

Gwasanaethau Cyflenwi Dogfennau

Eich cysylltu â'r cynnwys

Document Supply Services

Connecting you to content



Prifysgol
Abertawe
Swansea
University

Gwybodaeth am Hawlfraint

- Rhaid i lyfrgelloedd gael datganiad hawlfraint dan ddarpariaethau Breintiau Llyfrgell Deddf Hawlfraint, Dyluniadau a Phatentau 1988.
- Cyflenwir y dogfennau i'r defnyddiwr olaf ar gyfer astudio preifat neu ymchwil anfasnachol yn unig. Ni chaniateir rhoi copi i barti arall.
- Gall y defnyddiwr olaf argraffu a chadw un copi papur. Rhaid iddynt ddileu'r ffeil electronig unwaith y gwneir copi papur.

Copyright Information

- Requesting libraries must hold a signed copyright declaration as prescribed by the Library Privilege exceptions of the Copyright Designs & Patents Act 1988.
- Documents are supplied to the end-user for private study or non-commercial research only. They must not provide a copy to any other party.
- The end-user may print out and retain a single paper copy. They must delete the electronic file once a paper copy has been made.

Gwasanaethau Cyflenwi Dogfennau
Gwasanaethau Gwybodaeth a Systemau
Prifysgol Abertawe
Parc Singleton
Abertawe
SA2 8PP

+44 (0)1792 295045
DSCS@abertawe.ac.uk

Document Supply Services
Information Services & Systems
Swansea University
Singleton Park
Swansea
SA2 8PP

+44 (0)1792 295045
DSCS@swansea.ac.uk

Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt

Suzanne Onstine*

University of Memphis

Abstract

This article will address the issue of gender within the framework of ancient Egyptian religion. Two primary areas of importance will be explored; the role of gender in the divine world, and the role of gender for the practitioners of the religion. The religion of ancient Egypt was especially concerned with aspects of gender because of their focus on fertility and spiritual rebirth, concepts which were often expressed using gendered language and visual metaphors. The second part of the article explores the ways in which women negotiated the primarily male dominated religious hierarchy. The practice of Egyptian religion was also affected because of the gender roles that men and women played in their society. The temple was not simply a religious edifice, but also had administrative aspects that women were normally excluded from. This did not mean women were excluded from meaningful participation in the cult, but rather they forged an identity based on providing music for the cult in various ways.

Introduction and Historiography

Gender was at the very core of Egyptian religious beliefs, both spiritually and in more practical ways. Gods and goddesses have been studied and described since the beginnings of Egyptology.¹ However, the study of the practical manifestations of gender – particularly those issues pertaining to human women as opposed to the deities – has been slow to develop and is much more affected by the modern biases of Egyptologists. One of the main problems we face when doing an historiography of gender issues is the entanglement of female sexual behavior with the idea of gender roles. For generations of male Egyptologists, the position of women seemed only explicable by reference to her marital or sexual status expressed in sets of dualities: married/not yet married, virgin/whore, and prostitute/respectable housewife. The vision of ancient Egypt they created was a replication of 19th and 20th century western conceptions of gender roles where men were the ‘default’ and women were the second gender. In terms of behavior, men did the heavy lifting and the thinking, while women tended the children or the brothels. This tendency to sexualize women’s behavior is noticeable in early works on ancient Egypt,² but has been remarkably slow to leave modern scholarship.³

We are not helped by the nature of the ancient evidence left to us. Women’s roles in Egyptian culture are poorly understood because they are underrepresented in textual sources, and because the nature of visual sources is largely to portray an idealized version of both men and women. Additionally, much of what we know about gender in general and with respect to religion specifically, comes from a male point of view. Religious texts and images that survive are largely a product of male elite culture; carvings on temples and papyri with spells can both be thought of as expressions of an androcentric

religious hierarchy. The structure of the religious hierarchy reflected a male dominated official culture in which women had very specific circumscribed roles.

Recently, however, significant scholarly works and exhibitions have attempted to address the notion of gender.⁴ This has largely focused on women, although much needed studies on masculinity from a gender studies perspective are beginning to appear as well.⁵

Religious Beliefs about Gender; Gods and Goddesses, Cosmogony, and the Notion of Duality

