Women's work in the Early Dynastic Period

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Abstract

The twentieth century scholarship regarding women's involvement in the Early Dynastic Period offers subjective and incomplete accounts of women's roles in early Egyptian history. Scholarly commentary regarding the women from this period has so far not been able to provide a satisfactory account of their lives, or of their possible roles within that society. My Master's study of women's biographic details on funerary stelae/slabs from the First and Second Dynasty (*ca.* 3085–2544 BC) provides new insights on old data. This research employs a multi-disciplinary approach including statistical and textual analyses while applying gender as an analytical category. The early hieroglyphic script that records the women's name and/or titles is re-analysed through a palaeographic and philological examination that evaluates previous interpretations.

A dominant discourse that characterises this enquiry is the notion that the majority of women's stelae, of which most have no titles, represent concubines and harem women. Examination of previous scholarly commentary identifies an androcentric bias that has shaped and dominated the interpretation and evaluation of women in the Early Dynastic Period since the 1960s (Kaplony 1963: 371–372; Kemp 1967: 26). The feasibility of the existence of the harem institution in the Early Dynastic Period itself has been reviewed and remains unsubstantiated. My study provides a highly needed new perspective. This paper aims to present the findings of the study along with a new framework that demonstrates the influential role of Early Dynastic women in the context of the socio-economic environment of the new state. This innovative framework identifies new social configurations, interdependency in working relationships between roles and genders, which suggests flexibility and lateral differentiation within the stratified society of Early Dynastic Egypt.

Keywords

Early Dynastic Period – women – stelae – titles – public roles

عمل المرأة خلال عصر الأسرات المبكرة

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ملخص

تقدم منحة القرن العشرين المتعلقة بمشاركة المرأة خلال عصر الأسرات المبكرة تقارير غير موضوعية وناقصة عن دور المرأة فى التاريخ المصرى المبكر. ولم تتمكن حتى الآن المناقشات العلمية بشأن سيدات تلك الفترة من تقديم سرد مرضٍ لحياتهن، أو عن أدوارهن المحتملة فى المجتمع. تقدم دراستى لدرجة الماجستير الخاصة تفاصيل السير الذاتية للسيدات الموجودة على اللوحات الجنائزية من عصر الأسرتين الأولى والثانية (حوالى 3085-2544 قبل الميلاد) رؤى جديدة حول المعلومات القديمة. ويستخدم هذا البحث نهجًا متعدد التخصصات بما فى ذلك التحليلات الإحصائية والنصية من خلال تطبيق الجنس كفئة تحليلية. كما تتم إعادة تحليل النصوص الهيروغليفية المبكرة التى تسجل اسم المرأة وألقابها من خلال فحص شكل الخطوط القديمة وكذلك أسلوب اللغة لتقييم التفسيرات السابقة.

إن الخطاب المهيمن والذى يميز هذه الدراسة هو فكرة أن غالبية اللوحات النسائية التى لا يحمل معظمها ألقاب أصحابهن، ربما تعود لمحظيات ونساء من الحريم. ويبرهن فحص المناقشات العلمية السابقة خلال فترة الستينيات من القرن الماضى وجود تحيز ذكورى شكَّل وسيطر على تفسير وتقييم دور المرأة خلال عصر الأسرات المبكرة (372–371 :1963 Kaplony; 26 :1967 Kemp). كما تمت مراجعة إمكانية وجود مؤسسة الحريم فى عصر الأسرات المبكرة نفسه وهو الأمر الذى لا يزال غير مثبت. وتقدم الدراسة الحالية وجهة نظر جديدة مطلوبة بشدة، حيث يهدف هذا البحث لتقديم نتائج الدراسة إلى جانب إطار جديد يوضح الدور المؤثر لسيدات العصر المبكرة من التاريخ المصرى القديم وذلك فى سياق البيئة الاجتماعية والاقتصادية للدولة الجديدة. ويحدد هذا الإطار المبتكر التكوينات الاجتماعية الجديدة، والاعتماد المتبادل فى علاقات العمل بين الأدوار والأجناس، مما يشير إلى المرونة والاختلاف الجانبى داخل المجتمع الطبقى لمصر القديمة خلال عصر الأسرات المبكرة.

الكلمات الدالة

عصر الأسرات المبكرة – المرأة – اللوحات – الألقاب – الأدوار العامة

It is generally agreed that the Egyptian state was constructed around the powerful ideology of divine kingship (Redford 1986: 130; Wilkinson 1999: 3; Frandsen 2008: 47; Stevenson 2016: 422). This kingship ideology was embedded in ancient Egyptian cosmology and perceived in their mythology from the *sp tpy* – the First Time (Pinch 2002: 156). The hierarchical political and social structure of ancient Egypt is typically illustrated in the familiar pyramid form (Köhler 2010: 46). The stratified model separates the social classes in relation to the king. The king is positioned at the top of the model, which descends through the different classes, such as, the royal court, the elite, the administration, craft specialist and terminates with the *rḥ.yt* (Köhler 2008: 383). This kingship ideology also drove the socio-economic environment of the ancient Egyptian state. This can be exemplified by the following ancient Egyptian text defining the king's vital roles: "Re has placed the king in the land of the living, forever and ever, judging mankind and satisfying the gods, realizing Maat and destroying Isfet. He (the king) gives offerings to the gods and mortuary offerings to the deceased." (Assmann 1975: no. 20, II, 31–37).

As a king is unable to achieve these roles unaided, he "delegates parts of this comprehensive responsibility to others – priests and officials …" (Assmann 2001: 4). These vital functions constitute the primary sectors that drive the synergetic relationship of ideology and economy upon which the state was founded. Women, however, are rarely considered in the configuration of the socio-economic structure as it was considered the domain of men (Robins 1993: 11). Yet, does this type of focus give us an accurate reflection of women's involvement in the state of Early Dynastic Egypt?

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The Early Dynastic Period's source material primarily comes from mortuary contexts. The stelae, in addition to seals and seal impressions, provide much of our information about significant residents, administration and royal households of the period (Wilkinson 1999: 60, 93–94; Martin 2011: 2). The collection of stelae/funerary slabs that are a part of this research originate from the Early Dynastic necropoli of Abu Rawash, Helwan and Abydos. These are the three sites where there was a representation of stelae belonging to both genders. In total, the study included 324 funerary monuments of which 149 were identified as belonging to women, 53 belonging to males and 122 that have either no clear adjudication of gender by image or hieroglyphic determinative or have insufficient inscription to be analysed (see tab. 1). As the table reflects, the majority of the stelae come from the royal burial ground at Abydos.

