

The World of Women
in the Ancient and Classical Near East

The World of Women in the Ancient and Classical Near East

Edited by

Beth Alpert Nakhai



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	American Academy of Religion
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . D. N. Freedman, ed. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
AEL	<i>Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings</i> . M. Lichtheim. 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971-1980.
ANET	<i>The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i> . J. B. Pritchard, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ArSt	Arabian Studies
ASOR	<i>American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
AuOr	<i>Aula orientalis</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . A. L. Oppenheim, E. Reiner, and R. D. Biggs, eds. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956-.
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CIS	<i>Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum</i> , Paris: French Academy of Sciences, 1926-1975.
CSHB	<i>Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae</i> . M. Pindar and T. Buttner-Wobst, eds. Bonn: n.p., 1841-1897.
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
ErIsr	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JA	<i>Journal asiatique</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JARCE	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>

JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> , M. Deitrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, eds. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976, 2nd enlarged ed. of <i>KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . M. Deitrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, eds. Münster, 1995.
LASBF	<i>Liber annuus Studii biblici franciscani</i>
MAMA	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i>
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . E. Stern, ed. Vols 1-4. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1993.
	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . E. Stern, ed. Vol. 5. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 2008.
OEAE	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt</i> . D. B. Redford, ed., 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
OEANE	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> . E. M. Meyers, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologique et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RDAC	<i>Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus</i>
SBL	Society for Biblical Literature
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Texts
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

THE WORLD OF WOMEN IN THE ANCIENT AND CLASSICAL NEAR EAST

BETH ALPERT NAKHAI

Perhaps a decade ago, curious about the extent to which papers on women in the ancient Near East had been presented at the annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research, I looked into program books dating from the early 1970's to the late 1990's. What I discovered astounded me: many more papers had been devoted to pigs than to women.¹ Furthermore, finding papers that discussed real women rather than goddesses was virtually impossible. To remedy that egregious lapse, I introduced a program unit entitled *World of Women: Gender and Archaeology* into ASOR's annual meeting. The first session took place in 2000 and after a few years, women finally outnumbered pigs as a topic worthy of professional consideration.

Some informally gathered information provides a backdrop for the articles in this volume and substantiates the vital importance of the *World of Women: Gender and Archaeology* to ASOR, and of this volume to the field of Near Eastern archaeology. Between the early 1970's and the late 1990's, almost every paper in which one could use the pronoun "she" was about a goddess (most often Asherah). A few papers, primarily from the last years of the twentieth century, looked at women and religion (mostly figurines but also domestic cult), women in South Arabia and Roman Palestine, sexuality and gender roles, royalty and wet nursing, hunting and ethnography. Still, there was hardly a year in which more than one of these topics was presented and unfortunately, the papers presented in the *World of Women: Gender and Archaeology* notwithstanding, the situation has hardly changed since its 2000 inauguration.

¹ The focus on pigs relates to their potential as an ethnic marker for Israelites, Philistines and other Iron Age ethnic groups.

It might seem surprising to find so little attention paid to reconstructing women's lives in the ancient and classical Near East, but there are several reasons for this. For one, archaeology in this region has been dominated by biblically based research and both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are incontrovertibly androcentric documents. Furthermore, in response to the rich textual record for all historic periods across ancient western Asia, questions of history (conceptualized as kings and battles), religion (conceptualized as priesthoods and temples) and the lives of the elite (conceptualized as kings, palaces and luxury goods) have provided the foci for archaeological research. What this means is that domestic quarters, daily tasks, private life, personal religion and the like have found little traction among Near Eastern archaeologists. Indeed, even when these topics have been explored, women have rarely populated either the ancient places or the modern discussions.² Similarly, the subsistence economy, in which women played such an integral role, has been considered the near exclusive purview of ancient men. A further complicating factor is the paucity of academic positions in Near Eastern archaeology. Many archaeologists secure employment by affirming their willingness to teach courses in biblical studies. The introduction of a gender component to teaching or research is not required and indeed, many fear that any move away from the academic mainstream might lead to professional marginalization.

To contextualize this, consider the following. Women's studies courses and programs were introduced in colleges and universities throughout the United States and internationally beginning in the late 1960's and early 1970's. M. Conkey and J. Spector published their groundbreaking article, "Archaeology and the Study of Gender," in 1984.³ Beginning with the early 1970's, between 5 and 11 percent of the program units at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical

² For a discussion about why this is so, see B. A. Nakhai, "Daily Life in the Ancient Near East: New Thoughts on an Old Topic," *Religious Studies Review: A Quarterly Review of Publications in the Field of Religion and Related Disciplines* 31/3-4 (2005) 147-53.