First we will turn our attention to the divine world. In the Heliopolitan myth cycle, the world was created through a specifically male act of masturbation. Atum, the creator god ejaculated the twins Shu (male, air) and Tefnut (female, moisture). Shu and Tefnut bore Geb (the male earth) and Nut (the female sky). Geb and Nut together bore two sons and two daughters; Osiris and Seth, and Isis and Nephthys. This is the origin of the two genders, and is the origin of the importance of duality in religious thought. The very nature of the universe exists as a gendered metaphor, and the creator god had within him both the male and female potential. It also highlights the importance placed on semen in the creative act. Women were important as vessels who kept and protected the seed. The most obvious expression of this is the belief that the sky goddess Nut swallowed and protected the sun god on his nightly journey through the underworld. The visual imagery is very explicit in locating the site of the sun god's morning rebirth as the vagina of the sky goddess. The male essence of creation and a female vessel in which it matures were both regarded as fundamentally important aspects of the religious expression of fertility and rebirth. This duality can be seen in the Hermopolitan myth cycle as well. The primordial Ogdoad of the Hermopolitan myth cycle were the gods who existed before man and were paired groups of concepts embodied as male and female⁶ (Nun and Nunet, the primordial waters; Kek and Keket, darkness; Heh and Hehet, eternity; Amun and Amunet, hiddenness).

The gods and goddesses were often grouped together in male and female pairs, often with a child creating a divine family or triad. The Egyptians obviously believed that even the divine beings who inhabited their world had specific gender traits, whether those were expressed simply by a feminine ending on their name, or by elaborate iconography and the physical appearance of male or female genitalia.

Sometimes those gender traits could be ambiguous. The goddess Neith, the very ancient and tutelary goddess of Sais in the Delta, is sometimes described as 'the man who acts as a woman and a woman who acts like a man' or that she is 2/3 masculine and 1/3 feminine. Although she is a woman in pictorial representations, her emblems are a shield and crossed bows, which one would normally associate with pursuits like hunting or warfare, which were typically masculine activities in ancient Egypt. Fecundity figures like the Nile god Hapy are deliberately androgynous as they represent the potential of the Nile flood and fertile land; fertility relies on both male and female elements, and so the god as a metaphor is always depicted as a male with pendulous breasts.⁷

Egyptologists seem to find fertility and spiritual rebirth represented throughout the Egyptian's writings and material culture. In addition to Hapy, the religious iconography of rebirth and fertility were often expressed in gendered ways. The physical, gendered body provided a metaphor for these important spiritual concepts, just as it had for cosmological ideas. Visual symbols of fertility in the afterlife seem to have been tied to sexual potency and were associated with both male and female aspects. Osiris, the god of the dead, is the most obvious. Osiris was cut up into pieces and castrated by his brother Seth

in a battle for succession, but in the underworld he was magically reassembled by the goddess Isis, his sister/wife. The penis was never found, so Isis fashioned one for him and conceived by him a son, the god Horus.⁸ The promise of this episode of the story is that potency can and will be renewed in the afterlife. The penis is a powerful symbol of creation and regeneration. Votive offerings of wooden penises found at Deir el Bahari and dating to the New Kingdom are further evidence that it was a potent symbol that could be invoked in a religious context. It is presumed that the people offering these objects were praying for children, but they probably conveyed a much more complex array of meanings to the Egyptians who dedicated them.

Female symbols of rebirth revolved around pregnancy and children. The so-called fertility figures – a naked woman lying on a bed, often accompanied by children – have often been thought to be a ‘concubine for the afterlife’ although their actual meaning is much debated. Similar figures of naked women with tattoo markings have also been interpreted this way, however the archeological context of both of these types of objects indicate a more diverse meaning beyond the constrained interpretation of fertility and childbirth.⁹

The Kings and Queens of Egypt emulated this divine gendered world. The king represented a masculine aspect of divinity, signified by strength, virility, and power. These traits were linguistically and iconographically indicated by identification with animal traits (most notably male animals like the bull) as well as the depiction of the king with a false beard as a symbol of kingship. This gendered indication of kingship was such a strong symbol that when Hatshepsut, an 18th dynasty queen who ruled as a co-regent and king, depicted herself, she included the use of a false beard and male costume in addition to other non-gendered pieces of regalia.¹⁰ The Queens often adopted the iconography of goddesses in their regalia, most notably the cow horns of the protective goddess Hathor and the vulture wings of the goddess Nekhbet.¹¹

Real Women and the Religious World

The ancient Egyptians, like every other culture, had specific notions about gender roles. This included ideas about the ways in which men and women participated in religious life. Personal worship in the home is well documented; household idols and religious motifs from Deir el Medina, el-Amarna and elsewhere bear witness to a variety of traditions that Egyptians practiced in daily life. However, it is unclear whether any of these traditions were gender specific or whether we can break down these activities into a division of labor based on gender. Men and women were both the subject of ancestor cults where a stela or bust of a deceased person was erected in the family home, perhaps as the focal point of worship and appeals for divine intervention, much the way Christians might appeal to saints.¹²

