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Title	<i>A Woman's place: The transformation of female power in first millennial BC Egypt</i>
Description	A talk assessing the role of women in ancient Egypt - looking at the changes in female religious roles in ancient Egyptian society as a barometer for wider social, cultural and political transformation
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Elizabeth Froom Good morning everybody. Welcome to one of the first lectures of the alumni weekend. I hope you really enjoyed this morning and the rest of the weekend as well. Looks like an amazing programme.

My name is Elizabeth Froom, and I am lecturer in Egyptology here at the faculty of Oriental Studies, and I'm also a fellow of Saint Cross College. As you will hear, as I continue to speak, I'm actually from New Zealand. But I did my DPhil here at the Queen's College. I taught at Liverpool University for three years, before my appointment to my position here almost exactly three years ago.

I take groups of Oxford alumni and Cambridge alumni out to Egypt for tours. And I accompany those tours with lectures. And there's actually a tour with a colleague of mine next March, the dates are 13th to the 28th March next year. And these are really amazing tours. We go out to sites that are off the tourist track. And when I went, I saw things that I'd never been able to see before when I'd been out to Egypt. So they're fantastic tours. Next tour as I say is going out with one of my Coptic colleagues. And she's fantastic, so it should be really good.

And I've also been asked to model my lecture this morning on the type of lecture I give in the tour context, just to give you a sense of the type of things we discuss in that sort of environment. So what I do when I'm in Egypt with a group is I begin with a general overview of a topic. And then what I try to do is move into a detailed area, particular issue, or a question, that will then spark discussion that we can continue having over dinner or breakfast, whatever the case may be.

And also if possible, I try to draw a little on my own research where it's appropriate. And I'm going to do that a little bit this morning as well, kind of feed in some of the things that I'm working on. My research centres on notions of self-fashioning. How Egyptian non-royal individuals select and present aspects of their identities, their careers, experiences, moral character, for display in a monumental context. In particular I focus on the textual genre of biography, also called autobiography. And these are idealising life histories that were set up within non-royal tombs, or on statues, and stelae and temples.

My work in this area has centred around material from the late second millennium – the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties of Egyptian history, and a little into the First Millennium. But until now, until this morning, I've been mainly focussed on the men. But in the early First Millennium, we begin to see the development of texts, biographical texts, belonging to, and spoken by women.

And these texts express something like biography. It's some sort of equivalent strategy of self-fashioning. But interestingly, it's not directly equivalent.

So I want to consider in this lecture this morning, how and why woman gain access to this form of representation, this particular biographical voice, and how this may relate to transformations of female power in religious ritual domains. The woman that you can see here on my opening slide is a pre-eminent example. Her name is `[[Aninerdius 0:03:34]]` the Elder, the First. And she held office, in particular priestly office, around 750-600 BC. She and her descendents represent the culmination of the complex process that I'm going to trace a little through this lecture. She is an endpoint of sorts, and we will come back to her later on in the course of the lecture.

So what I'm going to do this morning is divide my lecture into two parts. The first will look more generally at the role and status of women, in particular during the New Kingdom, Dynasties 18-20, about 1539 to 1075 BC. Material from the New Kingdom is the richest and most diverse for this topic. And it may be material some of you are most familiar with, especially those of you that have been out to Egypt. This is also the period that immediately precedes the First Millennium, the period that I'm talking about. And so we'll see some of these developments, and be able to sort of trace them through over time.

The second part of my lecture will focus on the development of female roles and positions in the early First Millennium, Dynasties like 22 to 25, 1075 to about 700, or up to this woman here. My focus will be very much though on the earlier part of this period. And what I'm going to do is kind of describe and explore some of the evidence for changes in woman's self presentation in temples and mortuary domains, and what this might mean in terms of power and status.

Now as you can see, these are large topics and very long time spans. So I've got certain strategies that I'm using to try and focus this. First of all I'm only going to look at elite material. I'll move backwards and forwards between royal women and elite women. And you'll see the line between royal and elite women actually starts to blur during the time period. And we'll see this happen as I move through the lecture. I'm also limiting myself in terms of space as well.

The lecture this morning will concentrate on material from the city of Thebes, sort of ringed here on the map there, sort of more narrowly in this area and that area. And the city of Thebes, we got a larger map here. The material that I'm going to be drawing from throughout the lecture are tombs on the West Bank here, tombs of nobles, and then the Temple of Karnak here. So, a large temple complex, temple of the pre-eminent State God Amun, in the centre, and then `[[presets 0:06:16]]` of his consort Mut, and his sort of child God – not really, but we can call them that if we want to out there.

Throughout each part of the lecture, I'm going to examine three central themes and case studies to explore the manifestations of those themes. And these themes are: female religious and ritual roles, female roles within temple space, the self presentation of women and how they relate to one another and finally this theme of voice, biographical voice. And in fact I really should have changed the title of my lecture, because my lecture's really about the transformation of the female voice in particular temple domains. But of course that relates to power too. And that's something we can come back to and discuss.

So Egyptian society was strongly gendered in terms of position and representation and inequality is at the core of this distinction. As encapsulated by this slide from a Fifth Dynasty Tomb about a thousand years before the time periods we're dealing with. And it's a detail from a larger scene. It's a scene of a man, a non-royal, elite man hunting in the marshes. He's standing on a boat. And you can see the line of his foot and his toe. And that's his wife tucked by his foot, really not much bigger than his leg in this scene.

