



# Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

Warsaw, 25th-27th of June 2025

## Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

### Book of Abstracts



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## Keynote lectures

### A 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Woman Is like a Tea Bag

Koenraad Donker van Heel (Leiden University)

The Egyptian woman of the Late Period may have had the same legal status as the man, which – by the way – is not quite the same as her social status. The abnormal hieratic and demotic papyrological sources seem to corroborate this, albeit that there are also sources telling us otherwise. In this presentation we will look at the status of women in the 25th dynasty if we go by the legal papyri mentioning them. Starting from this we will then have a look at a very large abnormal hieratic account papyrus from the British Museum that still remains unpublished. Or, to quote Eleanor Roosevelt more precisely: A woman is like a tea bag. You can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.



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## Meret-Neith – A First Dynasty Queen of the Nile

Christiana Köhler (University of Vienna)

In 1899, Flinders Petrie discovered a monumental tomb in the Early Dynastic royal necropolis at Abydos that he thought belonged to a previously unknown king of the 1st Dynasty, Merneith. Following his publication of the *Royal Tombs of the First Dynasties* (1900–01), it transpired that – based on how the name was inscribed on two stelae associated with the tomb – this new royal was in fact a woman, queen Meret-Neith. Throughout the next 120 years, this queen has been the object of numerous studies investigating her identity and significance at the royal court of this time, ranging from her being a queen regent for a young king to being a ruler in her own right. Until recently, this discussion was much truncated because of a dearth of convincing evidence, given that Petrie's account of the tomb lacked in archaeological and inscriptional substance.

This situation changed in 2021 when the author started a new archaeological investigation of Meret-Neith's tomb at Abydos\* which solely focussed on this queen, her monumental funerary monument and on the questions surrounding her historical significance during the first decades of the early state of Egypt. This paper will present a summary of the exciting results arising from the new fieldwork.

This project is a collaboration between the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Egypt, German Archaeological Institute in Cairo, the University of Vienna and the University of Technology in Vienna, funded by the Deutsche FG and FWF.



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## The 'Real' Women of Nubia

Jacke Phillips (University of London)

I was sent a preliminary programme just before writing this abstract, and realised that I am the only speaker discussing Nubian women (in Nubia) at the conference. Only one paper discusses an aspect of Nubian women in Egypt. I therefore revised my original theme to a more encompassing presentation, more an overview discussion of Nubian women in Nubia<sup>1</sup> and what they can tell us about themselves.

So far as I have been able to unearth as yet, we have no surviving direct perspective from a Nubian woman in Nubia and virtually no direct speech by a Nubian woman in Nubia in the written record, even during the Napatan and Mediaeval (Christian) periods when texts both survive and can be translated. What we know or have discerned about Nubian women is derived almost entirely from secondary sources, from archaeological evidence and by back-dating anthropological and ethnographic evidence. What we think we know about them therefore is coloured by our interpretation(s) of this evidence from a variety of sources, both within and beyond Nubia itself.

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<sup>1</sup> I am limiting myself for this paper, generally excluding Nubian women in Egypt and Egyptian women in Nubia except as comparanda, prior to Islamic period.





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What and how can we extract a feminine perspective, or at least a feminine reality, from these sources? They are interpretive or inferential but, nonetheless, many have good evidence for accepted interpretation(s) and most likely have been correctly interpreted. Others are more obscure and definite conclusions cannot be drawn, but still patterns and continuities do emerge over time and space within the ancient and mediaeval Nubian Nile Valley.



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## Presentations

### **“He Comes Out from Her Vagina, to Rise from the Gate of the Horizon, He Parts the Thighs of His Mother Nut, He Comes out into Existence”: Women's Womb as the Gate of Life and the Door of Heaven**

Mennah Aly (Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities)

Throughout its vast history, the ancient Egyptian civilisation valued mothers as essential providers of life and sustenance. The female womb was viewed as the gateway through which new life emerged, both in this life and the next. Magico-medical texts reference the mother's womb, which opens for childbirth—a critical moment requiring special rituals to facilitate delivery and protect both mother and child, as narrated in the labour of Rededdet in Papyrus Westcar (Papyrus Berlin 3033).

Similar to the act of birth, rebirth after death also depended on mother goddesses who guaranteed the deceased's resurrection and celestial ascension, only when they appear from their womb. Despite viewing the Egyptian afterlife as male-oriented, funerary texts as early as the Old Kingdom emphasised that the resurrection of the deceased conditional on being reborn the womb of mother goddesses, particularly Nut. This concept is visualised in the New Kingdom funerary vignettes showing the sun god, whom the deceased aims to follow, emerging from Nut's womb



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signaling the opening the eastern Door of Heaven, echoing his first moment of existence.