As men's roles in the official religious hierarchy have been dealt with extensively in general books on ancient Egyptian society,¹³ this next section of the article will focus on women's participation in the religious life of Ancient Egypt. One of the most important differences in the ways men and women interacted with their religion was in the relationship between individual and the temple. In a purely religious sense, for the Egyptians, the role of priests was to serve the deities, usually by ministering to them in a specific deity's home, or temple. They did not serve a congregation of worshipers, nor did they enforce or teach a specific moral code associated with the religion. This meant that both male and female servants of the god (*hem netjer* and *hemet netjer*) as well as the various pure priests (*wab*-priests) and musicians were responsible for the care of the god's home

and the god's needs; food, libations, clothing, purification with incense, and music were offered in the daily rites. Images on temple walls mainly show men in charge of these tasks, but women were sometimes included at the head of groups making daily offerings to the god in their role as musicians. Chaeremon, a Roman era priest (ca. 40 AD) described the priesthood as divided into head priests, priests in charge of sacred vestments, sacred scribes, shrine bearers, and others. He also claimed that the priests sang hymns to the gods three or four times a day, morning, noon, and sunset.¹⁴ Even by this late date, the nature of the priesthood was consistent with respect to what was depicted in the earlier pharaonic period as the elements necessary for taking care of the deities and their homes. What distinguishes ancient Egypt from many other ancient cultures is the degree to which women actively participated in temple rituals as well as public processions of the gods despite the male dominated nature of the priesthood.

Women in all societies play a role in the religious life of their communities, whether it is in an organized public fashion, or at home perpetuating belief systems by passing them on to their children. 'Women's roles become more peripheral in traditions with heavy emphasis on written and on complex legal or theological interpretation, probably because women have historically had poorer access than men to advanced literary training. However, even in traditions where their roles are habitually minor, women often claim some area of religious life as their own – some special type of service, festal role, or category of ritual.' (Falk 2002) This is certainly true of Ancient Egyptian women who had higher levels of illiteracy than men. However, it is more likely that their exclusion from administrative jobs that were tied to the temple was responsible for their marginalization.¹⁵

The temple stood at the center of Egypt's redistributive economy and served as a tax collection agency, a government storehouse for surplus grain and wealth, and the lands allotted to it produced agricultural products used to pay the administrators and generate wealth.¹⁶ The administration of this required large numbers of officials with quasi-religious titles like 'overseer of the cattle of Amun'. The upper echelons of management would have been comprised of the high priest and the priests under him, making the role of priest sometimes both religious and administrative. By the New Kingdom, the priesthood had become largely a professionalized male bureaucracy whereas in previous eras, the participation of both men and women had been episodic in nature. It is for this reason that titles connected to the temple system were largely filled by men as women were not expected to fill full-time administrative roles.

However, women were not wholly excluded from priestly offices. From the very earliest times women were quite visible in cultic positions, not only as queens, counterparts to a divine king/high priest, but also as regular priestesses in the daily rites. These traditions and titles evolved over time, being impacted by changes in the society at large, politics, economics, and foreign influence, but the most important constant was the association of women with ritual music.¹⁷

Music was an essential part of the care of the deities. 'Observe the feast of your god...song, dance and incense are his foods' (The Instructions of Any, 3.3–10). Music was used by the clergy to appease the gods (intangible offerings are pleasing to intangible beings) and musicians are frequently depicted in scenes of temple rituals, religious processions, and at funerals. Different kinds of musicians (both male and female) were attached to temples as an important part of the temple personnel; without musicians the liturgy was not complete.

The evolution of the association of music with the priestesses may be related to the importance of the cult of Hathor in the Old and Middle Kingdoms. The earliest *Hemet*

netjer priestesses served in the cults of a variety of deities, but by the end of the Old Kingdom, the cult of Hathor was the most popular. Hathor was the goddess of music and dance and by the Middle Kingdom, musical instruments called the *sistrum* (a hand-held rattle) and *menat* (a heavy beaded necklace) were regarded as her sacred emblems.¹⁸ The use of these instruments was believed to invoke the goddess and confer on the ritual participants the blessing of the goddess. The use of the *sistrum* and *menat* by women in cultic and funerary settings was widespread by the New Kingdom and transcended their use as a Hathoric symbol. They were used by women who served in a variety of cults, not just Hathor's, and were depicted in the hands of women who do not appear to have been priestesses at all. They retained the aura of divinity, but were no longer restricted to Hathoric contexts. However, it is probably the early association of the priestesses of Hathor with music in the cult of Hathor that evolved into the role of the musician priestess by the New Kingdom. It was a role that women would continue to fill until the end of the ancient religion in the late Roman era.

