

The Body in Ancient Egyptian Texts and Representations (Plate 6)

Introductory Remarks

Texts and representations from ancient Egypt provide a great amount of evidence for the Egyptians' conceptions of their own bodies. Clearly, there was an acute awareness of the human form as well as an appreciation of the natural beauty of the male and female body. Nudity, or near nudity, was generally not a cause for embarrassment. The style of Egyptian clothing, with its sheer fabrics and minimum of coverage, was generally intended to enhance and accentuate the human form, rather than to obscure it. Workers in the field worn essentially no clothing, and men engaged in occupations such as butchering, tended to tuck the fabric of their kilts up into the waistbands, thereby keeping their garments clean, but exposing their genital area.¹ Musicians and fisherman also wore essentially no clothing. The gods Amun and Min were often shown in ithyphallic form (Plate 6, second from right), suggesting that, at least in the ritual context, such intimate aspects of the body were not matters of shame.

Statues and reliefs indicate that the standard dress for women was a tightly-fitted sheath which hugged the breasts, hips and waist.² In the New Kingdom, looser clothing was adopted, yet it was often made of diaphanous cloth that exposed the body.³ Some New Kingdom dresses were simply left open in the front (Vogelsang-Eastwood 1993, 110, fig. 7.13).

¹ Among many examples, Vandier 1978, pls. XV.2, XVI.3 (left), XIX.1,3.

² Vogelsang-Eastwood 1993, 96-107, for problems in interpreting the representations of these dresses, since no actual examples of some of the types shown in representations have been recovered. See also Robins 1990, 45-7.

³ Or seemed to expose the body, see Robins 1990, 46. For specific examples, Aldred 1973, 35, fig. 18, nos. 16, 22, 31, 34, 56, 120, 141.

Although most sources support this idea of the lack of embarrassment over the exposed form, one Late Period text reflects a more puritan attitude. In the story of Setne, the protagonist wakes up in the gutter: "Setne was about to rise but could not rise for shame because he had no clothes" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:135).

The Ideal of Human Beauty

Many texts indicate what features were considered to be components of a beautiful body. Much as in the modern western world, the emphasis, more clearly defined for women than for men, was to be slim and youthful. This ideal is clearly reflected in art of the Pharaonic period, during which time, woman and men alike, with few exceptions, were depicted as eternally youthful, in the prime of life (perhaps early 20's), slim, well-muscled and long legged (Plate 6). Exceptional representations, such as the statue of Hemiunu (Dynasty 4) (Eggebrecht 1993, 18) and reliefs from the tomb of Seshemnofor IV (Dynasty 6) (Eggebrecht 1993, 32) and Mereruka (Sakkarah Expedition 1938, pl. 44), all depart from the norm by showing the tomb owner as a corpulent man, whose heavy hips, heavy, full breasts and fleshy arms are a realistic portrayal of obesity.⁴ The most valued features of men were strength and defined muscles. In the Tale of Sinuhe, the protagonist recalls: "I passed many years, my children becoming strong men." (Lichtheim 1973-80, 1:227). In a text in praise of scribes, the ideal is "you are tall and spare" (Camino 1954, 398), referring to the tall, slender form which is portrayed in statues and relief. However, to be thin without muscle tone was not desirable:

"You are tall and thin. If you lift a load to carry it, you would stagger, your legs would tremble. You are lacking in strength, you are weak in all your limbs, you are poor in body." (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:171).

Representations of emaciated men are rare (Unis causeway, Dynasty 5; see Lauer 1976, fig 126), and are associated with famine and suffering.

The sense of youth as a measurement of beauty is found in several sources. An ostrakon in Cairo records: "Thank god for the body,

⁴ See Janssen and Janssen 1996, 14-7 for additional references, especially for the association of obesity with age.

its youthful vigor" (Cairo 25218 in Foster 1974, 30). The ideal of youth was coupled with a more explicit description of what was considered characteristic of feminine beauty in the Westcar Papyrus of the Middle Kingdom. In that tale, the king asked for amusement to alleviate his boredom: "Let there be brought to me twenty women with the shapeliest of bodies, breasts and braids, who have not yet given birth" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 1:216). This passage may be interpreted in several ways. The comment "who have not yet given birth" could conceivably allude to the assumed purity of virgins (a concept which is not otherwise significant in Egyptian sources), or more likely to physical changes in the female body which may follow childbirth. The passage could also indicate that the king desired women so youthful that they had not yet conceived.

