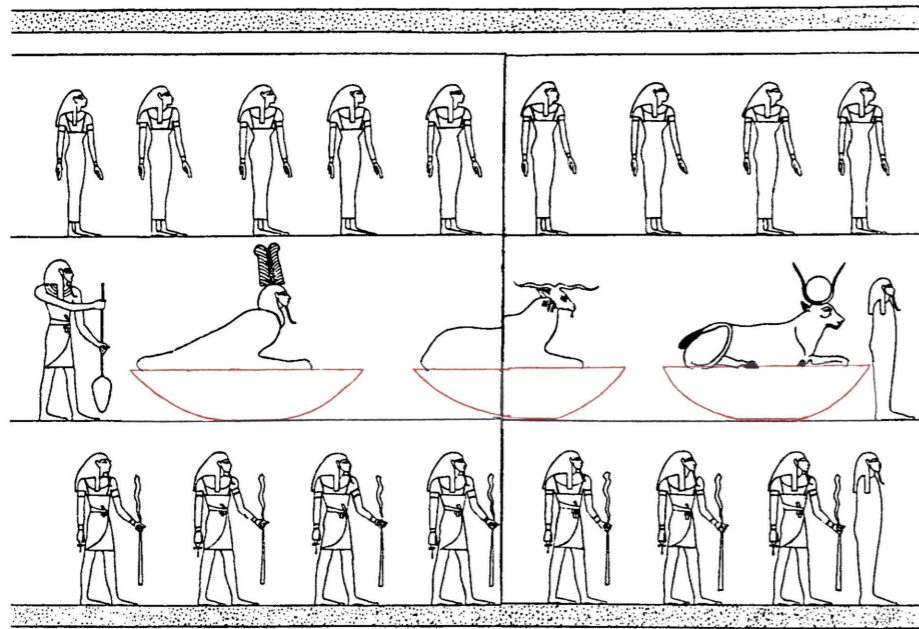




1 (Above) Amun with *neb* sign on lintel of Sesostris III, from Naq el-Madamud. Twelfth Dynasty.

2 (Left) Decorated chest, tomb of Tutankhamun, Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.

3 (Below) Scene from the ninth "hour" of the Underworld, tomb of Seti I, Thebes. Nineteenth Dynasty.



The woven wicker basket in this hieroglyph was termed *nebet* by the Egyptians, and the sign was used in the written language to represent the phonetic group *neb*. This led to the hieroglyph being used, in two homophonous words of very different meaning – *neb*: “all,” and *neb*: “lord” or “master.” Representational use of the basket often involves one of these connotations, therefore. A detail from a carved lintel of the Twelfth Dynasty king Sesostris III which shows the god Amun holding a basket with *was* (*S40) and *ankh* (*S34) signs on it (ill. 1) is an excellent example of this double meaning inherent in the *neb* sign. Here, the *neb* sign must be understood as “all,” with the significance that the god presents “all life and power” to the king. Corroborating this symbolism, the inscription below and to the right of the basket states “He [Amun] gives life to Sesostris.” Above the god, a *neb* basket may be seen in the inscription “Amun, Lord [*neb*] of the Thrones of the Two Lands,” and another directly behind him is “All [*neb*] stability and power.” In this instance then, the *neb* sign functions with both its respective meanings in the written text, and as “all” in the representational example. This latter meaning is the most common in representational contexts and may be found in many scenes where “all” of a given item or quality is offered to the gods or, with equal hyperbole, given by the gods to the king. This is the usual meaning, too, where the sign is placed in decorative contexts such as the carved wood and ivory chest of Tutankhamun (ill. 2) or in architectural (see *G24) and amuletic (see *V17) use.

Used with the connotation of “lord” – or in feminine cases “lady” or “mistress” – the *neb* sign was used from very early times as a kind of stand for the image of a god in order to show its divine nature. The vulture (*G14) and uraeus serpent (*I12) are thus seated on baskets in written Egyptian and in many representations to signify their identity as the tutelary deities of Upper and Lower Egypt. The two goddesses appear together in this way in the royal *nebtj* or “Two Ladies” title which was used as the king’s throne name, and in many emblematic scenes. In paintings made to illustrate the mortuary Book of That Which Is in the Underworld in the royal tombs of the New Kingdom, the ninth “hour” of the night contains the images of three gods which recline on *neb* baskets (ill. 3). These deities were revered as the providers of abundant offerings, and their depiction in this manner probably symbolizes their special importance.

In later times, the *heb* sign – a similar hieroglyph depicting a carved stone bowl (*W3) – was frequently used interchangeably with the *neb* basket in representational contexts, and the two signs may be alternated in friezes and other instances where multiple *neb* baskets might be depicted. Yet another hieroglyph, the *ek* sign (V31), represents a wicker basket with a small handle attached. This sign should not be confused with the previous glyphs and does not bear their symbolic or linguistic meanings.

BASKET



nebet

V 30