The dataset was assembled from previous studies on the stelae/slabs undertaken by Christiana Köhler and Jana Jones for the Helwan collection (Köhler – Jones 2009), Geoffrey T. Martin's epigraphical study of the non-royal stelae from Abydos (Martin 2011), and the details from Abu Rawash, which were extracted from Jean-Pierre Montet's original reports (Montet 1938 and 1946). The funerary relief slabs from the Helwan necropolis come from principal tombs considered to belong to the lower-ranking royal family members, middle-class officials and craftsmen (Köhler – Jones 2009: 96). On the other hand, the First Dynasty stelae from Abu Rawash and Abydos are from elite subsidiary grave contexts with the stelae from the latter coming from subsidiary graves surrounding the rulers of the First Dynasty. This funerary arrangement positioned the deceased close to the sovereigns as they were during life. Information regarding the original installation of individual stela/slab, however, is impacted by displacement from its original context. The archaeological context of all three necropoli have been severely impacted by natural and deliberate disturbances including erosion, looting and destruction in antiquity and modern times.

The statistical analysis of the stelae provides quantifiable data on the distribution between the genders and the number of undefined stelae in the corpus (see tab. 1). The statistics show that the majority, nearly 73% of the Early Dynastic corpus of gendered stelae from across the three sites, belonged to women. Chance preservation, however, may affect this statistic. The profusion of female stelae, 129 female stelae versus 37 male stelae, from the royal necropolis of Abydos has already been interpreted by some scholars as evidence of the high status of women in Early Dynastic society (MacArthur 2011: 254). On the other hand, this infrequent trend of female primacy in the archaeological record raised concerns from some scholars. An example of this concern is attested in Gerard Godron's declaration that he found the disproportion in stelae belonging to men as "troublant" (Godron 1990: 93).[1] This example is indicative of the androcentric bias that has resulted in a subordinate representation of these Early Dynastic women. As this paper will go on to demonstrate, previous perspectives that considered Early Dynastic women as harem ladies and concubines has impacted the scholarship on these women for more than half a century.

It appears that Godron did not consider two critical factors that impact the statistical analyses. First of all, the current corpus may not reflect the original number of stelae. This particularly refers to the Abydene necropolis. Excavations uncovered over 1200 subsidiary graves between the royal cemetery and funerary enclosures, but only 283 inscribed stelae have been recovered.[2] Another factor that impacts statistical analyses is that no gender determination can be made on nearly 60% of the existing corpus. As chart 1 demonstrates, 122 examples are either fragmentary or that the gender cannot be determined via image or

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[1]   "C'est assez troublant: pourquoi une telle disproportion en défaveur des hommes ?".
[2]   A total of 62 "blank" stelae and five stelae for hounds were also recovered from the royal necropolis.

	Total	Abu Rawash		Abydos		Helwan	
Male	53	1	20%	37	13%	15	42%
Female	149	1	20%	129	45%	19	52%
No Determinative	122	3	60%	117	42%	2	6%
Total	324	5		283		36	

Tab. 1 Collection of funerary stelae from the sites of Abu Rawash, Abydos and Helwan

hieroglyphic determinative. As such, both these issues may skew the numerical observations that indicate a prevalence of female stelae.

The statistical analyses initially incorporated all 202 identified stelae including eight which were fragments that only offered partial female determinatives. After the initial gender distribution analysis, these eight examples were exempt from further analysis. The remaining 194 stelae were separated into two groups, "with" and "without titles"; with the untitled ones considered to provide the deceased's name only (see chart 2). The analysis reveals that women not only possessed the higher percentage of stelae but, significantly, also represent 50% of the recovered titled stelae. In contrast, while there are fewer contemporaneous male stelae, men still accounted for half the titled stelae in the corpus and are attributed with a significantly larger proportion of Early Dynastic titles.

Currently, there are approximately 88 various titles known from the Early Dynastic Period (Martin 2011: 215–216; Hikade – Roy 2015: 43). It is important to note that not all the titles are clearly defined. Ambiguity still surrounds the earliest forms of the hieroglyphic script. There are at least 12 of the Early Dynastic titles remaining partially untranslated due to lacunae and uncertainty regarding the reading or meaning (Kelly 2016: 41). Due to time restraints, only the female title translations and interpretations were re-evaluated. The variance between the smaller number of male stelae and a higher number of male titles is explained by the

fact that 64.8% of the male stelae have at least one title, with only 19 of the 53 male stelae being without a title. In contrast, only 23.4% (35 of the 149) of the female stelae have a title. Moreover, a small number of male officials held multiple titles. For example, high officials, *ꜣmri.t(i)* from Helwan and Sabef from Abydos account for 14 titles between the two of them (Köhler – Jones 2009: 154–155; Martin 2011: 44–45). This equates to 16% of the Early Dynastic title corpus. In contrast, the highest number of titles on a female stela was three (Martin 2011: 82–83), with only 13 women holding more than one title.[3] Significantly, my research found that women held 21% of the known titles in the first two dynasties.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The initial collation of female titles from the stelae/slabs, based on previous authors' interpretations, identified twenty titles (see tab. 2). On inspection though, titles 10 – *rpwty*, "she of the carrying chair, palanquin" (Martin 2011: 114–115), and 14 *msnw*, "harpooner" (Martin 2011: 146–147) were excluded due to either conflicting or additional information that did not support the original findings of titles held by females. In the first instance, the sign transcribed on the stela for title 10 was found to be an element of the deceased's name. In the second instance, the harpoon title on Abydos stele 207, considered by Martin as

Chart 1 Gender distribution of stelae across the sites of Abu Rawash, Helwan and Abydos

Distribution of Early Dynastic stelae

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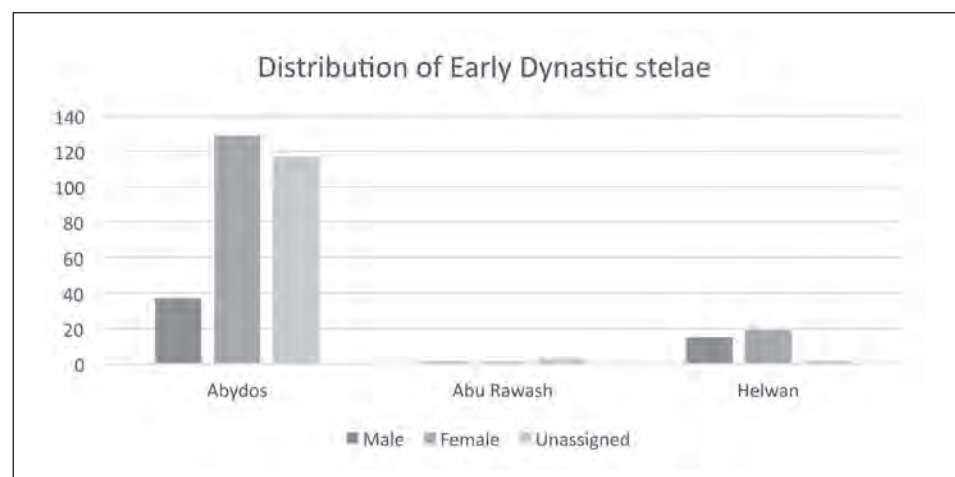
[3]   See Köhler and Jones (2009: 164–165, stela EM99–21); Martin (2011: 28–29, 82–83, 96–102, stelae 21, 95, 96, 120–126, 128–129).