Love poems in *P.Chester Beatty I* of the New Kingdom give a complete description of desirable attributes for women: "Upright neck, shining breast, hair true lapis lazuli, arms surpassing gold, fingers like lotus blossoms, heavy thighs and a narrow waist" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:182). These last two characteristics are particularly emphasized and exaggerated in sculpture. The beauty of female breasts is commented upon in *P.Harris 500* (Late New Kingdom), which equates "her breast, [with] the delicate scent of berries" (Foster 1974, 69). A text on the lid of the coffin of Wennefer from Sakkara praises the qualities of "beauteous, tressed, high-bosomed" women (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:56). The desirability of being "high-bosomed" is taken to extremes in reliefs and sculptures of the Ptolemaic era, when absurdly high, rounded breasts are portrayed (Brooklyn Museum 1988, pl. XXVII, cat. nos. 3, 7, 14, 15, 17, 20, 28).

Certainly the idea of fertility was also seen as a measure of beauty, for references such as "She is a fertile field for her lord" are encountered in various contexts (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:69). However, certain texts indicate mistrust of a beautiful woman. "Do not consort with a woman who consorts with your superior. If she is beautiful, keep away from her." (*P.Insinger* [Ptolemaic-Roman period], Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:188). So too, "If a woman is beautiful, you should show you are superior to her," (*P.Insinger*, Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:191).

Generally, age was associated with respect and wisdom. In the Setne tale, a man asked for information of another man, for "You have the appearance of a man of great age" (Setne I, Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:137). The negative aspects of aging are rarely mentioned or portrayed in representations. In statuary prior to the Ptolemaic period, age is most often conveyed by slight corpulence, or even by wrinkles of fat on the waist of otherwise slim figures.⁵ An extraordinary relief from Dynasties 18-19, now in the Brooklyn Museum (47.120.11), portrays a man with a sagging face, deep lines in his face, and wrinkled hands (Fazzini 1989, no. 57). In the Ptolemaic period, a convention for representing the effects of age consisted of portraying deep furrows along the mouth.⁶ The existence of prescriptions to forestall wrinkling and the appearance of age is another indication of the desirability of youthful appearance among the ancient Egyptians (Strouhal 1992, 89). There is little tradition of indicating infirmity. The rare examples of people with illness or disabilities include scenes of boatmen with what is taken to be the symptoms of bilharzia,⁷ the depiction of the Queen of Punt (Smith 1958, pl. 92B), dwarfs,⁸ a scene of a man with a drawn-up foot assumed to be the result of polio,⁹ and men with what are assumed to be tumors (Ghaliougui 1963, pls. 8a-c), and hernias (Ghaliougui 1963, pls. 6-7).

Height was, in some cases, used to designate status. In New Kingdom iconography at Thebes, the king is the same height as the gods. There is rarely any differentiation in size between male and

⁵ This could also symbolize wealth; cf. the statue of Inyotef (Dynasty 12; British Museum 461). Corpulence is common in scenes of harpists, perhaps as an indication of their sedentary life.

⁶ Among the examples, see Bothmer 1960, pls. 20 (MMA 25.2.1), 21 (Walters Art Gallery 152), 21 (?); 87 (Walters Art Gallery 197); 97 (Cleveland 48.141); 99 (Gulbenkian 46: referred to as a "wise man!"); 100 (MFA 1904.1749 "Boston Green Head").

⁷ Tomb of Mehu at Sakkara, cited in *LdÄ* I 813-4.

⁸ The best-known being the statue of Seneb, Aldred 1980, 76 fig. 37; note the representations in Dasen 1993.