³ M. W. Conkey and J. D. Spector, "Archaeology and the Study of Gender," in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, vol. 7 (ed. M. Schiffer; New York: Academic Press, 1984), 1-38. For further discussion, see B. A. Nakhai, "Gender and Archaeology in Israelite Religion," *Compass Religion* 1/5 (2007): 512-28 and references therein. See also M. C. Root, "Introduction: Women of the Field, Defining the Gendered Experience," pp. 1-33 in *Breaking Ground: Pioneering Women Archaeologists* (eds. G. M. Cohen and M. S. Joukowsky; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 2006), 2-4, on the discomfort professional women may feel about investigating topics pertaining to women.

Literature (each with 4-5 papers) have been devoted to some aspect of the study of women. Given the interests of the AAR/SBL, their focus was on religion to the exclusion of other areas of life but this does not obviate the fact that both these societies have been much more aware of the “gender revolution” of the past four decades than has ASOR. This fact is even more compelling when one realizes that many members of ASOR are also members of SBL. Therefore, they receive the AAR/SBL annual meeting program and can read about program units devoted to the study of women and religion. In addition, the ASOR and AAR/SBL annual meetings were coterminous until 1997, and since then have met back-to-back or even overlapped.⁴ Many ASOR members also attend SBL sessions.

Accentuating the positive, the work by the authors represented in this volume, and many of the articles and books to which they refer, indicate a growing attention to the field. Some scholars devote themselves primarily to gender-based research while others look at gender less systematically, but either way they contribute to our knowledge of the lives of women in antiquity. Archaeology, text studies and ethnographic comparanda are all tools employed in this endeavor, and the articles in this volume utilize a skillful blending of these and other resources. They are culled from the twenty-nine papers presented in the *World of Women: Gender and Archaeology* between 2000 and 2007.⁵ They represent a broad geographic and chronological range, investigating Egypt and western Asia from the Predynastic to the Byzantine periods, and England in the Victorian era.

The Papers

In *Dark Men, Light Women: Origins of Color as Gender Indicator in Ancient Egypt* (Ch. 1), Mary Ann Eaverly discusses the use of color as a gender indicator in Pre- and Early Dynastic Egypt, where men were depicted as dark or reddish brown and women as white or yellow. Earlier scholars understood this to be a “realistic” reflection of men’s outdoor and women’s indoor lives. Eaverly’s paper positions the color convention as a key component within an ideology promulgated as Egypt adopted a dynastic political structure; this ideology promoted the importance of the

⁴ J. D. Seger, “Part Two: The New ASOR 1975-2000,” pp. 34-77 in *An ASOR Mosaic: A Centennial History of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1900-2000* (ed. J. D. Seger; Boston: ASOR, 2001), 68.

⁵ By the time the invitation to publish this volume was made by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, a number of *World of Women: Gender and Archaeology* presentations had already been published. Most of these publications are listed at the end of this introduction.

pharaoh, and thus of male power. While Pre-Dynastic tombs show equality of offerings, Dynastic period tombs reveal imbalance. Even as the color convention similarly indicates imbalance, there is also complementarity. Yellow and red are colors understood to complete each other, as gender roles were part of a series of dualisms that permeated Egyptian thought. This insight impacts our understanding of gender roles not only in Egypt but also in the other Mediterranean civilizations that adopted Egyptian color conventions (Crete, Greece and Rome), and those (such as Mesopotamia) that did not.

A Taste of Women's Sociality: Cooking as Cooperative Labor in Iron Age Syro-Palestine (Ch. 2) is Aubrey Baadsgaard's study of social constructions of gender, focusing on domestic activities in the Iron Age. Moving beyond idealized notions of domestic practice based upon the assumption of a patriarchal social structure, Baadsgaard examines the material remains of cooking as made evident by ovens, together with associated features and utensils. She shows that cooking was a domestic activity organized according to women's personal preferences; it was carried out along with other domestic tasks in ways that allowed women to develop and sustain informal social networks among multiple households. The variation in the material record undercuts traditional views of cooking and other domestic activities as static, repetitive tasks restricted to fixed spaces. Instead, it indicates that cooking was a social activity occurring on a larger domestic stage, on which factors relating to family life, gender roles, and women's responsibility for the well-being of family members came together, and social relationships among households were negotiated and formed.

According to Jennie R. Ebeling and Michael M. Homan, women in antiquity played a large, though often overlooked, role in the production and consumption of alcoholic beverages fermented from malted cereals. *Baking and Brewing in the Israelite Household: A Study of Women's Cooking Technology* (Ch. 3) first highlights written and artistic records that reference women and beer in the ancient Near East and Egypt, in order to demonstrate the fundamental association between them. It then turns to Syro-Palestine, as it inspects the written and material record by exploring evidence for beer production and consumption. Ebeling and Homan examine evidence such as ceramic vessels, ground stone tools and fermentation stoppers, which are commonly overlooked by excavators or misidentified during excavation. Next, they investigate gender and domestic space, in order to reconstruct women's daily lives as they relate to beer production and consumption. Finally, they consider the cultic dimensions of women and beer, and conclude by reflecting upon the socio-

economic impact of women's involvement with beer production at the household level.