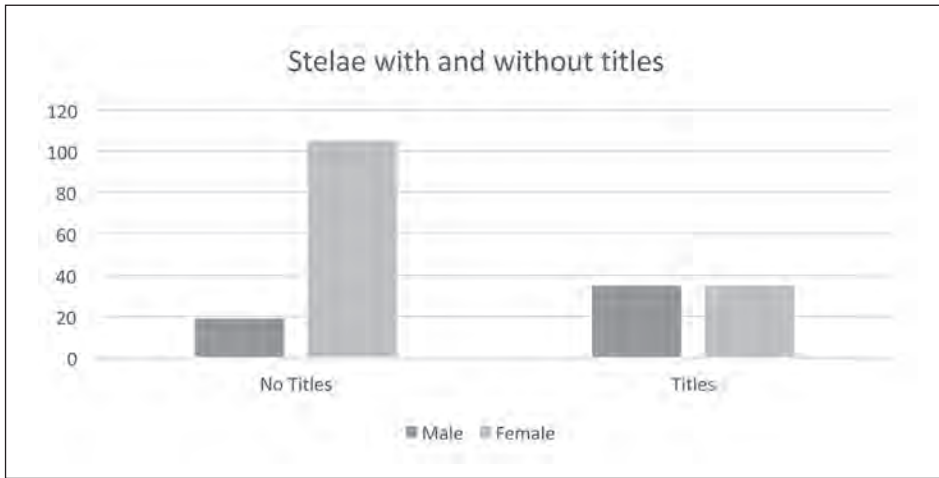**Chart 2 Apportionment of stelae with and without titles**

Title Number	Stela Number	Title	Title Translation	Other Stela Documenting Title
1	S01-37	rḫ(.t) nsw	"acquaintance of the king"	
2	EM99-10	s3.t nsw […]	"daughter of the king"	EM99-15
3	95	ḥts Ḥr	"favourite of the Horus (the king)"	
4	95	im3.t Ḥr	"one gracious to the Horus"	
5	126	ḥsyt Ḥr	"one favoured of the Horus (the king)"	
6	96	ʿḥʿ.t Ḥr	"female servant of the Horus (the king)"	
7	95	ʿ Ḥr	"hand of the Horus (?), one who lifts up the Horus (the king)"	238
8	96	ʿ Stḫ	"hand of the Seth, one who lifts up the Seth (the king)"	128; 129
9	96	m33t Ḥr	"she who beholds the Horus (the king)"	128; 129
10	148	rpwty	"she of the carrying chair, palanquin"	
11	21	ḥtm(t) Ḥr, H3stj	"she who ornaments the Horus, H3sty (nebty-name of Den)"	120; 121; 122; 123; 124; 125
12	21	wr(.t) sḳr	"great one of the litter (?)"	120; 121; 122; 123; 124; 125
13	196	wr(.t) pr	"great one of the palace"	
14	207	msnw	"harpooner"	
15	35	ḥm(.t)	"servant"	
16	189	mr(.t)	"weaver"	
17	20	sḫn-3ḫ	"spirit seeker"	39; 137–139; 144; 161–162; 179; 193; 202; 204; 211
18	EM99-21	sḫn(.t)-3ḫ nsw	"funerary priestess of the king"	
19	189	ḫtmw ḥwt	"sealer of the palace […]"	
20	EM99-21	sš ḥsb ḳd.w ḥtp.w	"scribe of the accounts of the builders of the offering-places"	

Tab. 2 The list of collated titles held by women in the first two dynasties of ancient Egypt from Saad (1957); Köhler – Jones (2009); Martin (2011)

possibly belonging to a female harpooner, was rejected based on Michele Germon Riley's palaeographic work on the stela. Riley's work demonstrates additional details of the determinative that is consistent with Gardiner's A1 male determinative (Germon Riley 1985: pl. LXXVII).[4]

The textual analyses of the funerary monuments remain problematic due to the difficulties in translating the infant hieroglyphic script. Limited understanding of the phonological system, morphological structure and abandonment of some original signs of the writings earliest forms, all hinder the transliteration and translation process (Regulski 2015: 9). An influential work on translating Egypt's earliest hieroglyphs was completed by Peter Kaplony in 1963. It was through his work on the women's stelae that "most if not all" the women interred in the royal necropolis were interpreted as "*sḫmḫ-ib*", which he translated as "vergnügungen" – the king's pleasure: concubines and harem women (Kaplony 1963: 371–372). Unfortunately, this abstract classification of women and their subservient roles has been generally accepted and continued to be promulgated for some 50 years (Helck 1987: 120; Wilkinson 1999: 60 and 2010: 64; Cervelló Autuori 2002: 30; Morris 2007: 190).

Addressing the bias

Upon closer examination, Kaplony's classification of women as harem ladies and concubines appears to be unfounded. There is nothing in the archaeological context or inscriptions to support the harem women classification, particularly for the beginning of the historic period. Initially, the First Dynasty subsidiary graves were considered to have provided "indirect evidence" of the possibility of a harem (Nord 1970: 1). However, the archaeological material in the first six dynasties regarding the harem institution remains ambiguous. Also, an assumption on the social status of women as harem ladies or concubines cannot be founded on the fact that a group of women were buried near their king (Ward 1989: 41–42). Nor can Kemp's endorsement of the theory, based on the lack of titles on a large percentage of the women's stelae, provide additional support for this classification (Kemp 1967: 26). Particularly when male stelae from the same corpus, without titles, are not categorised in the same manner.

