^{26, 27}

a) Lassoing the enemies of the god Osiris

Lasso, as a net, might be also a tool with which the enemies of the god Osiris could be caught.

Horus, the son and the defender, is lassoing the enemies of his father:

*h3 Wsir ink s3.k Hr iy.n.i sph.n.i n.k hftyw.k
m w3w.sn*

*‘O Osiris! I am your son Horus; I have come, having lassoed your enemies for you with their own ropes’.*²⁸

One of those butchers, known as *nmtyw* represented in the upper register of the fifth hour of the *Amduat* and whose roles are to protect Osiris, is entitled as: *‘nn hr sphwt ‘that with turned face, who catches with a lasso’.*²⁹

Then gripping the god Seth and his gang could have been carried out, not only by nets, but also lassoes.

The annihilation of the enemies of Osiris is well represented in the seventh hour of the *Amduat*, upper register (Figures 1 and 1a).

Here Osiris is seated on a throne under a canopy formed as a great cobra. His foes are in two groups, the first of which are beheaded and bound kneeling before him, entitled as *hftyw Wsir ‘the enemies of Osiris’*. The second group is of three figures, described as *wty ‘the bound’*,³⁰ lying on the ground and being lassoed by a standing god who bears the title of *nikw ‘the one who punishes’*.³¹

The text accompanying the scene highlights the punishments carried out on those enemies as a final destination, after being caught with those lassoes:

*In hm n ntr pn wt r Wsir h3kw r hnty-dw3t
nttw n wy.tn ... htm n b3w.tn nik tn nikw m
nkyt.f*

‘So says the majesty of this god: you who acted wickedly against Osiris, who rebelled against xnty-

dwAt, chains are to your arms . . . , destruction is to your souls . . . , the chastiser chastises you with his knife.³²

The lasso also shared the role of the net in capturing the enemies of the *nšmt* – bark:³³

i sby ḥft n nšmt ḥ3yty sw m ḥ3yt (Var. ḥ3d sw m ḥ3dt) snḥ sw m tm

‘O, rebel , you the enemy of the nšmt - bark, , (Speech directed to the executioners) catch him with the ḥ3yty - net (or the ḥ3dt - trap), and bind him with the tm - lasso’.³⁴

b) Lassoing the enemies of the god Re

Punishing Apophis, the eternal adversary of the sun-god Re, being caught with a lasso, is evident too in the seventh hour of the *Amduat*, middle register (Figures 1 and 1b).

Facing the bark of Re, on the prow of which stands the goddess Isis pronouncing incantations, the goddess *Srkt-ḥtyt* ‘*She who gives breath*’ and a god *ḥry-dsw.f* ‘*he who is over his knives*’, have lassoed Apophis whose body is transfixed with knives. Behind are four goddesses, whose functions are referred through their epithets.³⁵

The purpose of that action shows apparently, through the accompanied text:

wdi.ḥr Srkt-ḥtt sphw m tp Ḥry-dsw.f di.f sphw nykt m rdwy.f m-ḥt nḥm Ḥst Ḥk3-smsw pḥty.f m ḥk3w.sn

‘Then the goddess Srkt-ḥtyt ‘She who gives breath’ places lassoes on the head, and the god Ḥry-dsw.f ‘He who is over his knives’, he puts lassoes (whose names) to nykt ‘The punished (one)’ on his feet after having Isis and ‘The Great magician’ have deprived his strength through their magic’.³⁶

Conclusion

Lasso, in its role as nets, carries only the name *Sph* referring to the action of catching; and so the tool itself apart from using the word *ndḥ* in one case, and *tm* in another case, as a name of the lasso-rope.

The word *Sph* may be a causative of *ph* ‘to cause to reach’ of a rope.³⁷ Other texts use this word with a more extended meaning, to become a general term for ‘to capture’ or ‘to constrain’.³⁸

Lasso was used as a net in many roles, but on a smaller range, and in a very small number of texts.

Unlike the texts that show the role of the nets that have been developed through different periods, lassoes were confined only to two roles, the first of which focused on the obstruction of the deceased to reach heaven, being in one case a repast for the king and assigning the sinners to the Place of Destruction. The second is concerned with punishing the enemies of god Re and god Osiris.