PREDYNASTIC

The analysis of Predynastic mortuary data indicates that women and men enjoyed a similar social status, and that their burials showed no clear indication of patriarchy or a tendency for men to receive preferential ritual care in the interment of their bodies. Grave goods, when present, indicate access to wealth rather than acting as indications of gender. The items present mainly revolve around food offerings and the implements for food production and storage as well as some items of personal adornment. The nature of the early mortuary cult does not seem to include a gender bias. It is unknown what roles men or women played in the early organization of mortuary rituals or the cults based in early shrines like the temple and enclosure at Hierakonpolis. The figures of 'mourning women' who appear prominently on red painted jars of the later Predynastic, and their red and black ceramic figure counterparts, are often described as ritual figures. The exact ritual and the nature of their gesture – curving, upraised arms – are unknown. Perhaps they are part of some sort of special funerary ritual or indicate the presence of a divine or special individual. The same type of figure also appears along with scenes suggestive of religious ritual and royalty in Hierakonpolis tomb 100, often believed to be that of an early local ruler. If these scenes depict a funeral procession or other ritual act in which women take center stage, it would be our earliest expression of women participating in a public act of religious ritual. Clearly further study of this iconography is necessary to say more, but without contemporary written material that may explain or describe the import of these depictions it is difficult to see past the superficial level of symbolism displayed in these scenes.

WOMEN OF THE OLD KINGDOM THROUGH MIDDLE KINGDOM

By the fourth dynasty, the priestess title *Hemet netjer* had become popular. *Hemet netjer* and *Hem netjer* were the most common priestly titles for women and men in the Old and Middle Kingdom and simply meant servant of the god.¹⁹ Men held this title throughout history, serving various religious institutions, but the use of the title by women dropped off by the end of the Middle Kingdom to be replaced by other titles (see below).

Normally, a *Hemet netjer* served the cult of Hathor, in particular the cult of Hathor of Cusae by the sixth dynasty, but they could, however, be in the service of many other

gods and goddesses.²⁰ The cult of Hathor of Cusae was one of the most economically powerful institutions of the late Old Kingdom because of royal patronage, and the large numbers of women who participated in the cult can be interpreted as both a sign of their piety and of their political savvy.²¹ Without any separation of church and state, the temples and priesthood served as places of political influence as well as a home for the god. As administrative posts were held by men, religious service was one area where women could still participate in their local power structure. Women who held the title seem to have been of elite status as they also often held other ranking titles such as 'royal ornament' or were married to high ranking men. This is a pattern we will see throughout pharaonic history.

During the First Intermediate Period the title is still common, although the decentralization that took place probably left many temples without royal patronage, and therefore with less prestige. If women were serving the cult of Hathor partly because of its power and influence, it may not have been as attractive a vocation if it were no longer tied to the centers of power on a national scale. Whatever the reason, we see fewer monuments bearing the names and titles of the *Hemet netjer*.

The *Hemet netjer* associated specifically with Hathor continued to be common among elite women until the end of the 12th dynasty. By the Middle Kingdom, the duties of the *Hemet netjer* probably included the use of the *sistrum* and *menat* in daily rites before the deities. People who held the title are sometimes shown holding these implements. The *sistrum* and *menat* will remain important throughout history as instruments that women use in many religious contexts, such as temple rites, processions, and funerals. The *Hemet netjer* who served other deities may have had a similar function of making music for the gods, but it is unclear exactly what those duties consisted of. It is certain that later the duties of women in most cultic settings were primarily to make music as their titles indicate specifically that they were musicians of one variety or another.

The decline of the title's usage after that can be attributed to many factors, not the least of which is declining central authority in the late 12th to early 13th dynasties. Senu-
sert III's governmental reforms may also have played a role. The reforms must have unseated some of the wealthy elite families, including the women, who had traditionally occupied the more important priestly positions.²²

NEW KINGDOM AND THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

During the New Kingdom, the participation of women in temple ritual takes on a more obvious musical function. From the 18th dynasty until the 22nd Dynasty, the title chantress (Smayt)²³ became the most popular religious title for women, replacing the *Hemet netjer* title. Chantresses of Amun were the most common priestesses as Amun had been elevated to a state god, and his cult was widespread and powerful. Chantresses could, however, serve many deities and institutions. The title chantress had been rarely used in the late Middle Kingdom, but during the reign of Hatshepsut in the mid-18th dynasty many elite women began recording the title on their monuments and in the tombs of the Theban necropolis. By the reign of Ramesses II, the title was held by women of middle class status as well. This popularity continued into the Third Intermediate Period, particularly in the Theban area. The title chantress of Amun was so ubiquitous in Thebes in the Third Intermediate Period that it has been noted that nearly every woman in Thebes held the title.²⁴ While that is somewhat exaggerated, it does reflect a definite increase in the numbers of women who want to affiliate themselves with the cult of Amun. Given the power of the Amun priesthood in the Third Intermediate Period, it is not surprising

and follows the general trend of women being associated with the most powerful and popular cults of their eras.