There are a few possibilities for the inconsistent inclusion of titles on the early stelae that should be considered. The primary function of the stelae was identification. The fact that both genders did not consistently have a title inscribed on their stela indicates that the name was and is the crucial identifying element. A major accomplishment of writing was its facility for identification, which in this period was a royal and elite prerogative. In both life

and death, the name of a person was an inherent part of the ancient Egyptian identity. Much of the Egyptian mortuary culture centred on the premise that the survival of a person's name would guarantee his or her continued existence in the next life. The inclusion of titles helped to establish the person's reputation and standing in society. Titles also assisted in distinguishing their owners, as homonymy was common, with many names conveying familial, theophoric and basilophoric connections (David 2014: 57–59).

Importantly, the re-analysis ascertained that one-quarter of the female names in the corpus are theophoric-compounds to the preeminent Pre- and Early Dynastic goddess Neith (Kelly 2016: 23, 86). The high proportion of theophoric based names may suggest a naming practice where the name could include a role or association to the goddess or her cult. Other occurrences of role-related names in this period are evident for the many First Dynasty "ka" priests, for example, Ankhka, Amka, Hemaka, Hermaka, Henuka, Medjeka, Merka, Nebitka, Neska, Serka, Setka, Saka, Seshemka (Morris 2007: 171–186). Further research into the possibility of female role-related names is currently an avenue of research for my doctoral dissertation. What has become clear though, is that an immediate identification of women as harem women or concubines is unwarranted.

Kaplony's classification of the women as "*sḫmḫ-ib*" appears to be influenced by the application of a modern or Ottoman archetype onto the ancient institution of ancient Egyptian harems (Roth 2012: 2). It is the connotation of the *orientalised* harem, undoubtedly the most prevalent symbol in Western myths regarding Muslim sexuality (Fay 2012: 25; Ali 2015: 39–41), that has erroneously been applied to the interpretation of these women. The only similarities in the two historical institutions are that they share the same appellation, belong to the domain of royalty and both provide designated areas for women and children. In 1994, Vivienne Gae Callender argued against the inaccurate perception of the harem and stated it was time to change both the interpretation and the use of the term (Callender 1994: 23–24). Support for this change is warranted as there appears to be no accepted consensus for the existence or timeline of the harem in ancient Egyptian history.

Marine Yoyotte believes the harem commences during the Old Kingdom when the king is known to have more than one wife, requiring the need for separate quarters to house multiple wives (Marine Yoyotte 2016, personal communication). Nord, however, finds no direct evidence for polygamy or concubines until the First Intermediate Period (Nord 1970: 1), while Callender and Ward do not acknowledge the existence of royal harems until the New Kingdom (Callender 1994: 7–17; Ward 1995: 7). Considering these divergent opinions about the existence of the harem and the fact that there is no evidence of the harem in the Early Dynastic Period,

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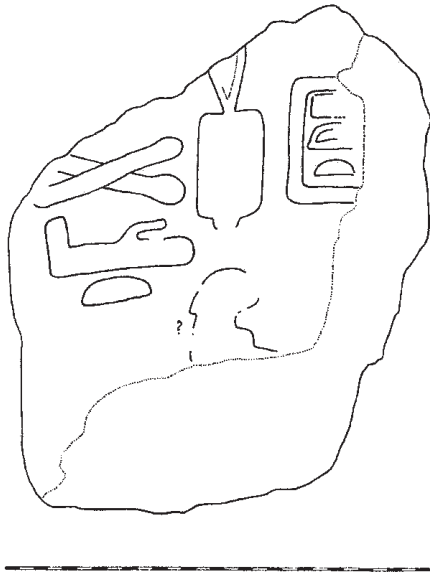[4]   The image represents male-seated determinative A1.

Fig. 1 Abydos stela 282 (drawing after Martin 2011: 186)

the classification of women as concubines in this period becomes unsubstantiated. Moreover, this classification suggests such interpretations are inherently biased by the androcentric tendency to classify women based on their sexual or biological role (Fletcher 2001: 192). This paper will now demonstrate how this preconceived notion of women has influenced some interpretations of the stelae, which all suggest that women lacked socio-economic and political status in this period. In the next section, I will outline two critical examples, which suggest that some women were actively involved in the administrative functioning of the state.

WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION

ẖtm.w ḥw.t [...]? – SEALER OF THE PALACE [...]?
The first example that demonstrates women's administrative roles comes from the fragmented stela Abydos 282, dated to the reign of Den (Martin 2011: 186). Unfortunately, the physical condition of the stela prevents a full translation of the title, given both the lacunae and the indeterminable internal details within the *ḥw.t* sign (see fig. 1). In his epigraphical study of the Abydene stelae, Martin lists the owner as a male, but a case is presented here with two points of reference to reconsider the stela owner as female.

The first point is the epigraphical representation of the seated determinative, which strongly suggests a female (B1) determinative. Significantly, Martin includes a drawn question mark beside the determinative in his illustration of the stela. Examination of the epigraphical illustrations of the seated male and female determinatives in Martin's catalogue shows that there is a distinguishing difference between the two gender forms. That is the presence or absence of an active arm gesture (see Martin 2011: 4–5). The image of the determinative is comparable to the seated female

determinative. The second point of reference is the stela's owners name *Dr.t Nt* – the hand of Neith – which further supports the attribution of female ownership. As already mentioned, there is a predominant number of women in the corpus with theophoric compounded names of the goddess, but there are no defined male stelae from the corpus at Abu Rawash, Helwan or Abydos that document male names including Neith.

Although the case of a female sealer is unique in the Early Dynastic Period, this and the next case, warrant genuine consideration based on the evidence of the archaeological remains not scholar's perceptions. Likewise, considerable debate has surrounded the limitations of women's political rule, especially in this early period. Primarily, female sovereigns have been considered as regents for minor male kings instead of full rulers (see Bryan 1996: 27), while Wilkinson describes Merneith: "As de facto ruler of Egypt ..." (Wilkinson1999: 62; see also Cervelló-Autuori 2005: 34–35; Morris 2007: 187; Bestock 2008: 53; La Loggia 2015: 100). It is questionable though, so early in their history, if a distinction between regent and ruling queen existed. In the first 100 years of becoming the unified state of Egypt – on two separate occasions – women stepped onto the political platform.