This paper analyses literary, magico-medical, and funerary texts to explore the concept of the mother's womb in ancient Egypt as the gate of life and reason for existence, both in this life and the next. Additionally, it discusses how the mother's womb functions as the Door of Heaven, through which the deceased aims to pass, aligning with the sun god Re in a rite of passage from death to eternal life, evoking the moment of coming into existence as a newborn.



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## Meri of Deshasheh

Kathryn Bandy (University of Chicago)

Among the holdings of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures at the University of Chicago are the remains of a woman named Meri and the objects from her burial. Meri's burial is one of the few late Old Kingdom-First Intermediate Period burials from Deshasheh that can be attributed to a named individual. Her Tomb (no. 116) was minimally disturbed in antiquity and all objects, including her coffin, headrest, two pairs of model sandals, a painted board, and fragments of her shroud are now in the ISAC museum collection.

Following the clearance of her tomb in early 1897, W. M. F. Petrie was most fascinated with Meri's body, which he described in detail in his excavation report and journal. J. H. Breasted similarly made a point of describing her skeleton in his publication of recent acquisitions by the Haskell Oriental Museum (Chicago) in late 1897. Following her body, the implications of her religious title associated with Hathor, and the unique painted board dominate all discussion.

But Meri and her life should not be reduced to merely her body or the study of isolated individual objects with which she was buried. This paper will present the early findings of an ongoing study that considers Meri as an individual and, while necessarily investigating her remains the material objects from her burial for details as to her life, aims to cease "objectifying"



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Meri and consider her for who she was – a local priestess of the First Intermediate Period – rather than merely an “unusual” body or the possessor of interesting burial equipment.



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## Understanding the Women Buried Within the Western Cemetery at Giza

Jessica Coughtrey (University of Southampton)

Funerary monuments and tomb art often depicts women working in fields, processing and producing food, and making clothing and furniture, but funerary art served to paint an idealised picture of life to aid the deceased in the afterlife, and may not always represent a realistic portrait of everyday life in Egypt. This ongoing research re-examines the role of women in labour organisation by analysing activity patterns inferred from skeletal remains from the Western Cemetery at Giza, dated to the Old Kingdom. Repetitive or excessive activity can leave a mark on human bone which has proved useful in reconstructing activity patterns of past populations. This study uses a biocultural approach to combine skeletal evidence of activity patterns with historical and ethnographic data. Analysis of skeletal changes associated with muscle activity was undertaken by recording changes at muscle attachment sites (entheseal change), the development of osteoarthritis in the joints, and changes to the shape and structure of the bones in the arms and legs (cross-sectional bone geometry). The titles, inscriptions, and tomb reliefs from tombs in the Western Cemetery were analysed to provide understanding of women's role within their community, and how archaeological bias may play a part in our interpretation of gender roles.



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## Priestesses of the West Bank: Self-Sufficient Women in Ptolemaic Thebes

Lauren Dogaer (University of Basel)

Studies of Ptolemaic Theban priesthoods often focus on male priests due to the male perspective of primary sources. Female priests, especially at Karnak and Luxor, are less documented and mainly their roles as musicians, singers, and dancers are noted. This lack of knowledge about the priestesses working on the east bank is reinforced by the fact that we lack documentary papyri from this side of the Nile.

However, the priestesses of the west bank, who work in the necropolis and smaller temples like Deir el-Medina, are better recorded and it is clear that they demonstrate significant autonomy. Though often requiring male relatives as *kurios* in Greek contracts, they acted independently in Demotic ones. Female priests of the west bank, performed similar tasks to their male counterparts and were often part of family businesses to ensure continuity of the liturgical days, in the case of those working in the temple, or the rights to tombs and mummies, in the case of those working in the necropolis. However, some female priests remarried outside their profession, likely due to financial independence from previous marriages, coupled with the fact that they had already produced offspring to whom they could bequeath their inheritance. This suggests that, when financially



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secure, women could choose their spouses. This paper explores the self-sufficiency of female priests on the west bank, with a particular focus on their possessions and inheritances. The documentary papyri will enable an investigation of the liturgical days and mummies in the possession of priestesses, as well as the prices paid for them. This can be compared with the corresponding data for male priests.



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### **Metaphorical Functions of Feminine Figures in Ancient Egyptian Royal Inscriptions: Symbols of Power, Continuity, and Divine Legitimacy**

Shih-Wei Hsu (Spanish National Research Council, Madrid)

This paper aims to explore, firstly, how feminine figures such as "women," "nurse," "widow," "mother," and "daughter" are used metaphorically in royal inscriptions to symbolize broader concepts beyond their literal roles. "Daughter" is portrayed as a metaphor for the continuity of the royal line and the stability of the dynasty, while "mother" and "nurse" are depicted not only as caretakers but also as symbols of the divine protection afforded to the king. "Women" and "widow" convey negative images of weakness, often representing those who require protection, and are frequently used to describe the enemies of the kings.