So women were generally excluded from public affairs, and official bureaucratic administrative structures. Their status as here, was often mediated by their male kin – fathers, husbands and sons. The title held by most elite women was 'Lady of the House' `[[Nebit Pier 0:08:02]]`.

Now this title does point to the status accorded to the management of the household, but also in part to their restriction to that domain too.

Yet despite the social and institutional barriers that women faced, they had relative, interestingly relative equality in law, for example, rights of property and divorce. For example, women could sometimes initiate divorce as encapsulated or kind of symbolised in this slide, which shows what had been a statue of a man and woman, and the woman has fallen out.

And when they were divorced they also had claims on property, not equal amounts of property with their ex-husband, but claims on some of the property, including their original 'bride price'. They could also own and dispose off their own property as well. So this highlights some of the complexities when we try to assess the role and position of women. Any view of women must take into account that we are not dealing with a homogeneous group. Status and role could vary considerably. A wife or mother of a high ranking Court official probably had considerable opportunity to influence decisions and wield authority.

And of course there are exceptions to any rule, and any generalisation. The evidence makes this very difficult to assess. Most of what survives to us from monumental royal and elite domains are sort of scenes like this where this is from a tomb, an Eighteenth Dynasty Tomb, where you've got the husband with a wife and possibly another female member of his kin group, sitting behind him. And scenes like this in tombs and equivalent scenes in temples were commissioned by men. Images of women in these contexts are part of centralising, idealising male dominated ideologies.

But it is through the exceptions that we can begin to map areas of innovation and transformation. So I'm going to begin with the theme of voice, voice as expressed through texts. Elite male identity was fashioned and displayed as here, in contexts of tomb and temple. And within these contexts, the genre of biography was a central mechanism. And these are texts inscribed within tombs and on statues and stelae within temples. And I've just got a couple of examples here. The first image at the top of the slide is of an elite male tomb of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

And below that you have the biography that was set up within that tomb. The statue is a biographical statue of a priest of Amun set up in the Temple of Karnak. Now these biographies are idealising presentations of an individual life, often centred on their performance of office or aspects of moral character. So for example, this individual in his tomb talks about going out on campaign with the King, hunting elephants, defending the King, that sort of thing and also acting for the King in royal festivals.

Whereas our priest statue talks about growing up in the temple, his education in the temple, initiation, and then his care for the priests and workers within the temple of Karnak, within the temple of Amun. For women, up until the First Millennium, we just don't have anything comparable. There are literary texts which incorporate a female voice, such as love poetry. And I've got a quote from one of these love poems on the slide here, which tells of a young girl who's fallen in love with the boy next door, just down the road.

But this text, like most images of women, probably reflects a male perspective and was probably composed by men. (Laughter) We can come back to that at discussion. A context in which we may begin to hear more certainly a female voice in the New Kingdom, is in letters. And we have a number of letters sent by women from the New Kingdom. Now whether or not these women actually wrote the letters, whether or not they were actually literate or whether they were dictating them, either way, they can give us a sense of individual choices and styles.

Letters from much later, letters from Roman Egypt show that even when a woman was definitely dictating the letter, the language was adapted and changed for the female speaker. The scribe or the speaker are making distinctive compositional choices that seem to be related to gender. And I'm going to just show you one quite nice New Kingdom example. In this papyrus that you can see here with the cursive writing, is a copy of a letter written to a King in the Nineteenth Dynasty

– so about 1200 BC, from a woman who holds a position in the harem at Gurob, which is a site in the Middle Egypt.

Harems were institutions housing royal women, and those connected with them. And they were also extremely important economic institutions, particularly for textile production, for weaving. Now the photos on the slide on the other side of the letter show some objects that were found at the site of Gurob. Now they date slightly earlier than the letter itself, but they give us a sense of related material culture. So you have a seal, it's a seal ring here and here of an overseer of the harem, a man, and box belonging to a scribe of the harem, another man.

And here you have a statue of a woman from a tomb at Gurob, again slightly earlier than the writer of our letter. But she gives a visual sense of her status. We get a feeling of her perhaps from this statue. The beginning of the letter is lost, but she seems to be talking about work which she completed and what she's particularly proud of. Remember she's speaking to the King here. "I shall have myself boasted about because of the work. And do not let anyone find fault with me. It is advantageous that my Lord – life, prosperity, health, has heard, had people said to me to be taught and instructed in this important occupation of weaving. It is fortunate that my Lord has found someone fit to do this work, the like of which has not been done for the God pray before."

Now the discourse of self praise here is actually very close to what you find in biography. But she's concealing it, arguably quite poorly, in praise for the King. "Now you're so great because you figured out that you should appoint me to do this work." So here we can begin to have a feeling for this woman, we can begin to hear her voice. The letter is very formal in register. But it is strikingly direct and forthright in tone. Some features of it, including the confusion of masculine and feminine pronouns indicate that the scribe who copied this was certainly a man.

But no matter how much this letter has been mediated by male hands, the tone seems to be a fair reflection of her personal status and authority, a reflection of her voice. This letter gives us a feeling for the diversity of female status, position and experience that normally eludes us. We can begin to apprehend a woman who was in administrative control over a significant concern – the weaving of cloth for the temples. Harems can be viewed as female institutions. So you say, "Oh well, she's just wielding authority within a female domain."