⁹ Stela of Remi, most conveniently in Strouhal 1992, 247, fig. 265.

female deities shown together (Plate 6).¹⁰ In scenes of the king rewarding a retainer, the king is normally taller than the recipient of the award.¹¹ In portrayals of the tomb owner surveying his domain, he is much larger than his retainers.¹² There is more variability in depictions of a man with his wife. In two-dimensional representations, they may be shown the same height, or the woman may be dramatically smaller than her husband. This variation is apparently not based upon the time or place of a relief's manufacture, as demonstrated by the stelae from the Naga ed-Deir workshops (Dunham 1937). These monuments, which are all roughly contemporary, show dramatic variation in the relative height of the spouses, from the woman being the same height as her husband (Dunham 1937, pl. 29:1) to the wife reaching just above her husband's elbow (Dunham 1937, pls. 32-3). Formalized pair statues often show the couple the same height.¹³

Body of the Gods

As is evident from representations, the gods could assume a variety of forms, many of them composite human/animal forms, the vast majority of which were a human body with animal head. Minor deities associated with the afterlife in the Underworld Books such as the Book of Caverns, Book of Gates, and *Amduat* were often pictured as mummiform beings with human, animal, or emblematic heads. The gods could also assume less tangible forms referred to as their "secret" or "hidden" forms. The New Kingdom Litany of Re fo-

¹⁰ For such an exception, see the Mycerinus triads in Saleh and Sourouzian 1986, 33.

¹¹ A notable exception to this is the scene of the priest Amunhotep being rewarded by Ramesses IX at Karnak (*PM* II 172 [505]-[506]).

¹² See Wilkinson 1994, 44-51 for further comments about relative and absolute size in compositions.

¹³ Wilkinson 1994, 46. Examples where the couple are the same size (references to Saleh and Sourouzian 1986): Rahotep and Nofret (Dynasty 4, no. 27); False door of Ikaure (Dynasty 5, no. 57); stela of Amenemhet (Dynasty 11, no. 79). Unequal in size: Mersuankh and his wife (Dynasty 5, no. 51); Neferherptah (Dynasty 6, no. 56), Khaemwase and Manama (Dynasty 18, no. 152); Khonsu (Dynasty 19, no. 216). In the Amarna period, there was a tendency to depict the queen as being considerably shorter than the king. See nos. 164-7, 188.

cuses on these hidden forms and the ability of the god to transform himself into any desired form: "Re ... the Lord of the Caverns, with hidden forms" (Piankoff 1964, 22.1). "Mysterious of face" is an epithet of Re in the Litany (Piankoff 1964, 25, 37). This text, in particular, emphasizes the many transformations of the god Re and the multiplicity of his bodies (Piankoff 1964, 22.4, 29,32). In a similar manner, in the Contendings of Horus and Seth (New Kingdom), Isis, normally portrayed in entirely human form, transformed herself into a statue of flint after her head was taken by Horus (Simpson 1973, 118-19).

In their anthropomorphized form, the gods are shown in the prime of health, with broad, well-muscled chest, slim waist and hips, and defined musculature in the legs. Goddesses in human form are always slim and beautiful, as related in a hymn to Isis: "Isis ... who fills heaven and earth with her beauty" (Žabkar 1988, 107). Representations of deities even depict a most human characteristic: the navel. The similarity of the form of the anthropomorphized god and the ideal of human physical perfection is explained by the texts that indicate that the gods created mankind in their own image. One such text relates that "Re has given you as his image" (Rahotep, Dynasty 13, see also Goedicke 1993, 41-5), while the Instruction for Merikare notes that "They [mankind] are his [the god's] images, who came from his body" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 1:106).

Some specific aspects of the physical features of gods are mentioned in texts. The god Osiris is normally shown with a tall crown that obscures any hair. Yet a passage from a text on the one of the burial shrines of Tutankhamun refers to the king [who] combs the hair of Osiris" (Piankoff 1955, 61). Like their offspring, the gods were not mute. Not only are the walls of the temples covered with scenes of the gods interacting with the king and accompanied by inscriptions phrased in direct discourse ("Words said by the god..."), but in the Underworld Books of the New Kingdom, as the god passes by the spirits, it is said that "They live through the voice of this great god."¹⁴

Although gods and humans shared much in their bodily forms, gods could be distinguished from humans in several ways. One was

¹⁴ For example, Piankoff 1955, 82.