Secondly, Hatshepsut, as a female pharaoh, left abundant inscriptions, many of which feature the use of figurative language. Some of these expressions were adopted from previous kings, while others are unique and do not appear elsewhere. These metaphorical expressions served to reinforce her kingship and ideology.

This approach not only examines the metaphorical roles of these feminine figures but also connects them to the broader cultural and ideological narratives of ancient Egyptian society, particularly those related to kingship, divine favor, and the perpetuation of royal authority, as reflected in Hatshepsut's inscriptions.



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## **Paving the Way for Nefrusobek: The Significance of Twelfth Dynasty's Nefruptah**

Ewa Józefowicz (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures PAS)

The princess Nefruptah, most probably the daughter of Amenemhat III, was a significant figure at the end of the Twelfth Dynasty. Although her titles were the usual ones for a royal woman of her times, several details of her life were less typical, most notably the use of a cartouche for her name and two places prepared for her burial. The reasons for this special treatment are not certain, but one of the possibilities is that she was prepared to be the heir of Amenemhat III, who did not have a male descendent. Nefruptah died before Amenemhat III, and after the short reign of Amenemhat IV Nefrusobek became the first confirmed female king of Egypt. The paper's aim is to discuss how much Nefrusobek's circumstances differed from other royal women's and how much of an impact it could have on the acceptance of Nefrusobek's reign.



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## **Lesser-Known Kushite Involvement in Egyptian Cultic Practices: The Cases of Khensa, Tabakenamun, and Takahamun**

Marta Kaczanowicz (University of Warsaw)

It is well-known that following the Kushite conquest of Egypt, Napatan royal daughters played an active role in religious life through their assumption of the Theban office of the God's Wife of Amun. Beyond this prominent example, however, the involvement of other Kushite women in Egyptian cultic practices remains largely unexplored. Evidence from Napatan cemeteries often suggests that Egyptian titles associated with the deceased were primarily honorific rather than indicative of direct participation in rituals. Yet, an analysis of both textual and archaeological sources reveals a different perspective on the female Kushite presence in Egyptian religion and, equally importantly, on how Kushites interpreted various aspects of Egyptian cult.

This presentation examines three individuals documented in both Kushite and Egyptian records – Khensa, Tabakenamun, and Takahamun. Their connections to Egyptian cult, reflected in their titles, iconography, and material culture, point to personal engagement in religious activities and offer insight into how Egyptian religion was adapted within the Napatan royal sphere.



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### The Evolving Significance of *ḥkrt-nswt*: Female Titles and Shifting Power Dynamics in FIP Ancient Egypt

Sue Kelly (Charles University, Prague)

The two *ḥkrt-nswt* titles are attested across nearly a millennium of Egyptian history, from the early Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom. Early scholarship, influenced by patriarchal prejudices, often misinterpreted these women from the Old Kingdom as royal or king's concubines (Fischer 2000: 31); even when these women were married to elite officials. While the later interpretation "ladies in waiting" (Ward 1986: 14) provided a more gender-sensitive interpretation, the Victorian terminology and perspective appears out of context for these women and divorced from the complex social and political circumstances of ancient Egypt.

A recent study offers a redefinition, Old Kingdom *ḥkrt-nswt* titles likely signified women who received prestigious ornaments from the *ḥkrt-nswt* department of the state's treasury: 'one who is decorated (for her service) by the king' / 'of the first rank' (Kelly 2024: 29). This translation aligns with Del Nord's interpretation that these titles were bestowed as an insignia of honour: 'She who is ornamented by the king' (1970: 13). The new study analysed 1,442 women from Dynasties 1 to 6, revealing that only 78 held one or both titles. While initially rare, attestations of the titles significantly increased in the Memphite necropolis during the Fifth Dynasty, followed by exponential growth in both number and geographical distribution throughout the country during the Sixth Dynasty (Kelly 2024: 31, Table 2.7).



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However, the political fragmentation and collapse of royal court during the First Intermediate Period (FIP) raise critical questions. Can the same interpretation of *hkrt-nswt* titles be applied to the dramatic increase of women found with this title during this period? Preliminary analysis of FIP attestations reveals a near-doubling of *hkrt-nswt* women compared to the Old Kingdom, making it the most prevalent title in the new corpus. This appears to support Robyn Gillam's hypothesis that *hkrt-nswt* titles replaced the earlier *rh[t] nswt* titles (1995: 227), given their near absence in the FIP record. However, several unasked questions remains, in the absence of a centralised royal court, who was bestowing these so-called rank titles and what did they signify?