But we can see from the seal and box that harems had male dominated hierarchies. So this can be understood as a somewhat mixed environment. And it's also a very prestigious environment as well. So it's striking that women who clearly had administrative power do not, as far as we can tell, set up their own tombs or dedicate statues and temples during this time period. In the New Kingdom, the self presentation of elite women, and thus their access to afterlife and memory was largely mediated through their male kin. Women did not own their own tombs. They were depicted in and buried in the tombs of their husbands.

There's a particularly beautiful example from the Eighteenth Dynasty on the West Bank of Thebes, on the tomb of a Mayor of Thebes called Sennefer. And he is depicted with his wife throughout the tomb. And you can see here behind him here, on this column here and just tucked in, she's seated just behind him on this wall here. Similarly the only way a woman could be depicted in temples through statuary, which is the most prestigious form of representation in temples, was with their husbands.

And this is the same man, Sennefer. His wife here has a different name. So either his wife had two names, or he had two wives, both are possible. Actually he's got a lot of woman in his tomb that have different names, he could have had up to four wives. But this is a bit of a debate. We don't really know how many women we're dealing with here. But this is a nice example of a statue that was set up in a temple context in which the woman is represented and she's quite prominent. But she couldn't have had a statue of her own, just by herself in the temple. She has to be with her husband.

But this pairing, or in the case of the statue, this triad representation with the child was potent for monumental display. Mobilises continuity, legitimacy and adherence to social norms. So, although the only way a woman could ensure an enduring monumental presence in this time period was through her husband. She was also vital to his self presentation, particularly in the mortuary domain. And it's the same thing in the royal sphere. The Queen was a necessary counterpart to the King. And this is a nice relief of a royal festival, in which you have the King with the Queen closely behind him, and participating in this festival. It's a festival of renewal – royal renewal.

This expressed the continuity and purity of the royal line, as well as mirroring the creative female male pairings that in part structured the world of the Gods. Divine Kingship was balanced to some extent by a divine Queenship. And the crown's and insignias that queens wear sort of identify them with Goddesses. And here you have the wife of Ramses II depicted wearing a [[Hathoric 0:19:13]] crown. So she's identified herself with Hathor in this scene.

Queens were also present in certain temple rituals as in the royal festival example. And here she is shaking a rattle sistrum before a Goddess. Scenes like this speak to the religious role of Queens, which I will discuss further later. So in both royal and non royal domains, there is a necessity for female presence. Wives accompany their husbands through many of the key transitions depicted in the tomb. And in cases where an individual died young or was not married, he's often depicted with his mother.

Now this idea of the necessity of the female presence for transfiguration and transformation is expressed through a particularly unique and distinctive example. And this is in the tomb of a high priest of [[Onorous 0:20:11]], called [[Anhumosa 0:20:12]] in Middle Egypt. So we're moving away from Thebes just for a moment, well upper Middle Egypt I should say, just north of the Thebian area. And in the cliffs you can just see the kind of the ... this is not a very good slide, but it shows the cliffs and the tombs as marked by an arrow.

Down towards the cultivation there was a temple to a Goddess, a lioness Goddess called Mekhit. And the owner of this tomb, a high priest, was probably involved in the restoration of that temple. So that temple was quite important to his self presentation. The tomb itself is quite remarkable. This is a very basic plan of it. What's particularly remarkable about it is the prominence of his wife in the scenes. So you come into the tomb through the entrance here. And the first thing you see on the faces of these pillars as you walk into the tomb, is his wife. She is standing there; she is the first figure that you see as you walk in. She's also beside you as you come in on the thickness of the doorjamb.

There's no parallel for this, for this prominence. And there are also scenes of her on these walls here and here and here, again around the entrance to the tomb's base. I'm sorry for the quality of the photographs, but I hope you can kind of see what I'm talking about. So what happens is you've got the tomb owner depicted here. The entrance to the tomb is here. So you're sort of entering the tomb space. And his wife is depicted and he's holding out, giving a bouquet to her, coming into the tomb space here and giving a bouquet to his wife.

What's interesting about this scene is that you can probably just make out the lines and lines of text all around her. That text that is wrapping round her is his biography, it's his life story. She's not mentioned in it at all, which is not surprising. But she is visually central to it, which is surprising. And on the other side of the door, so as you come in on this side, you have another scene of him bringing his wife a bouquet. In this scene she speaks directly to her husband, welcoming him into the temple of Mekhit and describing his transfigured and anointed body. Thus his tomb through this text is made part of the Goddesses domain. It becomes a temple of the Goddess Mekhit.

And his transition from the outside world into this divine temple space is enabled by the presence speech, and actions of his wife. She bears cultic titles and is a representative of the female divine principle. She is in some way assimilated with the divine, while also representing a key part of his lived experience. Her role is comparable to the role of Goddesses within the tomb space,

mediating that moment of transition between life and death and welcoming the deceased into the next world.

So this display of ritual cultic role which royal and non-royal women are depicted undertaking, must speak to a broader reality. And we can think that if women control some kind of cultural resources which are defined as their own, bit of a cliché to say things like birth and transition. Then it follows that they maintain some degree of power that differentiates them from or which is differentiated from male power. And in Egypt in this time period, this power focuses around the temple domain and domains of ritual and performance. Initially this development is confined to royal women.