by their odor, for the divine presence could be signaled by a pleasing fragrance.¹⁵ Other divine characteristics were flesh of gold, limbs of other precious substances and a head of lapis lazuli. The Book of the Dead describes Osiris as: "He is the golden of body, blue of head, on whose arms is turquoise" (introductory hymn: Faulkner 1972, 27). The god who took the form of a snake in the tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor was described as "plated with gold and his markings were of real lapis lazuli" (Simpson 1973, 52). In the Story of the Herdsman (Goedicke 1970, Naguib 1990, 15), the body of the goddess who provocatively presents herself is described as being "smooth and cool like blue faience (*ṯḥnt*)," a substance that resembles true lapis. In the Westcar Papyrus, the divine form of the king is described as "strong boned, his limbs overlaid with gold, his headdress of true lapis lazuli" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 1:220). In the temple of Seti I at Kanais (Wadi Mia), the gold retrieved by the miners is referred to as "the flesh of the gods" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:55). This description is echoed in religious iconography where the flesh tone of the gods is often a yellowish hue. The wood statue of Ptah recovered from the tomb of Tutankhamun beautifully illustrates this: his body is covered with gold leaf and his headdress is coated with blue glaze (Edwards 1976, pl. 22). Statues of deified humans could be covered with gold leaf to symbolize their association with the gods.¹⁶

The King's Body

Much of what has been mentioned about both the form of the gods, after whom mankind was patterned, and mankind itself, applies to the king. However, as might be expected with the person who was the link between the divine and profane spheres, there are more frequent attestations of the association of the king and his creators. The king is explicitly referred to as "the living image of

¹⁵ The presence of the god Amun was known to Queen Ahmose, for "She waked at the fragrance of the god who she smelled in the presence of his majesty" (Sethe and Helck 1906-55, 219.13-4. The word for "incense" (*snṯr*) is a pun on the word "to be deified" (*snṯr*).

¹⁶ Amunhotep Son of Hapu (Oriental Institute Museum 14321: Teeter 1995).

the god upon earth."¹⁷ The invocation of a god on the stela behind the colossal statues of Amunhotep III at Thebes evokes a common theme when the god intones that the king is one "Who came forth from my limbs, my image which I have placed on earth" (Sethe and Helck 1906-55, 1676:1-2). In the Litany of Re, every part of the king's body is equated with deities (Piankoff 1964, 38). A text on one of the Tutankhamun shrines relates that "Your [the king's] members are his [the god's] members" (Piankoff 1955, 72).

This closeness of the king's body with the gods' is stressed repeatedly in royal epithets such as "seed of the gods," "offspring of the god," "of his [the god's] body," "bodily son of [the god]," "shining seed of the god's body" (Sphinx Stela of Amunhotep II, Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:39). The Piye stela (Dynasty 25) explicitly relates "I was fashioned in the womb, created in the egg of the god! The seed of the god is in me!" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:73).

References to Particular Parts of the Human Body

1. The Nose

The nose had a special significance because of the association of air with the ability to live.¹⁸ The nose was considered to be an effective pathway to the very soul of the being. For example, the Poetical Stela of Thutmose III (Dynasty 18) relates: "I robbed their nostrils of the breath of life" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:36), i.e. I killed them. The obelisk of Hatshepsut is incised with a text that reads, in part: "My nostrils are refreshed with life and dominion" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:28). In the Instructions of Merikara (Dynasties 10-11), it is stated that the god "made the breath for their noses to live" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 1:106), i.e. he brought them to life. An important feature of the opening of the mouth ceremony was touching the nose of the mummy to allow life to reenter the body and therefore revive the deceased in the afterlife.

¹⁷ Most obvious in the *nomen* of Tutankhamun, which means "The Living Image of the God Amun."

¹⁸ As the "breath of Life" which could be granted by the god or the king.

2. The Heart

The heart, rather than the brain, was considered to be the seat of emotion. Moods are phrased in relationship to the condition of the heart: *ʾw jb* "wide of heart" (happy); *šhmh-jb* "distract the heart" (enjoyment); *šhm-jb* "stout of heart" (brave); *wʾh jb* "enduring of heart" (patient); *rdj jb m-sʾ* "place the heart after" (to be anxious); *rdj jb hnt*, "to place the heart before" (to pay attention to); *hr jb n* "upon the heart" (in the opinion of). The Poetical Stela of Thutmose III relates: "[I] made the dread of you pervade their hearts" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:36). "My heart is happy when I see your beauty" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:46), "His majesty was mighty, his heart stout, one could not stand before him" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:62).¹⁹

The Late Egyptian Miscellanies (Late New Kingdom) contain references such as "your heart is perturbed" (*P.Anastasi* IV.5.1: Caminos 1954, 131); "Do not give your heart to pleasures" (*P.Anastasi* V 8.2: Caminos 1954, 231); "Do not give your heart to the covert" (*P.Lansing*, 21: Caminos 1954, 374). An autobiographical inscription refers to "A daughter who is in my heart" (Stela Cairo 42208: Otto 1954, 139-43).