Hesyt-singers were also linked to various temples and the palace, but were more commonly associated with the goddess Mut at Karnak in Thebes during the New Kingdom. In the Third Intermediate Period, a few Theban women held the titles chantress of Amun, singer of Mut, and nurse of Khonsu, thereby associating themselves with the entire Theban triad. Singers of the interior of the temple of Amun were also known from the 22nd to 26th dynasties (see below with God's Wives of Amun). At this particular time, the cult of Amun was especially powerful. Again, the way in which women held religious titles seems directly tied to the political power a particular cult wielded.

Alongside individual titles, we also see the development of official musical troupes attached to temples. The *Khener*-troupe and the choir (*Shespet dekhén*) are frequently depicted in larger religious gatherings like processions of the images of the gods for the Beautiful Feast of the Valley festival and funerals.²⁵ These groups were, in part, made up of the musician priestesses and dancers.²⁶ Women could hold several musical titles including chantress of Amun, great one of the *Khener* of Hathor, and singer of Mut. Whether they held these titles concurrently or in succession is unknown.

The daily rites in the temple as well as the festivals were led by musicians – male and female. Many of Egypt's largest temples bear decorations of women taking part in religious rites. Scenes show groups of men and women clapping and chanting as part of these activities. Sometimes these groups are labeled chanters and chantresses, sometimes they bear no rubric. For example, at Luxor temple, women form an important part of Tutankhamun's Opet festival reliefs, acting as acrobats and musicians leading the parade into the temple.²⁷ Festivals would have provided an important opportunity for women to participate. These festivals would have needed large numbers of musicians and given women a chance to express their religious devotion in an episodic fashion, rather than daily service in a temple. However, reliefs at Karnak and elsewhere demonstrate that women could take part in the daily rites as well. A scene at Karnak shows chantresses leading a procession of chanters and *wab*-priests to where the daily rite of the god Amun is taking place. This puts them in direct proximity with the gods on the same level as the other priests, albeit the lower ranking priests. They therefore should be thought of as ritual specialists or priestesses as well, and not simply musicians in the service of a temple, especially considering the important role music had in appeasing the gods.

Even during the Amarna interlude, music continued to be an integral part of religious life. Many blocks from Akhenaten's destroyed temple at Karnak depict musicians at court (e.g., the blind harpist scenes). Epithets of Nefertiti refer to her as one who holds the sistrum, and at least one hymn equates the offering of a song to the giving of food offerings.²⁸ An interesting gender distinction occurs during the Amarna period. In musical scenes where the male harpists are blindfolded or depicted blind, female musicians are not. The reasons for this are unclear, but perhaps it is so they cannot see the Aten, a dazzling manifestation of the sun disc.²⁹

LATE PERIOD AND THE HELLENISTIC ERA

The use of female musical titles declines sharply in the Late Period and Hellenistic eras. Changing religious practices and an unstable political environment were major contributors at various points. Music did not go away even if some religious titles did. Sistrum players (*Ihyt*) and singers (*Hesyt*) did not completely disappear. They did not enjoy the popularity

of previous titles, but there are still women who record these vocations in their funerary equipment and on their monuments.

The most important female religious title of the Late Period was the God's Wife of Amun. Her center of power was in the great temple of Amun at Karnak in Thebes.³⁰ The title does not refer to a belief in an actual union between woman and god, but rather a ritual role played by the holder of the title. Originally, this post had been established and held by royal women of the New Kingdom; famous queens like Hatshepsut, Ahmose Nefertari, and several royal princesses occupied the role which seems to have been a counterpart to the king's role as high priest of all the gods in the New Kingdom. During the Third Intermediate Period, however, the title took on even more importance as the priesthood of Amun gained near autonomous power over the southern region of Egypt. After the Third Intermediate Period it was elevated to the highest office in the cult of Amun. The Nubian, and Saite pharaohs of the 25th and 26th dynasties would come to view this position as a valuable adjunct to the throne. By installing their own daughters in the position they were able to minimize the power of the priests of Amun who had ruled as near-parallel pharaohs for a short time in the Third Intermediate Period. These new, largely foreign pharaohs (the Saites were of Libyan decent) installed their daughters in the position while they ruled from capital cities in the north, keeping a loyal family presence in the south, and tying allegiance to the old power structure to the new regimes. Succession in the office was determined by adoption. As the holder of the title was supposed to belong to the family of the ruler, a daughter of the new king was 'adopted' legally to give her full rights to the office and the economic holdings the office controlled. This was done to limit the formation of collateral power bases. It is often speculated that the God's Wife of Amun was a celibate position after the New Kingdom, but other than the supposed need to prevent usurping dynasties from forming in the south, there is no evidence to support that assumption.³¹ The office was discontinued by the Persians when they took over Egypt in the sixth century BCE and was never resurrected.