And the first significant person to kind of wield this authority is this queen Ahmose Nefertari, a warrior queen from the very beginning of the New Kingdom. And this scene of her, really striking scene of her with the black face, comes from a later period which is actually deified. She becomes a Goddess, and the black represents fertility and fecundity. The other image on the slide is [[Astila 0:24:37]], which records the creation of a priestly office for her, that of the gods wife of Amun.

It also records an endowment of lands and goods in relation to that office, that she then bequest to her successors. So this is more than just a priestly title that she's getting. This is a degree of economic independence as well. Ahmose prioritised this title 'God's Wife' in her title strings. So she uses it more than her title of 'Royal Wife' or 'Royal Mother'. She's defining herself in relation to the God and the temple far more than her relationship to her husband and son. This is very unusual.

The title also refers to her role, her sacerdotal functions within the temple. She becomes the human representative of the first female divine principle who, with the creator God, ensures the perpetual creation of the universe. In this role, this kind of mediation between the generative power of the divine sphere and the mortal realm is represented by scenes in which women like this, whose successes as well are depicted on temples. So they're depicted in particular ritual contexts, playing this mediatory role.

The title of 'God's Wife of Amun' was held by numerous royal women throughout the New Kingdom. But it seems to develop into something more purely symbolic. Just about women claiming a divine connection rather than the sort of core priestly function. But for Ahmose Nefertari it reflects a reality of involvement in the development of religious practice in the New Kingdom. She's very involved in temple building. And she seems to be transformative in some of the ritual practices through building and performance in the early New Kingdom.

Perhaps the most famous holder of this office is someone some of you might be familiar with. This woman, Hatshepsut, who was a royal wife who later claimed the throne and ruled as King in Egypt during the Eighteenth Dynasty. This slide shows a statue of her bearing royal regalia. So he or she is already King. But she is still certainly female and statue has clear female attributes. It's a very beautiful statue I think. The line drawing below, the little kind of rough line drawing of a graffiti type text shows her prior to her accession in her role as 'God's Wife', holding a distinctive sceptre which is associated with 'God's Wife', and she bears that title in the text.

She, like Ahmose Nefertari before her preferred to use this priestly title of 'God's Wife of Amun' over titles such as 'King's Wife' or 'King's Daughter'. Thus, like her predecessor, she defines herself by her ritual role rather than her relationship to her pre-eminent male kin. Her position in particular seems to have a broader impact on the self presentation of high status women, the high status women in her milieu. From the beginning of the New Kingdom, the priestly class had been professionalised and the traditional priestly hierarchies and positions in the temple were closed to women.

But from her reign, from the reign of Hatshepsut onwards, numerous elite women begin to hold a title titled 'Songstress of Amun' in their title strings, alongside the domestic Nebit Pier, 'Lady

of the House'. Now traditionally Egyptologists don't tend to think that the songstress title was a priestly title. They say that it's more about rank and showing that you're a particular woman of high status in the Thebian area, rather than actual performative role. And this question of whether it's symbolic or functional is difficult to access.

But these elite women are defining themselves through a performative role in the cult. They are singing and making music for the God. And these are crucial aspects of ritual performance. And I think we have to really think about why Egyptological scholarship doesn't see this as priestly. Again this is something we could come back to. There is a corresponding visual aspect as well. And again we can return to Sennefer and one of his hundreds of wives. Here she is depicted with this title. So she is Nebit Pier, 'Lady of the House', his beloved 'Songstress of Amun'.

And she's holding in her hands key elements of ritual performance. Here she holds a sistrum, a rattle that was used, that you shook before the God, to perpetuate him, to make him welcome and to sort of stimulate his transfiguration I guess. She's also holding here a necklace counterpoise called a [[maenad 0:29:37]]. And both these items are associated with the Goddess Hathor. So in some ways she's identifying herself with the Goddess Hathor. She's also holding a lettuce which is the symbol of fertility. If you want to know why, you can ask me at the end of the lecture.

So these women through these attributes and roles are really kind of fashioning themselves as priestly performers, whether or not we see this as a priestly function or not, and whether or not we see it as symbolic or not. And from the late New Kingdom onwards, sort of the end of the Second Millennium into the First Millennium, these roles shift in meaning. What may have been symbolic absolutely becomes concrete and functional. There's no more argument about that. We have a proliferation of female titles in the cult.

So more titles, and more different types of titles must start to mean more functions and more roles. And we start to see the development of hierarchies, priestly hierarchies, some sort of female priesthood in the temple. And the development of this priesthood is marked in particular by changes in the position of the God's wife of Amun. And this takes on a more specialist function, seemingly becoming quite separate from any royal connection. And this is something I want to look at a bit further.

So, with the transition into the First Millennium, the end of New Kingdom Egypt, the three themes that I've been working with so far change significantly. The religious role of women and their place in the temple and their self presentation and relationship to male kin. But what I'm particularly interested in, and what I'm moving towards, is how changes in these two domains impact the potential for female voice. So I'll begin as we shift into the First Millennium, I'll begin with a bit of historical background just to kind of set the scene.