In rarer examples, such as a passage from the Kanais temple of Seti I, the heart is likened more closely to the seat of reckoning and intelligence: "Another good deed has come into my heart by god's command" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:54). This same idea is echoed in the stela of Redi-chemn (Dynasty 11): "It was my heart that furthered my rank. It was my character that kept me in front" (Lichtheim 1988, 43). A passage in *P.Insinger* is a bit more oblique: "He who knows how to hold his heart has the equivalent of every teaching" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:191). The heart may be equated with the entire human and his or her range of empathy and loyalties: "Every heart acclaims the sight of you" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:91).

¹⁹ See Lloyd 1989, 119, n. 10 for additional references to the heart.

Hair and Hygiene

A sense of the societal norm for hygiene can be determined from the Egyptian texts. As in the Islamic Middle East, great attention was paid to bodily cleanliness and in particular to the removal of body hair. Representations of priests indicate that many shaved their head. Certain classes of priests, such as the *is*, who acted as an intermediary of the god, were distinguished by shaving the forehead and allowing the back hair to grow long.²⁰ The hair of the Iunmutef priest was shaved with the exception of a curled sidelock on the side of the head (*LdÄ* III:212-3). According to Herodotus, priests shaved their entire body, a practice which may have been followed in the earlier period as well: "The priests shave their whole bodies every other day, so that when they conduct rituals, they will be free of lice and other uncleanness" (Herodotus, II.37). Scenes showing attendants shaving the pubic areas of priests are shown in the Old Kingdom tombs of Ankhmahor and Khnumhotep (Roth 1991, 66-70).

The removal of hair, at least from the face and body,²¹ as a sign of cleanliness was not restricted to priests. It is assumed that removal of body hair was practiced by men and women of the upper classes. In the Tale of Sinuhe, the protagonist claims: "Years were removed from my body: I was shaved, my hair was combed" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 1:233). In the Instruction of Ani, a temptress declares that she is literally "smooth" (n'') or hairless, in a declaration of her beauty (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:137).²² Certainly great numbers of copper and bronze razors and tweezers are physical reminders of this practice, as are recipes for depilatories (*P.Hearst* 154 [X.16], 155 [X.17] published in Reisner 1905).²³ The Instruc-

²⁰ The best known example is Montuemhet (Cairo JE 36933), in Bothmer 1960, pl. 12. The inscription of the statue of the *is* priest Amoneminet (Luxor Museum J141) refers to "give me ... sweet oil for my shaved head ..." See Pinch 1993, 333-5.

²¹ The statement that the Egyptians routinely removed the hair from their heads persists in modern literature, despite the fact that many mummies have hair on their heads.

²² See Derchain 1975 for further associations of hairlessness with eroticism.

²³ See Schoske 1990, 116-7 for a selection of tweezers and razors.

tions of Onchshoshenqy includes the recommendation: "Do not often clean yourself with water alone" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:172), which may be a reminder to shave in addition to washing.

Untrimmed hair on a man was considered to be unkempt, but it also could be a sign of mourning. As recorded by Herodotus (II:36), "In other nations, the relatives of the deceased in times of mourning cut their hair, but the Egyptians, who shave at all other times, mark a death by letting the hair grow, both on head and chin." Although mustaches and short goatees were socially acceptable for upper-class men in certain periods, most men with beards were designated as non-Egyptian. Bearded men, who from clothing and coloration appear to be Egyptians, are most usually lower class workmen.²⁴

However, hair was also considered to have an erotic attraction. Scenes of hairdressing preserved in tombs (Derchain 1975, 66-8) and on the sarcophagus of Queen Kawit (Saleh and Sourouzian 1986, fig. 68b) attest to the attraction of hair. Three of the scenes of sexual intercourse shown in the Turin Erotic Papyrus (Omlin 1973, pl. 13) portray the man tugging on the hair of his partner, apparently a reference to the erotic allure of hair. Religious texts refer to the beautiful tresses of the goddess Hathor, while Renepet-neferet was known as "the one with beautiful hair" (Derchain 1975, 59 and Naguib 1990, 101). In the tale of Two Brothers, the scent of a lock of hair of the duplicitous wife of Bata enchanted the king (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:209-10).