Notes

- 1 About the ropes and bonds with which the deceased is bound see, *CT II 112c: Ḥ k3 tni.i nttw.k Ḥ k3 rdi.(i) n.k inttw snḥḥḥ* ‘*O Bull, I lift up your bonds; O bull, I give to you your loosened fetters*’; *CT I 70 b-d: n ḍḍḥ.t(w).k n ḥnr.t(w).k n int.(tw).k* ‘*you shall not be imprisoned, you shall not be restrained, you shall not be fettered*’. The verb *k3s* is one of the most recurrent words denoting this idea, cf. *PT 349a-350c*; as usual the objects of the verb are foes of the god Horus or the king; the god Seth is brought in *k3s.f*; enemies are tied *k3s* in a *ntt* –rope, see: P. Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexicon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfou*, OLA 78 (Leuven, 1997), 1047. See too the fetters with which Apophis is hindered in *CT V 245c: smn intw.f in ntrw* ‘his fetters have been made firm by the gods’. For more about bonds, ropes, fetters see: J. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions* (Brill, 1960), 78-80,108,125-132.
- 2 *LÄ III 938; Cf.fig.1 (Hunter Palette BM 20790)* in: J.R. Ogdon, ‘*Studies in Ancient Egyptian magical Thought III. Knots and Ties. Notes on Ancient Ligatures*’, *DE 7* (1987), 29
- 3 Here we can recall the rite of lassoing the *Ng3*-bull. In his study of hunting rituals, Otto suggested that the term *ng3* means ‘lassoed cattle’ which had been captured with

- the lasso ritually: see: E. Otto, 'an Ancient Egyptian Hunting Ritual', *JNES* 9 (1950), 164-177. This ritual is depicted in monumental proportions in the temple of Sety I at Abydos. In this relief we see the male Upper Egyptian *ng3*-bull lassoed by the king Ramesses II, accompanied by the crown-prince who grasps the animal by its tail. In this rite which takes place before the god *Wp-w3wt* and is titled as *sph ng3 t3y sm'w in nswt* 'lassoing the male Upper Egyptian *ng3*-bull by the king', he says: *sph.i n.k ng3 t3y sm'w* 'I lasso for you the male Upper Egyptian *ng3*-bull'. That day of finding a new *ng3*-bull is to be a day of happiness as it is evident from *CT V 23j-24a: iw.n n.k imyw nwt hrw pw n sph ng3 imnt nfrt m h'w* 'Those who are in the sky have come to you on that day when the *ng3*-bull was lassoed, while the Beautiful-West is in joy'. At Edfou (Wilson, *OLA* 78, 552), the *ng3*-bull is one of the bulls which was sacrificed in the temple to represent Seth as a wild bull. This was one of the most prestigious sacrifices.
- 4 Ogdon, *DE* 7, 30.
- 5 See: M. Gad, 'Catching with Nets & Traps in Religious Texts.1-The origin of the Rite of catching the Enemies of the King', *ASAE* 86 (in print).
- 6 See: M. Gad, 'Catching with Nets & Traps in Religious Texts 2- Names, Descriptions, Functions of Nets, Traps, Catchers & the Gods related', *BEM* 7 (in print).
- 7 Zandee, *Death as an Enemy according to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, 232.
- 8 Hannig, *GWB* 476 {17212}; it is not authenticated in Leitz, *Lexikon der Ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, *OLA* 110 .
- 9 *PT* 1021c.
- 10 Cf. H. Beinlich, *Buch vom Ba* (Wiesbaden, 200), S.67, n.2: where he approaches this word to *sh3p* 'Verbergen', to hide!
- 11 Beinlich, *Buch vom Ba*, S.66, Zl. 81.
- 12 *BD* CLI (Budge II, 284). Translation: Faulkner, *BD*, 148.
- 13 The demons are referred to in general terms as the one who lassoes and injures, cf. A. Klasens, 'An Amuletic Papyrus of the 25th Dyn.', *OMRO* 56 (1975), 25. a similar text published by Y. Koenig, 'Un revenant inconvenant? (Papyrus Deir el-Médineh 37)', *BIFAO* 79 (1979), 118.
- 14 About that god see: M. Gad, *Blindness, its Social and Religious Conception in Ancient Egypt*, (unpublished MA (written in Arabic), Cairo University, 1993), 222-418.
- 15 Wilson, *OLA* 78, 829. Cf. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy according to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, 233
- 16 *Urk* V 55, 10-14. (= *CT* IV 299a-301a).
- 17 See M.Gad, *Netherworld and its Location in the Ancient Egyptian Conceptions* (Unpublished PhD. diss. (written in Arabic), Cairo University, 2002), 392-3.
- 18 *BD* CLXV (Lepsius, *Todtenbuch*, pl.79, 6-7).
- 19 'Grasper-of-top knots' well illustrated by such pictures as Seti I smiting the enemy, whom he seizes by the hair of the head.
- 20 Cf. *imy kh3w* translated as 'Kessel' in Leitz, *OLA* 110,VII S. 293.
- 21 *PT* 400a, 401a; cf. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy according to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, p. 233.
- 22 It is a variant of *hnw* : cf. *FCDME* 159.
- 23 *Urk* IV, 1075, 13-1076, 1; the translation is little different from that of *الجزء، مصر القديمة، الرابع سليم حسن، (القاهرة، ١٩٩٣)، ٥٦٦*.
- 24 *h3ytyw* as a kind of demons see: Hannig, *GWB* 536 {19359}. This word could be derived from the word *h3yt* 'Krankheit/ disease', thereupon the *h3ytyw* are to be the demons who might cause people to fall ill.
- 25 J.Cl. Goyon, 'Les dernières pages des Urkunden Mythologischen Inhalts', *BIFAO* 75 (1975), 344[144]-345 [145,12-14].
- 26  This word is derived from the stem *htm*  (Arab. *حطم* meaning to perish or destroy) and could be compared to *الحطمة*, a name of the Hell, mentioned in *Qoran*.
قارن سورة الهمزة (الآية ٤-٧): (كلا لينبذن في الحطمة × وما أدراك ما الحطمة).
- (Nay! Verily, he will be thrown into the crushing Fire. And what will make you know what the crushing Fire is), see: Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali; Muhammad Muhsin Khān, *The Noble Qur'an, with an English transliteration and translation of the meanings*. Darussalam, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 723. Cf. Gad, *Netherworld and its Location in the Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, 374-439.
- 27 A. Piankoff, 'Le Livre des Quererts', *BIFAO* XLI (1942), pl. XI, 8, 5.
- 28 *BD* CLXXIII (Budge, III, 65, n.28); Faulkner, *BD*, 172.
- 29 See: E. Hornung, *Amduat*, Teil I Nr.354. Cf. Leitz, *OLA* 110 ,VI 270 where one of the protective gods in the retinue of Horus bears that epithet, *sph* (see *EV* 104, 9; X, pl.112).
- 30 Hornung, *Amduat*, Teil I S.121, n. 496-498; Teil II S.126.
- 31 Hornung, *Amduat*, Teil I, n. 499.