This paper investigates the evolving significance of *hkrt-nswt* titles across Egyptian history. It examines whether a single interpretation can adequately explain their application and seeks to understand the significant increase in their prevalence within the decentralized political landscape of the First Intermediate Period. This research is one line of enquiry amongst a larger project that aims to shed light on the changing dynamics of women's social power in ancient Egypt.



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## Narrating Femininity: The Depiction and Use of Female Characters in Ancient Egyptian Fictional Stories

Nikolaos Lazaridis (California State University, Sacramento)

Fictional narrative writing in the ancient Egyptian language constituted a long-lasting tradition whose earliest manifestations date to approximately 2000s BCE (such as the *Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor*) and the latest to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE (such as the *Myth of the Sun's Eye*). In the course of these 2300 years, Egyptian fictional stories sustained a passionate relationship with Egypt's elite reproducing and propagating that class's core principles and values, flirted on and off with various forms of literary and documentary writing, such as tomb biographies and praise poetry, cherished the strong connections between written and oral cultures, and educated and entertained literati and illiterati who fell under the spell of storytelling.

One of the important ingredients of ancient Egyptian storytelling, and especially of its distinctive efforts to simulate human interactions that reflected, or distorted, real-life ideologies and practices, was *gender dynamics*. This term denotes, in the case of fictional writing, the matrix of choreographed interactions and relationships between engendered literary characters, which are informed by contemporary or earlier values and ideas about the relationship of gender – a sociocultural notion that fiction writers re-construct through their linguistic and literary choices – with power, status, and authority.



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In this paper, I examine gender dynamics in the corpus of ancient Egyptian fictional stories, following two primary steps. I, first, identify patterns in female characters' emotions, thoughts, speeches, and actions, which differentiated them from male story-participants. As I use methods that are popular in stylistics and narratology, my identification of such patterns relies on "locating" and evaluating female characters' participation in plot progress, on extracting the pieces of information that concocted female characters' presence in a story, and on analyzing the style in which the information about, and the participation of female characters was communicated. Second, I investigate how these identified patterns of constructed femininity contributed to the making of the Egyptian stories and to the effective communication of their messages, as well as to what extent the stories' constructed femininity related to contemporary femininity-associated ideas, practices, and values.



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### **Herankh also called Kludj: A Portrait of an Egyptian Elite Woman in the First Century BCE**

Nenad Marković (Independent Scholar)

The first century BCE witnessed the substantial influence and visibility of royal women in Egypt, especially Berenice III (r. 101–88, 81–80 BCE) and Cleopatra VII (r. 51–30 BCE). On the other hand, a group of non-royal kinswomen in Memphis attained comparable prominence. Descended from the High Priests of Ptah (hereafter HPP), and possessing exceptionally well-documented lineage, this kinship group held a privileged position and maintained close ties to the Ptolemaic monarchs. Until recently, however, these kinswomen have been largely ignored. Of particular significance and frequent scholarly attention is Taimhotep (73–42 BCE), wife of the HPP Pasherenptah III (90–41 BCE) and mother of the HPP Imhotep also called Padibastet IV (46–30 BCE), commemorated in three funerary stelae (London BM EA147, EA377, and, the recently identified fragment, Louvre E 27219). However, this study will focus on her mother, Herankh also called Kludj, known only from the monuments of her children, including a son Horimhotep and another daughter Taneferher (62–24 BCE); the father of her children was Khahap, likely stemming from the family of the High Priests of Letopolis, whose own mother might have belonged to the family of the HPP!



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Herankh/Kludj is assigned several religious titles, "Perfect Sistrum Player of Ptah the Great South of His Wall," "Singer of Ptah," and "Rhythm Maker of Ptah," which suggest her active participation in rituals within the grand Ptah temple in Memphis. Interestingly, another Herankh/Kludj, bearing the same titles, is mother of the HPP Pasherenptah III and wife of the HPP Padibastet III (121–76 BCE), attested across several monuments mentioning her son, including his own funerary stelae (London BM EA886 and Oxford Ashmolean 1971.18). Her lineage was in all likelihood from the HPP family, her father being Horimhotep, son of Padibastet, here identified as the HPP Padibastet II, and thus (younger) brother to the HPP Pasherenptah II, father of the HPP Padibastet III. Both women were of the same genealogical generation, notwithstanding a seventeen-year age disparity between Pasherenptah III and Taimhotep. Might they have been, in reality, one and the same? This study aims to tackle this compelling hypothesis by comparing their attestations, prosopographical and familial information.