So by the end of the New Kingdom, by the end of the period I've been talking about, the 1080's, roughly 1080 BC, Egypt was no longer a centralised state. And this map gives a sense of the different... or this process of political fragmentation that seems to happen. So the map here, you can see all these different colours on the map are areas of different political authority, different kind of power bases holding different parts of Egypt, really represents a mosaic of power and control. This is the endpoint of the period, around 730.

In the earlier part of this period, power was mostly divided North-South. And Upper Egypt was held by military leaders such as this man, who held the title of 'High Priest of Amun'. This individual whose name is [[Penegum 0:32:31]], Penegum the First, is depicted wearing royal regalia. So he's wearing the royal headdress. But inscribed on his arm, his title is 'High Priest of Amun'. Because of such title structures and other displays of political and religious authority, we seem to see the rulership of Upper Egypt as characterised by something like a theocracy, some sort of theocratic rule.

So the God Amun is King, and key decisions are made via oracles. And I've represented this a little factiously by this sort of cartoon-like drawing that shows a cat receiving an oracle from a

divine mouse. So a sort of a satirical comment on some of the structures of this theocratic state. The integration of religious and political power structures has implications for female position. This is something I'll come back to. These political developments were accompanied by complex transformations of elite culture and representation, particularly within the royal sphere.

So in the early part of this period, we no longer get those beautiful decorative tombs that we've been looking at in the early part of this lecture. The tomb becomes a simple shaft with no chapel superstructure, no decorated chapel at all. And instead the burial chamber becomes the focus, and you just have a coffin, some papyri, and stela. So rather than the tomb being a focal point for long-term commemoration and communal commemoration, commemoration of families, wives and children as well, the tomb becomes a short-lived medium for performative display centred on the body and the coffin.

And this focus on the individual body rather than communal commemoration tomb space also has significant implications for female self presentation. So if you can bear these two things in mind, this political fragmentation and the emphasis on the religious sphere as part of this political fragmentation, and what's happening in terms of display, mortuary display, this emphasis on the individual body rather than commemorative tomb space, hold that in your mind. Then we'll start to move through and see the implications of this through some key case studies.

So as I said, the context of political decentralisation means radical changes in power structures, particularly priestly power structures. And it's interesting to consider why female priestly roles and structures become so important in this development. Why do they suddenly pluralise? Why do they suddenly diversify? Why is this a focal point for change and development? And this is something we can perhaps discuss at the end. I'd really like your thoughts on this.

We don't really understand the mechanisms and drivers for this process. But many of these changes are focussed around the God's wife of Amun. And I'll just give you a couple of examples to illustrate this point. So the first is this woman [[Maat Carae 0:35:40]], represented here by her absolutely beautiful coffin. And she is a daughter of Penegum the First, she is the daughter of this man in the statue. Now the scene on the sort of black and white image – I'm sorry it's such a terrible, terrible photograph, is carved on a temple pylon in Karnak.

And here she is depicted shaking sistrum before the God Amun. You can just make her out here, hopefully you can see the line of her wig and her crown and the sistrum she's holding in the figure of Amun here. So this is a traditional female function, this shaking of sistrum. But the text is interesting. "May you grant a long kingship on your throne to the God's wife of Amun in Karnak, the royal daughter of your body, mistress of the two lands, the divine [[adoretress, Maat Carae 0:36:34]].

Two kind of interesting features here. First of all she's claiming divine descent. She is of Amun's body and she refers to her office to some sort of kingship. Now this is kind of interesting. She has a sort of royal authority, perhaps just limited to the domain of the temple. But she's still claiming some sort of kingship. Now, it's interesting that in a time when concepts of rulership and kingship are changing so much, that women can lay claim to the language of kingship a little bit. And they can begin to lay claim to some of the regalia and the actions of traditional Pharaonic kingship too.

Maat Carae is of course a member of the ruling family. And it's generally accepted that her position as part of legitimising and strengthening that power base. But is she just a figurehead? Is she just a marker of power? I think there's more to it than this. She is a daughter, but she is not a wife. She never marries. So her position is not used for strengthening authority through marriage. And it seems that she never had any children. Now this is true of most Gods' wives in this period. They hold their offices for very long periods of time, they don't seem to marry, and they don't seem to have children.

So of course scholarship has gone, "Oh well, they must be celibate, they must be virgins." And we, scholarship has tended to focus on that and get very, very interested in this idea of celibacy or

virginity in these contexts. We can't prove that, although the fact that they don't marry or seem to have children does seem to point in that direction. But I think what's really interesting here is that the Gods wife is no longer forming part of a human ruling pair. This role or this priestly office no longer represents the continuity of human dynastic office. This office seems to have become specialist and independent. Her primary pairing is with Amun, as daughter, wife and priestess.

The independent power and influences of this position becomes very visible to us at the end of the period that I'm covering in this lecture. So about 200 years from Maat Carae we come to Aninerdius again, the woman I began this lecture with. This an alabaster statue of her dating to some time in her reign, or her pontificate, between 750 to 600 BC. The statue stands at about 170 cm. So she's a bit shorter than me. I'm wearing heels, so maybe about there I guess. But still quite almost life sized statue. It was set up in the Temple of Karnak in a little shrine by the entrance to one of the main temple complexes.