As in many cultures, there was a concern with graying hair. *P.Ebers* (prescription no. 459) contains the remedy "to render the hair black again: blood of a black ox and smear on the head." Representations of Egyptians with gray hair, however, are rare.²⁵ The premature loss of hair was clearly a matter of distress, as indicated by remedies for increasing hair growth (*P.Ebers*, nos. 465, 474). So

²⁴ See, for example, Davies 1944, pl. 58, for bearded men making bricks, and Berlin ostrakon 23731 of a workman (in Priese 1991, no. 52).

²⁵ See Janssen and Janssen 1996, 23-5. Additional examples include Pashed (Zivie 1979, 63-6, pls. 23-4 and Janssen 1996, cover), Sennedjem (Shedid 1994, 78), and perhaps Sennefer (Desroches-Noblecourt 1986, 45), as well as workmen shown in the tomb of Nakht (Eggebrecht 1993, figs. 66-70).

erence to the practice appears in a letter written in Greek, dated to 163 B.C. It refers to a woman who gave a man a sum of money to "cut" her daughter "according to the Egyptian custom."³¹ D. Montserrat (1996, 43) has commented that "perhaps the strongest argument against female circumcision as a regular Egyptian practice is the absence of any implication of it in the gynaecological texts of the Dynastic and subsequent periods." Unfortunately, little of the literature dealing with actual examination of female mummies comments upon the evidence for this practice, largely because of the difficulty of determining whether a female mummy has been circumcised. Even the use of computed tomography (CT) has not been able to add appreciably to our knowledge of the actual physiology of female mummies.

Elimination

One of the few references to the process of elimination relates: "The rear [of the body is] to aerate the entrails" (Hymn to Khonsu, Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:113). Feces were considered to be extremely unclean. In the Instructions of Any (New Kingdom), the relationship of child and mother is characterized as "As you grew, your excrement was disgusting, but she [your mother] was not repelled, she did not exclaim 'what am I going to do!' " (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:141). So too in Book of the Dead, Chapter 125, the deceased, as a part of his profession of innocence and worth states "... my hind parts are clean."

The sense of impurity of human waste is clearly indicated in the Book of the Dead, which characterize the realm of the damned as being a place where the deceased lived upside down, ate feces and drank urine. A number of spells contain variations upon: "Spell for not eating dung in the gods' domain ... I will not touch it with my hands, I will not step on it with the soles of my feet ..." (BD 52, 53, 82, 144b, 189). Demons who guarded the third gate of the Underworld were called *wnm hwt nt ph.f* "Those who eat the filth of their backsides" (BD 144b).

³¹ Brunner 1991, 77-8. See also Montserrat 1991; note Janssen and Janssen

Conception

There was a clear understanding of the role of semen in conception. The tale of Setne relates: "She lay down by the side of her husband. She received [the fluid of] conception from him" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:138). A Hymn to Khonsu relates: "The male member to beget, the female womb to conceive, and increase generations in Egypt" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:113). In the Contendings of Horus and Seth, Seth became pregnant from ingesting a plant covered with the semen of Horus (Simpson 1973, 120), indicating that it was clearly understood that the ejaculate was the source of conception. This is also symbolized by the "lettuce" plant which was associated with fertility because of its milky white sap.³²

A passage such as "You are not a man since you are unable to make your wives pregnant like your fellow men,"³³ is further proof that the Egyptians clearly understood the relationship of coitus and conception. This is still further indicated by medical prescriptions for barrenness and also for inducing abortion (*LdÄ* II:757).

So too there was an awareness that the cessation of menstruation in a woman of childbearing years indicated pregnancy. In the Setne tales, it is related that "When [her time of purification came she had] the sign of a woman who has conceived" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:138).

References to life beginning in the womb are not uncommon: "To give life to the young in the womb" is mentioned in the Hymn for Khonsu (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:112), and there are many references to greatness while "still in the womb (egg)" in laudatory texts of the New Kingdom.