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### **Women in the Streets and Women of the Streets: Gendering In-Between Space in Ancient Egyptian Towns**

Uroš Matic (University of Innsbruck)

Ancient Egyptian towns have increasingly been the focus of archaeological research in Egypt for several decades. One aspect of settlement spaces that has largely escaped Egyptological attention is the street, often regarded as merely a path for movement or an in-between space. However, both textual sources and the archaeological record suggest that ancient Egyptian streets were spaces where various activities took place. Due to the equifinality of the archaeological record, identifying the gendered aspects of settlement activities presents particular challenges. Nevertheless, valuable insights into androcentric views of the street as a gendered space can be gleaned from Demotic textual sources such as The First Tale of Setne Khamwas, The Instructions of Ankhsheshonq, and Ostrakon British Museum 50627. This paper will focus on the attitudes of ancient male authors toward "women in the streets" and "women of the streets", two until now neglected groups. Particularly, the paper critically considers the gender bias of both the ancient authors and modern translators and commentators. In order to better understand both these biases and ancient reality, a comparison to similar androcentric views about women and streets in other ancient cultures will be made. Last but not the least, the limits and potentials of the archaeological record of the streets for addressing the issue of gender bias will be highlighted.



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### **It Was Made for a Woman: Iconographic Connotations in the Stelae of Women from Abydos**

Gehad Mohamed Ibrahim Bakr (Minia University)

Women were on par with men in ancient Egypt, even if the size of discovered monuments belonging to the former was smaller. The article's subject will focus on the stelae of women from Abydos provenance. They are dated to the New Kingdom period and are currently housed in the Cairo Egyptian Museum, Museo Gregoriano, and others. The corpus is numbered fifteen stelae. The article's purpose is to shed light on the iconographic importance of women's stelae, which contain a variety of themes aimed at showing connotations of ownership patterns. The assumption of women's freedom in commissioning their funerary stelae opened up a hidden side around their social and religious roles in that era and confirmed their proprietary rights. The leading cause behind focusing on the 18th to 20th Dynasties is due to the significant artistic and linguistic developments over time and to explore the continuity and change through this corpus.



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### Exploring Women's Piety One Woman at a Time: An Example from TT16

Suzanne Onstine (University of Memphis)

With the discovery of a previously unrecognized seated pair statue in Turin of Panehsy and Tarenu (Cat. 3053), the original owners of Theban Tomb 16, came a new set of inscriptions to tell us about the couple. At first glance the inscriptions are formulaic in nature, but in the details they reveal a more personal character. Combining what is known about Tarenu and her husband from the tomb with this new piece of sculpture that names Ahmose Nefertari and Amenhotep I we can see a deep devotion to the royal ancestors by both original tomb owners. The scenes in the tomb depicting Ahmose Nefertari and Amenhotep I are usually associated with Panehsy as he holds the title *ḥm-ntr n Imn-ḥtp n p3 wb3*. However, in typical Ramesside style, Tarenu is usually by his side. Further, the statue includes Amenhotep I and Ahmose Nefertari as the subject of the *ḥtp di nsw* formula on Tarenu's side of the seat, and on the back, her section of the *ḥtp di nsw* inscription invokes Hathor *nbt ḏsrt*, who plays a strong role in the tomb, not Osiris as Panehsy does. In exploring the relationship between the statue and tomb's decorative program we see Tarenu as a more active participant in funerary decisions and perhaps even in the cult of Amenhotep I and Ahmose Nefertari, rather than as an adjunct to her husband's role.



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### **Breaking Stereotypes: Highlighting the Economic and Social Independence of Women from Ptolemaic Pathyris**

Mariantonietta Pascalicchio (University of Helsinki)

Aneta Skalec (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures PAS)

The Ptolemaic town of Pathyris (flourishing about 30 km southwest of Luxor between 186–88 BCE) offers a unique window into how progressive Egyptian societies were in terms of gender dynamics. The impressive amount of Greek and Demotic material from the site portrays a wide range of social roles and economic activities in which women were directly involved. Women of Pathyris were not only mothers and wives but also owners of land and livestock, heirs to real estate, entrepreneurs, conducting their business without any male guardianship, as Katelijn Vandorpe first pointed out in her study of Apollonia *alias* Senmonthis (Vandorpe 2002).

While the material from Pathyris paves, on the one hand, the way for further, innovative analysis of women's socio-economic position, following in Vandorpe's footsteps, on the other hand, their involvement in business activities has too often been overlooked or underestimated by modern editors. A case of misgendering will be presented in this paper, highlighting the urgent need for a review and an unbiased analysis of the material from Pathyris, which will bring to light the economic, social, and cultural independence of women in ancient Egyptian societies.