Now here she's holding the traditional regalia of the Gods wife, a kind of floral sceptre. And in her hand, held in her fist is the symbol of Hathor, the [[Menart 0:39:51]] counterpoise. But it's also interesting that the statue bears a biographical inscription. And that's what I've quoted on the slide here. She says, "I was a Gods wife, effective for her town, charitable for her [[known 0:40:07]], her province. I gave bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, because I know what my local God Amun desires."

This biography is really striking because it parallels almost word for word – slightly adapted because she's a woman, the types of biographies that man had been writing about themselves for 1,500 years. This phraseology, "I gave bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked" is a standard biographical phrase. It's just the classic biographical statement. And so she's really aligning herself and drawing on this ancient male tradition of self presentation. Aninerdius was the adopted daughter of a Gods wife of Amun. And she was the actual daughter of a ruler. And she in turn adopted other gods' wives of Amun, other daughters of rulers.

She and her descendents are the primary ritual actors in the temple of Amun. The cult is no longer enacted symbolically by a King, the King figure, or in reality by some male high priest, but by these women. Some examples here, nice example I think. This is one of Aninerdius' descendents presenting the figure of Maat to Amun within a temple kind of like this one. And here you've got other Gods wives of Amun in the embrace of Amun, being held, embraced by the God.

So these women are not only adopting quite a lot of royal insignia and claiming initiations on royal Pharaonic models, but they're also playing roles in rituals as here, that had traditionally been reserved for the King. So here she's offering Maat to Amun, a very royal kind of type of scene. They're also depicted being embraced by the gods, libating the Gods image. And in one case – and I wish I had a photograph to show you, but I couldn't find one, being suckled by Goddesses.

So they and the officials who serve them held the central authority in Thebes, the central religious authority. They commissioned temple building, especially in the area of Karnak temple. And they commissioned buildings sort of around the back of Karnak. So here you've got the back of the temple of Amun. And there's a row of temples here. This is the temple of [[Onorous Onofors 0:42:39]], which is here. And so what they seem to do is create a new processional route at the back of the temple, lined with these shrines that are dedicated to forms of Osiris, but in which their role is absolutely prominent, their image is absolutely dominant.

So what we have is women becoming the absolutely key cultic figure in the temple complex, right at the end of this period. And this is a steady process of development over the sort of 200 year span. And now what I want to do is sort of move back in time and look at what's happening in other spheres of representation, see what's going on, and see how this all kind of fits together. So these political and social changes at the very top of the temple hierarchy have a concomitant in forms of self presentation available for women a little further down the social scale.

Now these women are still part of the elite in Thebes, but they're not members of the high priesthood, the Gods wife of Amun, the priesthood. And these forms relate to changes in burial practice, and its emphasis on the individual body. So included in women's tomb shafts are stelae like this that depict women before the God, in adoration of particular gods – here [[Ra Harakte 0:44:03]]. And what's really interesting is women also start to get their own funerary papyri too.

So whereas earlier in the New Kingdom like in tombs, women had to share funerary papyri at the books of the dead. And they're always depicted, there's always just sort of one book of the dead with husband and wife on it, and the woman is sharing that book of the dead. Women in this period start to get their own papyri. And this is a nice example. This is from right at the beginning of the First Millennium. It's actually the woman's papyrus, belongs to her. Her husband had a separate one. He's one of these kind of royal high priests of Amun. And here she is on the papyrus depicted behind him, very standard, very traditional.

But then in certain scenes on the papyrus, as in this detail here, she's by herself. So you see this kind of process of change and this slow process of kind of gaining autonomy within the mortuary domain. And this is encapsulated by these two examples as well. Here you have a very traditional scene from a man's book of the dead, where he's ploughing the fields and sort of participating with particular works in the next world. And here you have this woman, owner of this funerary papyrus doing exactly the same thing.

So you start to have women claiming autonomy and power within temple domains among the high priesthood, but also women claiming autonomy, separation from men, in the funerary sphere in the next world. And both these strands I think enable the final development I want to talk about, which is the transformation of female voice within temple environments. So this is the stuff that I'm really interested in. I've only just started working on it. So I'd really like to get your thoughts as I take you through some of this material.

So we saw the use of ancient biographical phraseology on the statue of Aninerdius. Biographies of women start to appear long before her statue. Her statue is again a kind of culminating point. But these biographies emerge in interesting ways. They're initially still embedded within male self presentation, and related to male kin. But it's not like anything we saw in the Eighteenth Dynasty, and hopefully you'll see what I mean. We start to get quite distinctive and innovative voices emerging.

So I'm just going to look at three examples. The very earliest is this statue, or statuette I should say, found in Karnak. Like all Egyptian material, it looks monumental, looks like it should be life-size. It's actually only about that big. So just a wee little thing. And the scene in front of the knees, sort of across the knees, shows the owner of the statue, [[Hor 0:47:07]], who is depicted here in this kind of quite big cloak, with his arms raised before the God Osiris. But behind him is a female figure, it's his mother.

And I'm sure you can see she's actually bigger than him in the scene as well. She's a little bit taller. She's quite prominent. And this makes sense because she seems to be the person who dedicated the statue for her son, complete kind of role reversal. The body is inscribed with two biographical texts that wrap around either side. And the one on the right side of the body eulogises the statue owner. Very standard type of biography, but it uses very unusual phraseology. It's quite innovative and strange.