The Gods' Wives of Amun continued the practice of having female musicians as a part of the temple personnel. From the 22nd to the 26th dynasty the title 'singer in the interior of the temple of Amun' was associated with the office of the God's Wives of Amun. Perhaps they were her personal retainers in the cult.³²

Scenes of musicians in religious contexts continue to be popular, however. Several Ptolemaic temples have reliefs showing music in gateways or the forecourts of temples. One example at Medamud shows two musicians – a male harpist and a female drummer. The rubric says 'pleasing the god with harp playing.' These scenes of mixed groups of men and women are common although women are more prevalent and it is more common to depict women in groups and men in groups within the same composition. Clearly the intent of the music remained the same throughout time.

Biography

Suzanne Onstine is an Egyptologist and assistant professor in the History Department at the University of Memphis. Her dissertation *The Role of the Chantress (Smayt) in Ancient Egypt* was published in 2005. Over 800 women with the title 'chantress' are documented and analyzed to provide a more nuanced definition of what it meant to be a chantress in the male dominated religious hierarchy of ancient Egypt and society in general. She is currently the director of the University of Memphis epigraphic mission to Theban tomb 16 in Luxor, Egypt. The owners of the tomb were both musicians.

Notes

* Correspondence address: Prof. Suzanne Onstine, 101 Mitchell Hall, Memphis, TN 38152, USA. E-mail: sonstine@memphis.edu.

- ¹ For general studies on the deities of Ancient Egypt, see Wilkinson (2003), Assmann (2001), and Hornung (1982).
- ² Yoyotte (1961) is the most often quoted but least substantiated argument for the linking of sexual activity with religious vocation. Blackman's (1921) early study represents an early deviation from this norm, perhaps in part influenced by his anthropologist sister who was studied modern Egyptian peasants, including women. She found many similarities between ancient and modern Egyptian culture and paid close attention to gender roles in her book (Blackman 1927). Gitton (1979) is a remarkably small offering on women's religious titles.
- ³ See for example Naguib (1990) where the author suggests that 'chantress' could also mean prostitute without offering evidence to support that claim.
- ⁴ Exhibit catalogs by Capel and Markoe (1996) and Wilfong (1997) are especially useful. More general works on women that include chapters about women and religion include Robins (1993b) and Watterson (1991).
- ⁵ Parkinson's (2008) article 'Boasting about hardness: constructions of Middle Kingdom masculinity' contains the most recent summation of the issues dealing with masculinity studies related to Egyptology.
- ⁶ In ancient Egyptian creating a feminine word was often accomplished simply by adding a final 't' to the masculine version, similar to the Semitic languages, of which Egyptian is a relative.
- ⁷ On the nature of fecundity figures see Baines (2001).
- ⁸ The full version of this myth, as articulated here, can only be traced to the time of Plutarch (first century CE). However, the imagery emphasizing an erect penis emerging from Osiris' mummified body is found in New Kingdom temples like Abydos, where the Osiris myth was most at home.
- ⁹ They have been found in temples, houses, and the tombs of women and children in addition to men, so there were obviously not strictly funerary items for men (Capel & Markoe 1996, p. 65, 67; Pinch 1993, p. 197–225).
- ¹⁰ Troy (1986) deals extensively with the ritual role of the queen, her divine associations through iconography and epithets, and her place within the religious hierarchy vis-à-vis a number of titles they held.
- ¹¹ Significantly, the vulture was also the hieroglyphic sign for the word for mother.
- ¹² Demarée (1983).
- ¹³ Of an entire book dedicated to priests and the priesthood, Sauneron (2000) gives only three pages of attention to the female personnel (67–69). See also brief treatments of women's roles in Chapter 5 of Donadoni (1997) and Chapter 3 of Quirke (1992).
- ¹⁴ Van der Horst (1982, p. 69).
- ¹⁵ Women were not legally excluded from administrative positions, and a few women held high administrative titles throughout time, but it was not a commonplace occurrence.
- ¹⁶ On the role of the temple and the economy, see Assmann (1989), Bell (1997), Bleiberg (1988).
- ¹⁷ On music, generally see Manniche (1991a). For a short treatment of women in musical roles, see Teeter (1993).
- ¹⁸ Hathor's epithets sometimes include 'mistress of music', 'mistress of the chorus dance', 'mistress of inebriety, jubilation, and of music'. (Bleeker 1973, p. 54) Her depiction on musical instruments (especially the sistum and menat) as well as her frequent invocation during musical rites seals her identification as a goddess of music and dance.
- ¹⁹ For a general survey of titles of women in the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, see Fischer (1989).
- ²⁰ Neith was the second most common deity to serve, but women also served in the local cults of smaller temples in their home towns.
- ²¹ For more on the priestesses of Hathor see Galvin (1981, 1984) and Gillam (1995).
- ²² On women's titles in the Middle Kingdom, see Ward (1986) and Guest (1926).
- ²³ For a full treatment of the chantresses, see Onstine (2005).
- ²⁴ Niwiński (1989) and Naguib (1990) deal with women in the 21st dynasty cult of Amun.
- ²⁵ For processions and their importance see Assmann (1991) and on the Beautiful Feast of the Valley generally see Foucart (1930). For the Khener specifically see Bryan (1982), Nord (1981), and Ward (1983).
- ²⁶ On dancing in ancient Egypt see Brunner-Traut (1992) and in the Old Kingdom specifically see Kinney (2008).
- ²⁷ The full publication of the scenes of Tutankhamun's Opet festival are in Epigraphic Survey (1994).
- ²⁸ On the subject of women in the Amarna period see Manniche (1991b).
- ²⁹ The harpists are probably not all actually blind, but the blindness represents some symbolic state necessary for this type of religious act. Manniche offers the suggestion that only men would be affected by blindness caused by seeing the god as women are never shown blind or blindfolded (Manniche 1991b, pp. 100–1).
- ³⁰ The most recent treatment of the God's Wife is Ayad (2001, 2009). Older studies include Graefe (1981) and Gitton (1984).
- ³¹ For the early God's Wife of Amun see Robins (1993a). Ayad agrees with the notion of celibacy, while Teeter (1999) argues against it. Ritner (1998) specifically addresses the adoption as a method of succession.
- ³² Teeter (1993, 1999) and Teeter and Johnson (2009).