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## Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

Warsaw, 25th-27th of June 2025

### **Procreation or Contraception? On the Dilemmas of Ancient Female Inhabitants of the Nile Valley**

Małgorzata Radomska (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures PAS)

Although most of the realities of the daily life of the ancient women of the Nile Valley depended on their social position, some aspects of life invariably remained of particular concern to rulers and members of royal families as well as ordinary women. These were fertility and maternity issues, which were taken care of not only because of the high child and infant mortality rate, but also because of the fact of inheritance in the male line. Thanks to epigraphic and iconographic sources, we learn about the determination with which women of the time courted the gods for offspring. We learn about those gods who looked after fertility and the various stages of childbirth, as well as examples of the methods that were used to get pregnant using magical and medical means. In exposing the concern for having offspring, however, it is also important to note the existence of practices and medicines for terminating pregnancy.



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## Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

Warsaw, 25th-27th of June 2025

### **A Modern Lithuanian Woman on Ancient Egyptian Women: Marija Rudzinskaitė-Arcimavičienė and Her Booklet *The Status of Woman in Ancient Egypt* (1932)**

Tadas Rutkauskas (Vytautas Magnus University)

Marija Rudzinskaitė-Arcimavičienė (1885–1941) was the first Lithuanian Egyptologist who taught at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas during the 1920s and 1930s. She published numerous articles and books in Lithuanian, spreading the knowledge of ancient Egypt on a scale never seen before in Lithuania. As a modern, independent woman, M. Rudzinskaitė-Arcimavičienė led a challenging life, dedicating herself to the study of ancient Egypt. As a historian and Egyptologist, she was also very interested in the role of women in the ancient world. Her 31-page booklet, *The Status of Woman in Ancient Egypt*, written in 1932, is probably the earliest publication in book form on this subject. In the first part of the work, she provides a general overview and her ideas about the role of women in ancient Egyptian society. In the second part, she presents Hatshepsut and her reign.

The paper discusses the M. Rudzinskaitė-Arcimavičienė's perspective on the subject, the sources and literature that she used to write her booklet, and the parallels and comparisons that she draws between ancient Egypt and later, even modern, history. Although scientifically of little importance and now in many cases outdated, the ideas presented in this short book reflect her own academic interests and the state of research at the time.



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Consequently, the booklet provides an interesting female perspective dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on ancient Egyptian women.



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## Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

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### **Adding a Feminine Touch: Figural Graffiti in the Tomb of Benia (TT 343)**

Marina Sartori (University of Oxford)

Theban Tomb 343, belonging to the overseer of the works Benia and dated generally to the reign of Thutmose III, features a rather simple decorative and textual program. Nonetheless, draftsmen seem to have been attracted by it and possibly used it as a practice model, and several figural dipinti in red paint attest to the successive frequentation of the tomb. These dipinti (published in Guksch 1978) represent mostly feminine figures and heads – a subject rather uncommon among secondary figural tomb epigraphy, where usually men, animals or ritual objects such as boats are represented. Whereas Guksch 1978 mentions this aspect and analyses the figures from an art-historical perspective, these dipinti have yet to be investigated in their social context and purpose. The present paper will set the preferred choice of female figures into the broader debate on the social practice of draftsmen and scribes visiting tomb chapels and leaving their own traces in the original decoration. By mapping the distribution of the analysed dipinti within the tomb and comparing it with other dipinti representing women found both in the Theban area and in Saqqara (where female figures are added in black paint, for example, in the tomb of Maya and Meryt, see van Pelt & Staring 2019), the paper will give an insight into the identity of their authors, as well as on the ritual importance of the female figures within the tomb decoration.



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# Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

Warsaw, 25th-27th of June 2025

## **The Menat – Wet Nurse, Teacher, Substitute Mother, All-rounder?**

Manon Y. Schutz (University of Münster)

The ancient Egyptian term *menat*, often determined with the breast sign and/or the suckling woman, is generally translated as wet-nurse, that is, a woman whose task is to suckle the progeny of others alongside her own. Yet, at the same time, the male form of this title, *menai*, is understood as referring to a tutor, i.e., someone who plays a substantial role in the education of children—even though the term is frequently determined with the female breast as well. How can this be explained? Considering the determinative and the fact that the designation *menat* is older than its male counterpart, the female title and function appear to be original, only in a second step having been transferred onto men. Could this mean that the *menai* suckles the children in a metaphorical way? Or is our understanding of the role of the *menat* simply too narrow-minded? In other words: What could the common denominator, the connection between the female and male occupation be?

The aim of this paper is to reassess the role of the *menat* in ancient Egypt, especially with regard to royalty. Was she merely the wet-nurse of the princesses and princes? Did she act as their substitute mother? As children were breastfed for three years, it is clear that they had a close relationship with the woman taking care of them. However, one might wonder whether these women could also have been responsible for the early education of their protégés—a function that is well-documented for royal wet-nurses



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and nurses in other cultures and at other times. To make at least an attempt to understand the menat and her role, texts, paintings and reliefs, statues as well as other archaeological remains are analysed. Is the menat an all-rounder whose real importance has been overlooked so far? Did these women maybe shape the ancient Egyptian world(view) more than is generally assumed?