And the one wrapping around the left side of the body is in her voice, she is speaking. She describes the care that she took to preserve her son's memory. So his mother, 'Lady of the House', 'Songstress of Amun', she says, "I was honest with you, I was straight with you while you were alive. And as for the day you departed for the West, the day you died, I acted to the best of my ability. I built a pure place for you in the temple of Anubis, which I completed perfectly as a work of transition. I hid you there in the West. I made you a statue in Karnak following Amun

in every festival. And another there at the peak of Abydos, core ritual centre in Middle Egypt – Upper Middle Egypt. I did all of these things for you, that which must be done for every excellent noble.”

Now there’s a lot of things in this text that are quite unusual and quite interesting. The phraseology of ‘proper care of kin’, taking care of you father or your child, usually your father or your parents that have died. It’s known from earlier biographies, it’s a standard biographical motif or trope, but has never been spoken by a woman before. And this idea that she’s creating temple environments, creating tomb spaces, creating statues, all of that draws on traditional motifs of biography too, but here again is adapted to a completely new context.

And it’s interesting that also in this text she’s really [[theamatising 0:49:33]] this idea of her son’s transition and transformation if you think back to the material that I looked at earlier, how much this is part of female representation. Now in a sense this biography is in line with earlier traditions of female self presentation. Her actions are focussed around her male kin. But these are her actions. She is saying something of her self, her responsibility and her ability, including her financial ability through this text. Now admittedly it’s a tiny little statue. So we’re not talking about much financial ability. But she also says that she built you know, the tomb space and other statues as well. So we are talking about some outlay now, but we do have to keep the size of this little statue in mind.

My next example is this statue of a man called [[Nark Efmoot 0:50:26]], who holds many priestly positions in the Temple of Karnak. And now we’re talking of something really substantial. The statue is about 1.7 metres high. So I guess about there. But he’s seated, so he’s over life size. And there are numerous voices inscribed around the surface of the statue. But most prolific and most distinctive are the voices of his female kin. Now as you can see, on the front of the statue sort of down by the knees, you have figures of two women, you can see them on either side. And these are his wife on the right and his daughter on the left.

The speech of his wife is more of a mourning song and statement of her devotion to him, than a biography. She says, “We will rest here together without the Gods separating us. As you live for me, I will not be parted from you.” She also very unusually, expresses her longing that they will remain together in this world. And this is one of the most beautiful passages from Egyptian text from this time period I think. “Don’t let us go to this land of eternity, just so our names might not be forgotten. A moment of seeing the rays of the sun is more effective than eternity as ruler of the underworld.”

So this desire for presence, this immediacy of presence in the lived world means far more than spending your life with Osiris, with the God . . . or that spending your afterlife with Osiris, the God of the dead. So what she seems to be saying is that this presence that she has on this statue enables them both to kind of live in this world, to be in the rays of the sun, to be in the temple environment. That might be one way of reading it. Their daughter on the other side also expresses the depth of her loss. She’s actually speaking to her father. “Would that you were here with me eternally. Oh I will not be separated from you.”

And then her speech seems to shift in tone. “I will rejoice and I will delight when I remember you youthful. Then the other children will say to me, ‘She is not without a father or mother.’” Kind of an odd text. But what I think she’s saying or how I think you could understand this is that there is no real loss here. Although her parents have died, they are still together on the statue. Their representations mean that they are still united, they are still together in temple space, and that she has not lost her parents fully, that somehow they kind of are enduringly present in the statue.

Now this daughter seems to have dedicated the statue for her father. So although she’s quite small in representation, it looks like she was the dedicator. And the reason I say this is because this gentleman has another statue also setup in the Temple of Karnak, where he bequests all his property to this daughter. So looks like the statue where he’s bequeathing the property is her way

of ensuring that no one else can lay claim to the property. It's like, "So don't you touch my stuff you know, it's inscribed on the statue" you know. "That's it. I've got legal right to it." And then she also seems to have dedicated this statue, which preserves something or says something about her devotion, her relationship to her father.

The mother's speech on the side of the seat, the same statue, is more fully biographical in voice. This is something that actually does correspond to what we think might be a traditional biography. And she says, "I am the daughter of an overseer of Upper Egypt, and the mother of great priests. My God, Amun probably, loves me. And he honours my family, for he made me a great one of my town. He venerates me in his domain for he has bound my ears to Karnak, Mistress of Temples. I follow Mut, Goddess, lady of the domain. And I adorn her with all perfection. This commemoration is effective, thus ensuring that my heirs may be confirmed in her domain."

It's kind of an odd text. I'm not sure I've got the translation exactly right, but I think I've got the sense of it right. This text seems to be all about the legitimacy of her position in the temple and the legitimacy that she then bequest to her sons, including the son that is the owner of the statue. It's interesting that she really emphasises female presence and female space. She is the one who ends up through her role, binding her sons to the temple. Karnak, the temple is female. Karnak is a Mistress of Temples. And then she talks about her role in relationship to Mut the Goddess, the consort to Amun, and her role adorning the God. So that alludes to some sort of priestly function, priestly performance.