Works Cited

- Assmann, J. (1989). State and Religion in the New Kingdom. In: W. K. Simpson (ed.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 55–88. Yale Egyptological Studies 3. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- (1991). Das Ägyptische Prozessionsfest. In: J. Assmann and T. Sundermeier (eds.), *Das Fest und Das Heilige*, pp. 105–22. Studien zum Verstehen fremder Religionen, band 1. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn.
- (2001). *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. English translation by David Lorton (Original editions pub. 1984).
- AYAD, M. (2001). Some Thoughts on the Disappearance of the Office of the God's Wife of Amun, *JSEEA*, 28, pp. 1–14.
- (2009). *God's Wife, God's Servant: The God's Wife of Amun*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Baines, J. (2001). *Fecundity Figures. Egyptian Personification and Iconology of a Genre*. Oxford: Griffith Institute.
- Bell, L. (1997). The New Kingdom 'Divine' Temple: The Example of Luxor. In: B. Shafer (ed.), *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 127–84. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Blackman, A. M. (1921). On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology (JEA)*, 7, pp. 8–30.
- Blackman, W. S. (1927). *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt*. London: G.G. Harrap and Co. Ltd.
- Bleeker, C. J. (1973). *Hathor and Thoth*. Leiden: Brill.
- Bleiberg, E. (1988). The Redistributive Economy in New Kingdom Egypt: An Examination of BAKw(t), *The Journal of the American Research Centre in Egypt (JARCE)*, 25, pp. 157–68.
- Brunner-Traut, E. (1992). *Der Tanz im Alten Ägypten*, 3rd ed. Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin. Originally published 1937, Munich.
- Bryan, B. (1982). The Etymology of Khener 'Group of Musical Performers', *BES*, 4, pp. 35–53.
- Capel, A. K. & Markoe, G. E. (1996). *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt*. Cincinnati: Cincinnati Art Museum.
- Demarée, R. J. (1983). *The Ax iqr n ra Stelae. On Ancestor Worship in Ancient Egypt*. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten.
- Donadoni, S. (1997). Priests. In: S. Donadoni (ed.), *The Egyptians*, pp. 121–50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Epigraphic Survey (1994). *The Festival Procession of Opet in the Colonnade Hall*. Oriental Institute Publications, Vol. 112. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Falk, N. (2002). Religion, Women's Roles. In: Helen Tierney (ed.), *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*. New York: Greenwood Press. [Online]. Retrieved on May 31, 2009 from: <http://www.gem.greenwood.com>.
- Fischer, H. G. (1989). *Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom and of the Heracleopolitan Period*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Foucart, G. (1930). *La Belle Fête de la Vallée. Le Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 24. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale.
- Galvin, M. (1981). *Priests and Priestesses of Hathor in the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period*. PhD Dissertation, Brandeis University.
- (1984). The Hereditary Status of the Titles of the Cult of Hathor, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 70, pp. 42–9.
- Gillam, R. (1995). Priestesses of Hathor: Their Function, Decline and Disappearance, *The Journal of the American Research Centre in Egypt (JARCE)*, 32, 211–37.
- Gitton, M. (1979). Le Clergé Féminin au Nouvel Empire. In: W. F. Reineke (ed.), *First International Congress of Egyptology Acts*. Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des alten Orients. Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR Zentral Institut für alte Geschichte und Archäologie, pp. 225–8. Berlin: Akademie verlag.
- (1984). *Les Divines Épouses de la 18e Dynastie*. Paris: Belles Lettres.
- Graefe, E. (1981). *Untersuchungen zur Verwaltung und Geschichte der Institution der Gottesgemahlin des Amun vom Beginn des Neuen Reiches bis zur Spätzeit*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Guest, E. M. (1926). Women's Titles in the Middle Kingdom, *Ancient Egypt*, pp. 46–50.
- Hornung, E. (1982) (first paperback edition 1996) *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt. The one and the Many*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Kinney, L. (2008). *Dance, Dancers and the Performance Cohort in the Old Kingdom*. London: British Archaeological Reports.
- Manniche, L. (1991a). *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*. London: British Museum Press.
- (1991b). Music at the Court of the Sun-Disk, *Amarna Letters*, 1, pp. 62–5.
- Naguib, S. (1990). *Le Clergé Féminin D'Amon Thébain à la 21e Dynastie*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Niviński, A. (1989). Some Remarks on Rank and Titles of Women in the Twenty-First Dynasty Theban 'State of Amun', *DE*, 14, pp. 79–89.
- Nord, D. (1981). The Term xnr: 'Harem' or 'Musical Performers'? In: W. K. Simpson, W. Davis (eds), *Studies in Honor of Dows Dunham. Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan*, pp. 137–45. Boston: Museum of Fine Art.