Archaeological remains suggest that Neithhotep and Meretneith possessed the major indices of Early Egyptian rulers, such as *serekhs*, the preeminent symbol of royal authority from Naqada III (*contra* Anthes 1959: 75; Kaplony 1963: 495, 741; Roth 1997: 105–115). Furthermore, they were provided royal burials comparable to their male counterparts (Callender 1992b: 51). Although Neithhotep's tomb at Naqada is stylistically different to the First Dynasty royal tombs at Abydos, the tomb was originally considered to belong to King Menes (Wilkinson 1999: 70; Heagy 2014: 76). So, either as ruler or regent, women played a crucial role in the political arena in this period. As such, it is also feasible that some women were making active contributions in the early administration. The two cases presented could be considered as the antecedents to the Old Kingdom women who held administrative titles (Robins 1993: 111–114, 116).

sš ḥsb ḳd.w ḥtp.w – ACCOUNTS-SCRIBE OF THE *ḳd-ḥtp*?
The second example that indicates women's active roles in the Early Dynastic administration comes from a funerary slab from Helwan dated to the middle of the Second Dynasty (Köhler – Jones 2009: 164).

The original inscription recording the "scribe of the accounts of the builders of the offering-places" is now lost. The title was documented by the original excavator Zaki Saad but due to later damage to the slab it was unable to be determined in a more recent examination. The title is attested in both Jones' *Old Kingdom Titles* (Jones 2000: no. 3159) and the *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache* (Erman – Grapow 1951: 167, no. 10, "accounts scribe"). However, it is the gender of the stela owner, not the title, that is under re-examination.

In Saad's original determination of the owner's gender he stated "Judging from the hair and the appearance, the owner looks like a woman but the title makes this difficult to accept. The owner may have been a man as the title denotes" (Saad 1957: 8). Saad's comment demonstrates how his perception that women undertook no part of the bureaucracy took precedence in his evaluation and interpretation of this funerary slab. Saad clearly bases his judgement solely on the administrative title and not the evidence that the funerary slab presents. However, the appearance of the deceased was not questioned by Köhler and Jones, in their more recent examination, when they ascribed to her the "funerary priestess of the king", the second title recorded on the funerary slab (see fig. 2). At the time of the re-examination, Köhler and Jones noted that there appeared to be at least four signs to the right of her name (Köhler – Jones 2009: 164).

Saad's original identification of the title has not been questioned. The two titles on the funerary slab demonstrate the owner's contributions in the maintenance of the king's funerary cult and the work undertaken in the *ḳd-ḥtp*. This could suggest a working relationship between the two roles. The evidence from the funerary slab suggests the deceased's active engagement in significant roles of the state.

Apart from her appearance, other content from the funerary slab provides additional support for the case of female ownership. Primarily, Kaplony determined her name *Mn-Ḥḳt* as a female theophoric name associated with the fertility goddess Hekat (Kaplony 1963: 230). It also appears significant that of only three female Helwan funerary slabs presented with a title, this is the only one from this necropolis with more than one title. As unprecedented as the case is for a female account scribe in the Second Dynasty, the case warrants genuine

consideration based on the evidence from the funerary slab and not on a preconceived idea that women were absent from the bureaucracy.

THE EARLY DYNASTIC PRIESTESSES – *sẖn(.t)-Ꜣḫ*

My study also identified that many other women were active in the Early Dynastic funerary priesthood. The earliest form of funerary priest/ess title was a composite sign genitivally transliterated (D32:G25) as *sẖn-Ꜣḫ* and translated as either "one who seeks" or "one who embraces the spirit" (Faulkner 1962: 241; Jones 2000: 832–833, no. 3036; Erman – Grapow 1971: 468, 14). The translation of the title is not clearly defined; however, the consensus is that the role belongs to the funerary priesthood ("der Totenpriestertitel"– Kaplony 1966: 52). The ambiguity of the transliteration and translation of the title is linked to the uncertainty of the reading of the Dynasty 0 king's name as either Sekhen or Ka (Regulski 2010: 98). The interest this title has previously attracted has focused on the orthography and reading of the title, more than the implication that a large percentage of the Early Dynastic priesthood were female.

The title is attested 35 times, plus the one attestation of the higher ranked *sẖn(.t)-Ꜣḫ nsw.t* (see *Mn-Ḥḳt* discussed above). The funerary priesthood is the most prevalent role in the current corpus. Most of the stelae are dated from the late First Dynasty onwards. A total of nine fragmentary stelae could not be assigned a gender, with 13 remaining attestations for women and 14 for men (see chart 3). The functions and duties of the role remain undetermined. Two of the male priests, however, list additional roles such as hunter and baker (Martin 2011: 30–31, 148–149, stelae 24, 208). The variation of the duties indicates they undertook interdependent tasks that challenge modern notions of ranking within titles. Prior to my study, that the women undertook the role, and the identification of a role conducted by both men and women, received very little attention.

RITUAL ASSOCIATION

In addition, the women's involvement in the funerary cult corresponds with the study's findings of their involvement in rituals of kingship and cult. Many of the titles' meaning or functionality remain uncertain. Yet, I concluded that the titles: *ḥts ḥr/wr.t ḥts,* "great of the *ḥts* scepter", *ꜥḥꜥ.t Ḥr*, "servant of Horus (the King)", *ꜥ Ḥr*, "hand of Horus, one who lifts up the Horus (the King)", *mꜢꜢ.t Ḥr*, "she who beholds the Horus (the King)", *ꜥ Stẖ*, "the hand of the Seth (one who lifts up the Seth (the King)" all suggest involvement in ritual activities.[5] Due to the later queens' title *mꜢꜢ.t ḥr ꜥ Stẖ*, some of the First Dynasty title holders have previously been considered as early queens. However, this remains inconclusive.

For example, there is no supporting philological evidence that either Queen Neithhotep or Queen
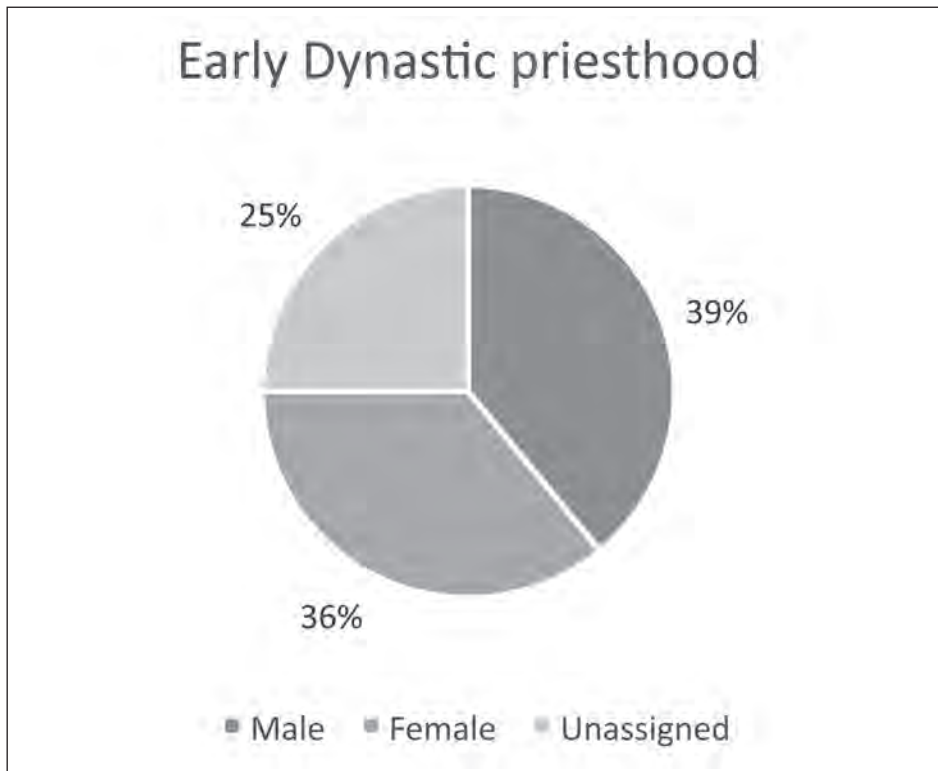