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# Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

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## Unveiling Women's Legacies in Egyptology

Marwa Soliman (Mansoura University)

Spanning from the Roman conquest of Egypt to the resurgence of European fascination with ancient civilizations, the historical documentation of Egypt often sidelined the contributions of women. Nonetheless, in the early 19th century, women from Europe and America, traditionally relegated to mere companions on voyages, embarked on independent journeys or accompanied by fellow women. These individuals, entranced by Egyptian antiquities, transitioned into writers, benefactors, and scholars within the realm of Egyptology, serving as catalysts for a surge in Western travellers. This investigation aims to bring to light the underacknowledged endeavours of trailblazing women in Egyptology, casting them not solely as archaeologists but as vanguards who confronted societal norms and gender constraints. Through an examination of the achievements and impacts of notable figures such as Amelia Edwards, Margaret Murray, Hermine Hartleben, Sara Yorke Stevenson, Gertrude Caton-Thompson, Maggie Benson, Janet Gourlay, Christiane Desroches and Kate Bradbury—the initial women granted official licenses for excavation in Egypt—this study endeavours to illuminate their enduring legacies and unique perspectives, thereby enhancing the historical discourse surrounding women in Egyptology. By immersing into the historical expanse of these pioneering women in Egyptology, a domain historically dominated by male viewpoints, this



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article aims to present a more comprehensive and varied portrayal of women's roles in shaping the field through their scholarly triumphs, methodological advancements, and cultural influences.



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## Reconstructing Social Reality Through Female Networks

Danijela Stefanović (University of Belgrade)

The study examines the networks of three 'royal ornaments' (*hkrt-nsw*): *nbw-m-th* (early to mid-Dynasty 13), *jtj.f-ꜥnh* (Dynasty 13, associated with the circle of Vizier Ankhu), and *jꜥh-ḥtp* (Dynasty 18, during the reign of Hatshepsut). By analyzing the dossiers of these women—who shared the same rank title yet belonged to different chronological contexts and social milieus—the paper demonstrates how microhistory can shed light on the dynamics of women's networks and their influence on historical narratives. Utilizing network theory and Social Network Analysis (SNA), the study reveals how the dossiers of non-royal women not only provide deeper insights into the 'history of women,' with a focus on feminine titles, but also open possibilities for reconstructing family and social networks that are otherwise challenging to trace.



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# Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

Warsaw, 25th-27th of June 2025

## Women's Voices in Ptolemaic Pathyris

Łukasz Mikołaj Suski (University of Warsaw)

The study focuses on the role of women in the multicultural society of Pathyris during the Ptolemaic period. The primary sources of analysis are papyri—legal documents such as wills, loans, and contracts of sale—which allow for the reconstruction of their daily activities and social relationships. Both synchronic perspectives (analyzing women's ownership and activities across various topographical areas of the town) and diachronic perspectives (tracing social changes across different generations of Pathyris' inhabitants) are considered. Special attention is given to differences in the status of women resulting from the Greco-Egyptian character of the town, reflected not only in social structures but also in the use of language, as evidenced by Greek and Demotic documents.

The presentation also addresses women's interactions with public institutions and their role in the local economy. Prosopographical research provides insights into how women accumulated wealth, the strategies they employed to secure their property, and their relationships with other residents. The final section of the presentation highlights open research questions, potential interpretative challenges, and the possibility of comparing the situation of women in Pathyris with that in other Ptolemaic towns.



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## Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

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### **Hatshepsut's Romantic Relation with Senenmut: A Re-examination**

Filip Taterka (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures PAS)

One of the most controversial issues regarding Hatshepsut's reign is her alleged romantic relation with the overseer of the house of Amun Senenmut. A great number of privileges, often unparalleled in nature, that were granted to the latter by the female king were often seen as attesting to the fact that Senenmut was not only Hatshepsut's chief advisor and counsellor, but also her lover. Some scholars have even gone as far as to suggest that Senenmut was the (real) father of Hatshepsut's child(ren). The aim of this paper is to demonstrate, through a careful re-analysis of the sources from both historical and methodological point of view, that the 'romance hypothesis' does not withstand criticism as it seems to be based on some unfounded assumptions, which ultimately go back to the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century gender prejudices. The additional aim of the paper will be to demonstrate how these prejudices about females influence also the way their male collaborators are often perceived.