- Onstine, S. (2005). *The Role of the Chantress (Shemayet) in Ancient Egypt*. London: British Archaeological Reports.
- Parkinson, R. B. (2008). Boasting About Hardness: Constructions of Middle Kingdom Masculinity. In: C. Graves-Brown (ed.), *Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt: Don Your wig for a Joyful Hour*, pp. 115–42. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales.
- Pinch, G. (1993). *Votive Offerings to Hathor*. Oxford: Griffith Institute.
- Quirke, S. (1992). *Ancient Egyptian Religion*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Ritner, R. (1998). Fictive Adoptions or Celibate Priestesses?, *GM*, 164, pp. 85–90.
- Robins, G. (1993a). The God's Wife of Amun in the 18th Dynasty in Egypt. In: A. Cameron, A. Kuhrt (ed.), *Images of Women in Antiquity*, revised edn, pp. 65–78. London: Routledge.
- (1993b). *Women in Ancient Egypt*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sauneron, S. (2000). *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.
- Teeter, E. (1993). Female Musicians in Pharaonic Egypt. In: K. Marshall (ed.), *Rediscovering the Muses. Women's Musical Traditions*, pp. 68–91. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- (1999). Celibacy and Adoption Among the Gods' Wives of Amun and Singers in the Temple of Amun: A Reexamination of the Evidence. In: E. Teeter and J. Larson (eds), *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, 405–14. SAOC 58. Chicago, IL: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- & Johnson, J. (2009). *The Life of Meresamun; a Temple Singer in Ancient Egypt*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- Troy, L. (1986). *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*. Boreas 14. Uppsala, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Van der Horst, P. W. (1982). The way of Life of the Egyptian Priests According to Chaeremon. In: M. H. Van Voss (ed.), *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee*, pp. 61–71. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Ward, W. (1983). Reflections on Some Egyptian Terms Presumed to Mean 'Harem, Harem-Woman, Concubine', *Berytus*, 31, pp. 67–74.
- (1986). *Essays on Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom and Related Subjects*. Beirut: American University in Beirut.
- Watterson, B. (1991). *Women in Ancient Egypt*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Wilfong, T. (1997). *Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt: From Prehistory to Late Antiquity*. An Exhibition at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology.
- Wilkinson, R. (2003). *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Yoyotte, J. (1961). Les Vierges Consacrées D'Amon Thébain, *CRAIBL*, pp. 43–52.