Fig. 2 Accounts scribe stela (after Köhler – Jones 2009: pl. 23)

Chart 3 Early Dynastic priesthood

Merneith exhibited any of these titles in their titulary. It appears here that the interpretation of the Fourth Dynasty queen's title was projected back onto the earlier titles of *mȝȝ.t Ḥr, ꜥ Ḥr* and *ꜥ Stẖ*. In fact, the vital key in interpreting the titles in their Early Dynastic form is the identification of the titles' independence of each other. In my recent review, in conjunction with earlier studies by Troy and Sabbahy, it is evident that these titles were individual up until the Third Dynasty (Troy 1986: 189; Sabbahy 1982: 23). Significantly, no single stela presents all three titles together. It is important not to apply the later title's connotation onto the earlier versions. Not only should the early titles be recognised as the antecedents but also that their meaning and interpretation could have differed over time. Conversely, this could suggest the activities and functions involved in the cult or ritual roles in the Early Dynastic Period were so important that the Fourth Dynasty queens adopted the roles and the full titulary.

Also included in this category are the two enigmatic titles that are unique to the Early Dynastic Period. The titles *ḥtm(.)t Ḥr, Ḫȝstj*, "she who ornaments the Horus", *Ḫȝsty* (*nebty*-name of Den)", transliterated as (V28:G5:G38 – N25:N25:X1); and *wr.t sḳr* "great one of the litter (?)", transliterated as (S29:Aa7 – N25:N25:X1) are attested together on seven stelae (Martin 2011: 215). Before the titles can be used to situate women in the society, a clearer understanding of the title is warranted. The review of all previous scholarship finds that the meaning of the titles is uncertain. To demonstrate the confusion regarding the translations, a summary of previous interpretations is provided:

1. Kaplony: "as to ornament and provide – of crowns and salve" suggesting "she who ornaments the King" (Kaplony 1963: 372). Nord notes this title as a possible precursor to the Fourth Dynasty title *ḫkrt-nsw.t* Nord 1970: 4).
2. Helck translates the full titulary as one title "The one who decorates Horus and awarded by King *Ḫȝsty*" (Helck 1987: 119).
3. Scharff transliterated the bird as (G39) reading the signs as one title and offered "*Ḥr sȝ Ḫȝstj Sḳr* – Son of Horus *Ḫȝsty Sḳr*" suggesting that *Sḳr* could be another one of the king's names, or alternatively a possible nickname for the King – "The Hitter" (Scharff 1931: 21).
4. Callender disagrees with the bird's identification as (G5) and (G38/39) and instead transliterates the birds as (G1) and (G35) and offers "*ḥȝ ꜥk Ḫȝstj Sḳr X* … Would that *Ḫȝstj* benefit by the offering of X" (Callender 1992a: 28). This reading relies upon the supposition of retainer sacrifice.
5. Godron rejects all previous scholarship and offers "The equipped Horus strikes/blinds people in the *Ḫȝstj*, N" or Horus who slaughters the inhabitants of the *Ḫȝstj*" (Godron 1990: 91). Godron associates his translation to the victories of the king commemorated on the annals, which appears to be more a testimony to Den than the title(s) of the women the stelae denote (Godron 1990: 92).

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[5]   All the title translations in this and following sections are as per Martin (2011: 215) or otherwise stated.

There are three major complications that impact the previous readings of the title. The first is the identification of the birds in the recording of the title is obscure. The second is the dissimilar meanings attributed to the variations of the verb *ḥtm*. This is further affected by the inconsistency in which bird is identified in the transliteration. For example, the translation of *ḥtm* with (G39) affords the definition "provide" in line with the early translations of the title (Faulkner 1962: 180; Kaplony 1963: 372). At the same time, however, if the bird sign is transliterated with the similar (G38) as Kahl (1994: 529) does, it provides the intransitive verb "perish: *sḥtm* destroy; *sḥtmw* destroyer" (Gardiner 1957: 583). Similarly, the verb *sḳr* can be translated as either "hit" as applied by Scharff and Godron or "offer/present". The third impediment is that the title's informal structure has challenged standardised grammatical analysis. For example, the arrangement of the signs and the order they have been transliterated in appears problematic. The position of the (V28) is consistently before the (G5) bird, but the accepted transliteration attributes the "*ḥ*" to the bird depicted below, which Kaplony notes as a reading aid for *ḥtm* (Kaplony 1963: 373).

After a full review of previous interpretations, my study offers alternate transliterations and translations. The new transliterations attempt to apply known grammatical elements and structure. All Early Dynastic stelae demonstrate that the writing was consistently right to left. The first step was to break the original transliteration into (V28:G5:G35), replacing *ḥtm Ḥr* with *ꜥky.t Ḥr*, "female servant of Horus", which applies Callender and Riley's identification of the second bird as the (G35) cormorant (see fig. 3). The (V28) is still interpreted as a phonetic complement, but this time to the bird that it rests besides, the (G5) Horus. While there are no known precedents of a phonetic complement for Horus, due to the inconsistency identified in the earliest forms of writing, it warrants consideration. The unfamiliar use of the phonetic complement could have been used to aid in differentiating the birds. Previously, the connection of the cormorant to the female title *ꜥky.t* was not attested until the Middle Kingdom. The title associates the holders as household servants and offering-bearers engaged in the preparation and delivery of food (Stefanovic 2009: 41). As such, the reading of this title would suggest a female servant possibly involved in the provisions for Horus.