Texts indicate that the purely erotic pleasure of intercourse was enjoyed as a sensual bond between partners. "He slept with me that night and found me [pleasing. He slept with] me again and again and again, we loved each other" (Setne I, Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:128).

1990, 90 for the statement that female circumcision was not practiced.

³² *LdÄ* III, 938-9. Hence the lettuce's association with Min, a god of fecundity. The lettuce is also shown in the hands of statues, in particular block statues, as an allusion to rebirth: Schulz 1992, vol. 1, pls. 1a, 59c, 60b, 61c, 63b, 68b, 87b, 93b, 96c, 119b, 123c.

³³ *O.Berlin* 10627 in Wente 1990, 149.

too, the presence of hairpieces and wigs found on mummies or in tombs (Fletcher 2000; Harris and Wente 1980, 18; Scott 1973, no. 28; Petrie 1902, pl. 4.7 [tomb of Djer]) indicates the sense of value placed on a full head of hair. Hair apparently was closely associated with an individual personality; the lock of hair recovered from the tomb of Tutankhamun has been identified as a memento of a favored relative, Queen Tiye (Harris 1978).

As in the Islamic world, praise of the god may have always been preceded by washing. Brief labels on the door jambs of temples indicate that specific levels of purity were required for entrance.²⁶ The Hymn to the Aton relates: "As you cast your rays, the Two Lands are in festivity. Awake, they stand on their feet, you have roused them; Bodies cleansed, clothed, their arms adore your appearance" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 2:97). Herodotus records that priests washed themselves with cold water twice a day and twice at night (Herodotus, II.39). So too, it may have been the general custom to wash before eating as indicated by "Pharaoh cleansed himself for a banquet" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:142), and the depiction of basins and ewers near stacks of food offerings on funerary stelae (Dunham 1937, pl. 34; Teeter 1994, 19 [no. 3]).

The Egyptians' desire to be clean is also seen in their emphasis upon perfumes and ointment. Thousands of perfume vessels have survived from the Pharaonic period. In the New Kingdom and into the Ptolemaic period, it was the custom to wear a cone of perfumed fat on one's head during festivities. The perfume would slowly melt and perfume the wearer, much like modern deodorant.²⁷

Circumcision

Male purity was dependent upon circumcision. The importance of this ritual is well illustrated by the Piye stela (Dynasty 25), which relates that two local rulers of Upper Egypt came to the palace. "They could not enter the palace because they were uncircum-

²⁶ For example, on the door jambs of the side rooms in the Temple of Ramesses II at Abydos, and on the jambs of the door from the Cachette Court to the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, which declare: *w' b sp sn* "Be twice pure."

²⁷ For these cones, see Maraite 1992.

Formulas for contraception are indicators of this form of physical expression (*LdÄ* I: 1227-8). However, the Instructions of Onchshe-shonqy are more sarcastic, relating that "Man is even more eager to copulate than a donkey. It is his purse that restrains him" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:178).

Furthermore, the relationship of menopause to the inability to conceive was recognized as indicated by a letter of Ramesses II to the Hittite king Hattushili. In that note, preserved in Akkadian, the Egyptian king responds to the request of the Hittite to send him a doctor who may make the Hittite ruler's "sister" pregnant. He wrote "See, Matanazi, the sister of my brother ... isn't she fifty, no, even sixty years old? See, a doctor is no use for a woman who is fifty or sixty years old for she is unable to conceive."³⁴

Menstruation, Childbirth, and Purification

An ostrakon from Medinet Habu refers to the *st ḥmwt* the "place of women," which T. Wilfong has suggested may be an area where women stayed while they were menstruating. These areas are called *ḥrr.t* in Ptolemaic-era sources (Wilfong 2000). The passage in the Satire of the Trades that mentions that the washerman "even gives (or cleans?) the skirts of a menstruating woman,"³⁵ can be interpreted as general distaste for blood, or even, in keeping with the overall theme of the text, a satirical comment upon a man having to wash a woman's clothing. Wilfong has concluded that there is "no evidence for a formal universal taboo against women in menstruation," and that "there is no evidence to support earlier assumptions that women's menstruation was seen as a negative part of women's lives" (Wilfong 2000).