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### **Devouring Divinity: Maternal Roles in the Pyramid Texts' Cannibal Hymn**

Angeliki Tsiadimi (Correctional Education School, Larisa)

This presentation explores maternal figures' complex and often overlooked role within the Cannibal Hymn, a striking component of the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts. Dating to approximately 2300 BCE, this ancient Egyptian funerary text presents a vivid tableau of the deceased pharaoh consuming gods to attain divine power.

The analysis reveals that beneath the violent imagery lies a nuanced portrayal of maternal influence and power. I examine how goddesses and mortal queens are depicted as sources of nourishment, protection, and divine authority. The paper will highlight key passages that illuminate maternal roles, from the nurturing milk of Isis to the cosmic motherhood of Nut.

By investigating these maternal themes, we gain new insights into Old Kingdom Egyptian concepts of kingship, divinity, and the afterlife. This fresh perspective challenges traditional interpretations of the Cannibal Hymn and offers a more comprehensive understanding of women's significance in ancient Egyptian religious texts and royal ideology.



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## Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

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### **Between Strength and Grace: The Political Symbolism of Middle Kingdom Queens and Princesses in Leonine Iconography**

Sandra Veprauskienė (Independent Scholar)

The leonine imagery associated with Middle Kingdom royal women, particularly through representations like female sphinxes, offers a nuanced portrayal of feminine power in ancient Egyptian art and ideology. This presentation examines how Egyptian queens and princesses were depicted as embodiments of both grace and strength, positioning them as guardians of dynastic stability and pivotal figures in the reinforcement of political legitimacy. It further explores their implied involvement in foreign diplomacy, where female members of the royal family likely acted as emissaries of divine and royal authority in cross-cultural interactions during the Twelfth Dynasty. Through case studies of jewelry adorned with lion motifs, statuary, and seals, this research seeks to enhance our understanding of the political and ideological roles of female power in Middle Kingdom Egypt, highlighting the dynamic interplay between their protective functions and their embodiment of regal authority.



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# Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

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## Gender and Power in the Instructions of Ptahhotep

Jacquelyn Williamson (George Mason University)

Ptahhotep, in the famous passage in lines 325–337, seems to say that it is important to keep a wife from power, and that the husband should control his wife. We often interpret this passage as proof that in ancient Egypt the woman's place was in the home, subject to her husband's superior position. But is that truly what the passage is saying? Interpretations of it can change depending upon which framework of power or cultural systems to which one ascribes. As academics, we base our interpretations of gender and power on different, perhaps unconscious, assumptions about power, which particularly impacts our understanding of ancient women. Building off previous research presented at the ICE in 2023, this paper dismantles colonialist Western expectations about how power functions, with the aim of examining Ptahhotep with new eyes. New critical perspectives further allow alternate modes of analysis to not only challenge our understanding of the Instructions of Ptahhotep, but how we approach the study of women's roles in ancient Egypt as a whole.



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# Women's Perspectives in the Nile Valley

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## **The Real Power behind the Throne: The System of Female Regency in Ancient Egypt and the Historiographical Challenges of Its Study**

Olha Zapletniuk (Swansea University)

The paper is devoted to the overview of the system of female regency in ancient Egypt and to the problem of historical assessment of the political influence of queen-regents in modern historiography, where their political achievements and military deeds are usually overlooked.

In cases where a male king appeared to be juvenile, there was a system of informal regency, occasionally held by a queen-mother in order to preserve dynastic succession. Royal women could only gained power by acting in conjunction with a male royal, since the presence of a male co-ruler was compulsory for queens to act as rulers. With a male king on the throne, the ideological concept of kingship was maintained, and temporary regency of the queen-mother was accepted even in patriarchal societies.

As regent, the king's mother acted on behalf of her young son or co-ruler, and her political power during temporary governance was limited only to her young co-ruler; the queen-regent assumed royal obligations, a set of male symbols and duties, including the assumption of military power. Most of these women were never crowned as kings, but during their periods of regency on behalf of male relatives who were unable to rule for diversified reasons, they indeed acted as genuine kings. Nevertheless,



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queen-regents remained in the shadow, at least officially, and all their achievements and political decisions were subsequently attributed to their male dependents, even if they were infants at the time of accession. The political and military role of royal women during their temporary regency are poorly studied in modern historiography and this topic requires additional attention and further study.

The paper examines the archaeological evidence for the reigns of several ancient Egyptian queen-regents, such as Meret-Neith, Khentkaus, Ankhesenpepy II, Ahhotep, Hatshepsut, and Tausret, in order to explore the similarities and differences in their legitimisation of regency and the set of symbols these queens used to emphasise and display their changed political status. The paper also addresses the issue of the lack of attention given to female regents, who only became more visible if the regents subsequently institutionalised their power, as Hatshepsut or Tausret did. The results of the study demonstrate that the real impact of female regents on Egyptian history may have been more significant than previously assumed.



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