The second title would then transliterate as (S29:Aa7 – N25:N25:X1), which applies honorific transposition to the king's name, providing *sḳr(.t) Ḫꜣsty* as the offerer/sacrificer of *Ḫꜣsty*. This format of the title replicates Jones' title no. 3616 – *sḳr* (*?*) *Ỉnpw* – offerer/sacrificer of Anubis, attested in the Second and Third Dynasties (Jones 2000: 979, no. 3616). The listings in the *Wörterbuch* (Erman – Grapow 1953: 307, nos. 8–10) discuss the
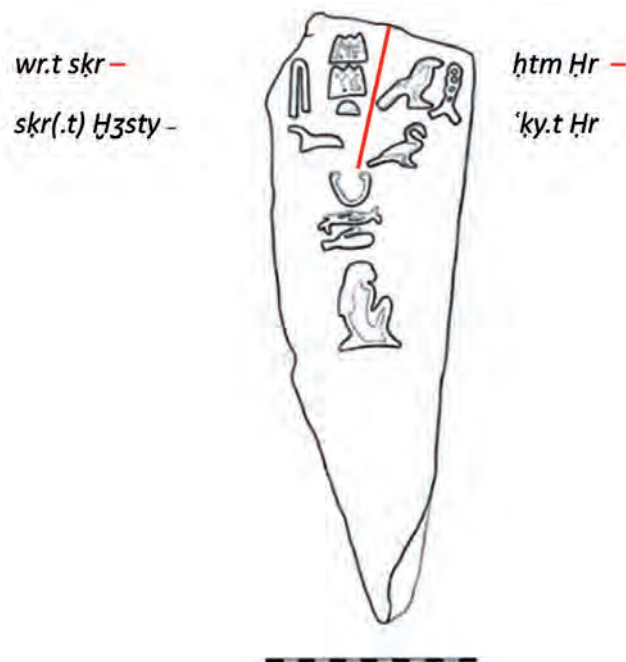

wr.t skr –

skr(.t) Ḫꜣsty –

ḥtm Ḥr –

ꜥky.t Ḥr

Fig. 3 Stela 120 demonstrating separation of titles and alternate translations (drawing after Martin 2011: 96)

bringing of offerings, specifying the sacrificial offering with white bread and wine. This translation also suggests the participation of the women in a ritual role involved in the sacrificial offerings to the king. The two alternate transliterations coalesce in their similarity to the provisioning and offering of food. That the titles are recorded together may suggest the individual titles delineate the dual manifestations of the mortal – *Ḫꜣsty*, and the divine – Horus, aspects of the king.

All the titles in this section position the women in proximity and service to their sovereign.

ROYAL AFFILIATIONS

The textual analyses identified six titles that associated the women to the king or the royal house. Included in this category are "daughter of the king", "acquaintance of the king" (the stela owner is considered "possibly" female),[6] "one favoured of the Horus (the King)", "favourite of the Horus (the King)", "one gracious to the Horus", and "great one of the palace". The one certain title from this group is the familial identification of a member of the royal family. The remaining titles raise many questions regarding their translations. This affects our understanding of the functionality of the roles, or if they are epithets associating them to the royal court. Significantly, many of these titles are gender neutral with both genders' stelae exhibiting these titles. Yet, the study noted that the "acquaintance of the king" title is translated differently, based on gender.

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[6] The uncertainty surrounding the gender of the deceased prevents this example from providing conclusive proof that the title was applicable to women from the Second Dynasty onwards.
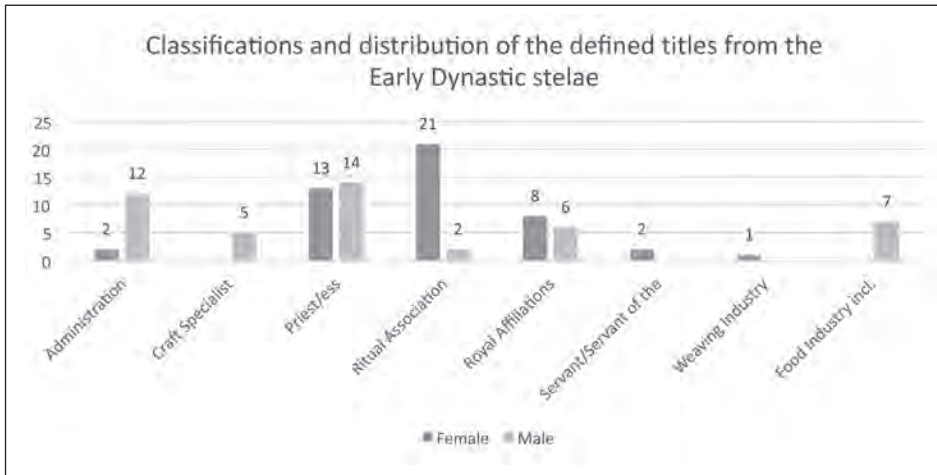
Chart 4 The classifications and the distribution of the defined titles from the Early Dynastic stelae

Fischer notes the uncertainty of the earlier use and meaning of the title but confirms it meant "one who is known to the king" in the later Old Kingdom period (Fischer 1996: 24). The ambivalent nature of the title is exacerbated by the seemingly inconsistent application of it for the different genders. Fischer states that when it is applied to a male that it denotes "one who is concerned with the king's property", but for females, it is only interpreted as meaning "one who is known to the king" (Fischer 1972: 73). There is nothing to denote a morphological difference in the title, so the variance in translation is perceived only by the interpreters. Similarly, "great one of the palace" was considered by Kaplony to denote a senior/head of the harem (Kaplony 1963: 373, 1049). Yet, as Ward (1989: 41) correctly contests, the validity of this translation rests upon the acceptance that these women constitute a harem.

The ambiguous nature of the Early Dynastic Period, and working with little secondary evidence, impedes the ability to provide clear definitions of the early occupations or epithets. The textual analysis identified that seven of the eighteen titles, all from the First Dynasty, are written in a direct genitive construction with (G5) as the *nomen rectum*. It raises uncertainty concerning the titles, ascribing Horus as the *noun of possessor*, as to whether they relate to the divine manifestation of the king or the god Horus. Ultimately, this would only change a royal association to a ritual one.

SERVICE ROLES

The last two titles to be examined belong to a female servant and a weaver. The generality of the servant role prevents understanding of its actual function or the capacity of the role in context. Similarly, the female weaver's duties, and in whose service she was employed, are not known. Previous scholarship has recognised women's involvement in the important weaving industry, where they are also attested as holding administrative titles in the Old Kingdom (Fischer 2000: 20–21). The hieroglyph for weaver in the Old Kingdom is a seated female determinative with a woman holding a shuttle or weaver's sword (Bryan 1996: 19).

WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY

The recent analysis demonstrates women's participation in the state through their involvement in the royal court, mortuary industry, administration, weaving and maintenance of the rituals of kingship and cult (see chart 4).[7] Furthermore, it establishes that ungendered, horizontal and interdependent working relationships existed within the structure of the state. The symbiotic relationship between the "state" and "religion" described by Assmann as "aspects or dimensions of one single, indivisible theopolitical unity" is essential in recognising the construction and functionality of the society (Assmann 1989: 56). The importance of the bureaucracy of the Early Dynastic period is synergetic with the maintenance of religion and the rituals of kingship. This suggests lateral working associations within the structure of the society. For example, the provisioning of requirements for the mortuary industry and the rituals of cult and kingship creates a large portion of work undertaken by the administrative sector. This interdependency in working relationships between roles is also demonstrated by the range of roles undertaken by some priests, as well as the funerary priestess of the king and her role as female accounting scribe in the offering places. Moreover, my study suggests that contemporary gendered and hierarchical

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[7]   These findings appear consistent with Savage's identification of women's engagement and status in the Predynastic period. ("Thus, it would appear that, to the extent that mortuary ritual reflects Predynastic social conditions, women held a status greater than or equal to men", see Savage 2000: 91).

**Chart 5 Visual translation
of ancient text into
the operation model
of the socio-economic
environment of the ancient
Egyptian state**

observations of such tasks and functions should not be
projected upon the past.

New framework

To re-situate the new information from the research,
a new framework was constructed to allow both
the heterarchical implications and the inclusion
of women's roles in the state to be illustrated. This
framework – an operational model of the socio-
economic environment of the ancient Egyptian state –
is set against the text quoted at the beginning of this
article. Assmann states that to enable the king to
uphold his duties to the gods and the mortuary cult, he
is assisted by priests and officials (see above).

By applying the knowledge that the structure of the
ancient Egyptian state was constructed around the
ideology of divine kingship, the framework positions
ideology at the heart of the operational socio-economic
model. Re has entrusted the vital duties to the king who is
positioned at the top of the wheel displaying his primacy
of position. As previously mentioned, the king delegates
parts of his responsibility to priests and officials. The two
branches of ritual cult practices (sacerdotal roles) and
mortuary cult are synergistically supported by the officials
in upholding these responsibilities (see chart 5). As such,
the five sectors are mutually dependent and constitute
the wheel that drove the socio-economic environment
of ancient Egypt. The construction of the operational
model allows an opportunity to demonstrate female
participation in each of the sectors. A representative
sample of the titles is added to the model to provide

a visual representation of women's agency in the socio-
economic environment of the state (see chart 6).

The framework demonstrates women's contributions
in the symbiotic associations and configurations of
the socio-economy of the state. This alternate account
shows that women actively participated at the highest
level of the society and played vital roles in the state.

Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate ancient women
by offering a glimpse into their public activities in the
state, as well as providing references to women's efficacy
as productive members of the society. Moreover, this
new information augments the current knowledge of
early Egyptian society. The sacerdotal role of funerary
priestesses and their involvement in rituals conducted
in kingship and cult demonstrates that women were
involved in the ideological practices of the state. The fact
that the women's titles document their involvement in
perpetuating their ancient Egyptian ideology positions
them in crucial roles and elevated ranks of the society.
The importance of these roles can further be suggested
by the adoption of the roles and titulary by the Old
Kingdom queens. New social configurations have been
identified through both sexes undertaking the roles in the
mortuary cult and women participating in administrative
roles. These also elucidate a greater diversity in terms of
women's participation in the Early Dynastic state. The
research undertaken on the women's stelae has not only
provided a divergent perspective on women's participation
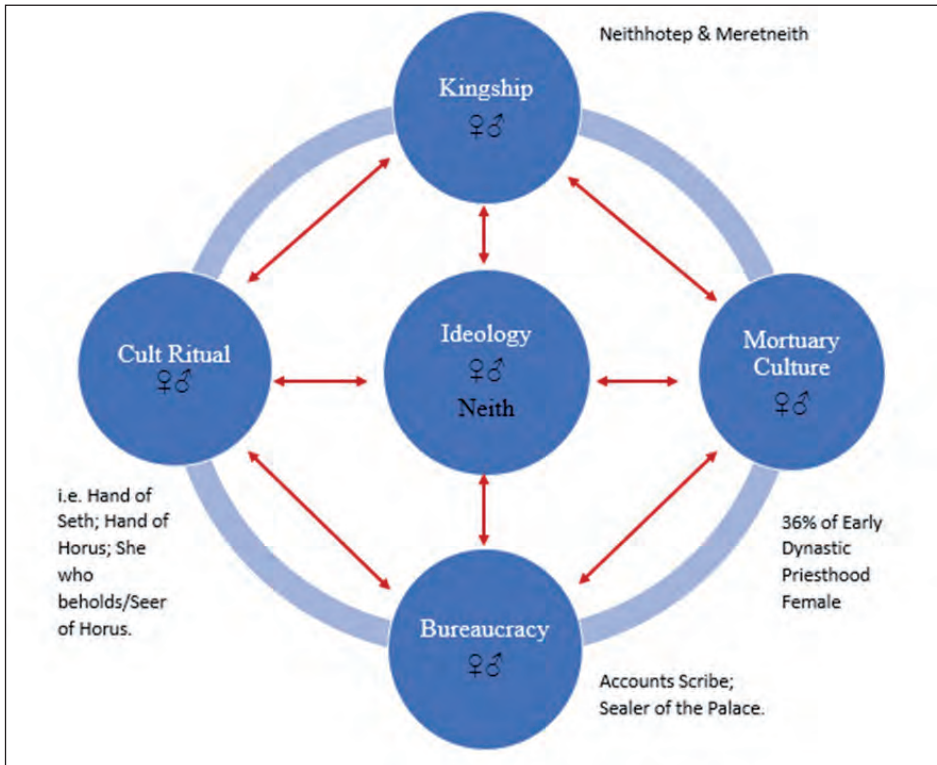in the society, but it also recognises a fluidity within

Chart 6 Representation of women's contributions in the socio-economic environment

the structure of the Early Dynastic Egyptian state. It is difficult, however, to conclude social status and structure of the society from only a single type of evidence. As such, my Ph.D. is investigating women's titles, from a range of artefacts including seals, mirrors, libation basins, stelae, false doors and wall scenes from Dynasty 0 to the end of the Old Kingdom.

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