So it seems like through this text that the owner of the statue owes his position to his mother and is kind of tracing his priestly lineage through her. And she is able through her voice on the statue, to lay claim to that. Again it's not something we've heard before. Now both of these statues were dedicated I think by women for men. So I think the woman probably had a hand in the composition of the texts, which probably sort of makes their distinctive features or the innovative features more understandable.

And we're beginning to see a development, an expansion, in the range of possibilities for female expression. And this is just hinted at in these two texts. My final example, which is my favourite, is quite different. This is a statue of a woman called [[Sheninsoptu 0:56:31]]. And in some ways it falls within more traditional forms of representation. This statue was dedicated for her by her husband in the temple of Karnak, again around the sort of the 900's BC. But the texts inscribed on the surface are I think some of the most insensuous and intimate prescriptions of individual presence in temple space. And the form of the statue itself is really striking.

This is the only temple statue of a woman, known to me, from this time period, or indeed from the New Kingdom as well. In a sense it predicts the beautiful and imposing statues of Aninertius and the other Gods' wives of Amun. But it also makes play with the past. It is closely parallel in form with statues of Goddesses from temple domains. So here you have Sheninsoptu on the right, no on the left and this statue of a Goddess, an Eighteenth Dynasty Goddess from the Theban area. Now the way I've done the slide makes it look like they're the same size. This statue is over life size. Sheninsoptu is only 60 centimetres. So about that high. So she's much, much smaller.

But this seems to be quite a clear identification with divine representation. There's a sense of modelling I think. On the title Sheninsoptu bears the title 'Musician of Amun Ra'. But she only bears it once. And otherwise she is referred to simply as a 'Lady of the House', a Nebit Pier. The texts do not quite fit our traditional understanding of biography. We're still not really able to talk about a woman's career, her life, in the same way as we talk about a man's life and biography. But it seems that the boundaries of decorum restricting certain forms of representation, making certain types of representation unavailable to women in turn enable extensions and elaborations of meaning. So something new comes out of this restriction.

The text inscribed on the left and right sides of the seat, so all around the seat, are among the most sensuous descriptions of the experience of temple space. Throughout it seems the statue speaks,

voicing her desire to remain in temple space, and mapping its sensuous geography. So I'll just quote you a bit, but I haven't put it on the slide because it's quite a lot.

"I have come to your august temple. I have attained your beloved place. May I hear the rejoicings in the mouths of your wild priests when you appear before me. May my body rise up at your call. May I inhale your myrrh which circulates through the sky. I have come so that I may be in the temple. For I know that this sacred space is the resting place of [[Atum 0:59:27]]. May I remember the heaven of sky, Amun, as he desires, as he breathes in the centre of his alters within it. May I sit there among its columns that I may be the scent of myrrh. I have set aside weariness in this great city. The pavilion where a man can forget weariness and worry in order to be effective thereafter."

Now in these texts, the distinction between lived experience, being in the city, being in the temple, afterlife wishes in the statues own voice in the temple has blurred. The physicality and sensuality of divine presence is really striking. So instead of being a straightforward narrative of a life, these texts form what I consider a statue biography, the statue is speaking, the statue is telling of its experience. And she is the statue.

Now texts like this which give the statue a voice are known from earlier periods, but they're never as strongly or as expressed as this, and never as elaborate. Through the incorporation of sensual and sensory domains in Sheninsoptu's texts, the sense of being intimately and personally present in the temple is intensified. The statue seems to me to be a culmination of the theme of voice that I've tried to develop through this lecture. She speaks vividly and is enduringly present through the speech and through the statue.

And this theme of spoken performance, the power of speech, is also mobilised in the biographical epitaphs that she holds, that she's characterised by throughout the texts. She is a noble who knows her speech. "Pure of hands in every ritual. One excellent of speech whose breath thereof is myrrh. When I was on Earth I spoke truth to all."

And I've included this little colour slide here which shows incense, myrrh, being burned on a [[flant 1:01:22]] to release the scent in a temple environment. And this idea of myrrh being a metaphor for the self is really important in Sheninsoptu's text. "She, her breath, her speech is myrrh. And she also wants to sit among temple columns, that I may be the scent of myrrh." So she becomes through these epitaphs and through the material presence of the statue itself, an element of ritual performance and participation. She becomes that scent, she becomes that myrrh.

So through the course of this past hour I have tried to trace areas in which we can begin to see the emergence of an independence of sorts. This is not an equal citizenship but a degree of separation, delineation, and definition enabled in part by exception of political and social circumstances and probably by some exceptional individuals. The drivers of these changes are not fully understood. And what I've just tried to do is sort of tease out some different strands to assess this impact, particularly in terms of female self presentation.

The religious sphere was the area in which women always had the possibility of presence and participation. And it seems to be these highest office holders, the royal women of the Eighteenth Dynasty that provide a model which is adapted to the temple based political structures of the First Millennium. The question is how we might view the impact of these prominent individuals in reshaping temple environments, practices and performances. The tendency has been to view them as only figureheads, but I think we need to reassess this.

The expansion and elaboration of female priestly roles, and their parallel autonomy in the mortuary sphere open up new possibilities for fashioning female identity. We see this with the Gods wives who come to lead temple cult. But we also hear it in the speeches of Sheninsoptu, who's self is defined by ritual action and spoken performance. This female self presentation draws

on the past, on male traditions, but also innovates and presents a new and distinctive voice and presence in the world of the temple.

Thank you.

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