Although the legal and ethical aspects of legitimacy of children in ancient Egypt are vague, it appears that under normal circumstances, children were born to couples who had established a residence, or whom the community considered to be "married."³⁶ This is

³⁴ Edel 1976, 69-70. I thank Robert Biggs for this reference.

³⁵ For this reading and commentary, see Wilfong 2000.

³⁶ Some of the complexities of this problem involve determining what elements constituted a "marriage." See Johnson 1996, 179-85 for a discussion of

cised and were eaters of fish, which is an abomination to the palace. But Namrat entered the palace because he was clean and did not eat fish" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 3:80).²⁸ Herodotus states that "The [Egyptians] practice circumcision, while men of other nations, except for those who have learned from Egypt, leave their private parts as nature made them." In reference to priests, Herodotus comments: "They circumcise themselves for cleanliness' sake, preferring to be clean rather than comely" (Herodotus, II.38-40).

Scenes of circumcision appear in the tomb of Ankhmahor (Dynasty 6) (Harris and Wente 1980, fig. 2.2), and in the Temple of Mut at Karnak (Fazzini 1988, 12-3 and pl. IV.2). An inscription on a stela from the Girga district (First Intermediate Period) in the collection of The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago (OIM 16956) is engraved with a biography which includes the statement: "I was circumcised (?) along with 120 men. There was none whom I struck, and none who struck me among them; there was none whom I scratched and none who scratched me among them" (Dunham 1937, 102-3 and pl. XXXII).

According to Westendorf, circumcision was performed in the second decade of a boy's life.²⁹ Certainly the scene showing circumcision in the tomb of Ankhmahor may portray a male of that age. Examinations of male mummies confirm that circumcision was commonly practiced (Harris and Wente 1980, 11, 14, 65, 237).³⁰

Evidence for female "circumcision" is much less clear. Although Strabo (*Geography* XVII 2.5) recorded that "one of the customs most zealously observed among the [Egyptians] is this, that they ... circumcise the males and excise (*ektemnein*) the females," the sole ref-

²⁸ For additional references, see Stracmans 1985, 292-7. See also the comments of Roth 1991, 62-75 for circumcision and priestly roles, and Old Kingdom scenes and references to the procedure, and *ibid.*, 66-70, for the suggestion that the scene in the tomb of Ankhmahor may show a priest being shaved rather than circumcised.

²⁹ *LdÄ* 1:727-9. See the comments of Wente in Harris and Wente 1980, 237.

³⁰ There is some confusion about the body of Amunhotep II reflected in recent literature. Ikram and Dodson (1997) state that "he was uncircumcised," but the primary study of that mummy (Smith 1912, 37) reports that "like all other known adult Egyptian men, Amenothos II was circumcised."

indicated in the Blinding of Truth by Falsehood where the son of a woman and father Truth was mocked by other children since his father was unknown (Simpson 1973, 129-30).

Figured ostraca from Deir el Medina which show a woman in a small shelter suckling a child have been interpreted as a birth pavilion, a special area where a new mother spent the days after delivery (Robins 1993, 83-4). These ostraca depict the woman with a characteristic hairstyle, with the locks pulled up and cascading down from a central "pony tail" (British Museum EA 8506, in Robins 1993, fig. 22).

In one of the few references to post-partum ceremonies, Ruddedet, who bore the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty, is described in a Middle Kingdom story as having "cleansed herself in a cleansing of 14 days" (Lichtheim 1973-80, 1:221), probably a reference to a period of seclusion following childbirth, a tradition which is still maintained in parts of the Middle East and elsewhere. This suggests that a woman was considered to be impure (or in a special state?) for a set interval following childbirth.

Final Remarks

This survey suggests that the ancient Egyptians had a positive body image. Not only were they not puritanical about exposing their bodies, but the many references to the belief that their bodies were fashioned after the gods emphasizes this sense of comfort with their self-image. The reliefs and statues which portrayed the Egyptians as slim, long-legged and youthful served the purpose of immortalizing them in that ideal form for eternity.

marriage in ancient Egypt, and of the *imyt-pr* documents, which were once considered to be marriage contracts, but are now recognized as contracts that stipulate the disposition of property held individually and in common by the man and woman.

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EMILY TEETER

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