- 32 Hornung, *Amduat*, Teil I, S.121; Teil II S.128.
- 33 The *nšmt* – bark is the sacred boat of the god Osiris, which carries his body to his burial in *Peqer*, destined for his final glorification in Abydos. This journey is an episode of the Osirian myth, in which the boat was attacked by the Sethian enemies. According to *CT V 227a-b*, this boat was the first *Re*^c built. And *Peqer* is the name of a district in Abydos to which the god Osiris, in his bark, departed during his feast; see *Wb II 561, 6*. The burial district of Osiris in Abydos; now: Umm el Qaab.
- 34 Goyon, J.Cl., ‘Textes Mythologiques 1. « Le Livre de Protéger la Barque du Dieu »’, *Kêmi XIX* (1969), 52; (NY col. 36, 13-37, 1). Cf., 64 (D. col. 32).
- 35 *dmḏyt; dmyt; nykt; ḥtmyt* ‘she who unites; she who cuts; she who wounds; she who destroys’.
- 36 Hornung, *Amduat*, Teil I S.125; Teil II S.133, n.9. Cf. *E IV 237, 13* where the king is slaying Apophis: *sphḥ ibw wnp ḥftyw m dnn.f* ‘(he) lassoes hearts and pierces foes in his hand’. *sphḥ* has become a general term for to ‘capture or to constrain’, see: Wilson, *OLA 78, 829*.
- 37 Wilson, *OLA 78, 829*. In a corrupted text (*CT III 395b*), there is an appeal to a catcher with a lasso: *Ḥ sphw... irr.k m nṯr* ‘O you who lassooedact as a god?’.
- 38 Wilson, *OLA 78, 829*.