In *Bringing Home the Artifacts: A Social Interpretation of Loom Weights in Context* (Ch. 4), Deborah Cassuto examines the traditional association between women and the crafts of spinning and weaving, which is known from contemporary traditional communities (as attested by cross-cultural studies) and ancient Near Eastern societies (as attested by historical texts and by iconographical references that use the spindle whorl and weaving loom to depict feminine attributes). Loom weights, which are remnants of vertical warp-weighted looms, have been found in numerous excavations of Iron Age II sites throughout the Land of Israel. By focusing on the contexts in which these loom weights are found and on the artifacts associated with them, Cassuto engenders the Iron Age house. She investigates the association between weaving and food preparation activities, both of which were carried out in the same activity areas. After reconstructing patterns of behavior, Cassuto interprets them in light of ethnographic data and archaeological parallels, and highlights the role of the Iron II woman at the center of all household activities.

Elizabeth A. R. Willett's study of *Infant Mortality and Women's Religion in the Biblical Periods* (Ch. 5) shows that the well-justified fear of infant mortality resulted in mythologies of child-stealing goddesses and in family religious practices designed to combat them. Willett demonstrates that the household was the locus of women's religious activities. Aramaic incantations from Nippur designed to protect children from child-stealing demons affirm women's leadership in protective household rituals, since women frequently procured the incantations, which required the name of the mother of the household but not that of her husband. Passages in the Hebrew Bible show women performing religio-magical activities in their homes and mention family support for some of these rituals. In some Israelite houses, ritual lamps, incense altars, female figurines and amulets used to deflect evil forces are found alongside the remains of food preparation and textile production; significantly, no specifically male accoutrements accompany these votive objects. Domestic shrines from elsewhere in the ancient Near East, at which residents offered food and incense to personal deities, provide parallels that help interpret the cultic finds from Israelite houses.

In *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (1903), William Robertson Smith introduced the discussion of *mut'a* or temporary contract marriage in Arab tribal contexts. Cynthia Finlayson's *Mut'a Marriage in the Roman Near East: The Evidence from Palmyra, Syria* (Ch. 6) explores *mut'a* marriage through a study of Palmyrene funerary portraits, which comprise

the largest collection of community portraits and genealogies known from the late Roman Near East. She presents the findings of a five season, on-site study of women's portraits, emphasizing the evidence for *mut'a* marriage and its manifestations among the Arab/Aramaean tribes of late Roman Palmyra. She demonstrates that there were multiple forms of *mut'a* marriage, including a matriarchal form that allowed upper class women to initiate unions with designated males; the offspring of those unions built up the clans of the women rather than those of her male partners, affording women influence and the ability to be the progenitors of their own subclans and tribes. This evidence provides a link in the evolution of *mut'a* marriage and highlights its importance in understanding the socio-political roles of women in the ancient Near East.

There are comparatively few studies of women in the Byzantine Near East. In *A Restless Silence: Women in the Byzantine Archaeological Record* (Ch. 7), Marica Cassis demonstrates that the archaeological record is increasingly important as a source for evidence about the lives of women in this period, and as a tool for assessing their social status. Archaeological data are especially important since there are few texts from antiquity either written by women, or written by men about women. The predominance of men among Byzantine authors, and the andocentric nature of modern scholarship, have created a falsely masculine perspective. Cassis utilizes the advances made possible by gendered archaeology to illuminate the many active roles women played in the Byzantine world. In both Christian and Jewish communities, women were variously participants, religious donors, residents of monastic communities and even holy figures. Archaeological evidence, particularly from the site of Çadır Höyük in Turkey, illustrates the roles women may have fulfilled within a previously uninvestigated venue, secular rural residential communities.

In *Fe(male) Potters as the Personification of Individuals, Places, and Things as Known from Ethnoarchaeological Studies* (Ch. 8), Gloria London uses pottery, the most common artifact found on archaeological excavations, to investigate the roles of women in the ancient economy. Pottery production is a high-risk low-return seasonal industry, which can best be understood through the reconstruction of its manufacturing techniques. London's ethnoarchaeological work with contemporary female pot-making communities in Cyprus and the Philippines highlights elements of this industry. She shows the ways in which teaching is an essential element; how female potters may seasonally involve their entire families in the work of pottery production; and, how women mark their pots to highlight self-expression in an industry ruled by convention. Her ethnoarchaeological research explains the paucity of pot-making locations

on excavation sites by revealing that much pot-making is home-based, taking place in multi-purpose domestic spaces, and seasonal, so that areas used for pot-making at one time of year, at other times bear no evidence of the industry.

Edith Nesbit was a British author and activist who used Near Eastern scholarship to comment on social conditions in Edwardian England. In *“Working Egyptians of the World Unite!”: How Edith Nesbit Used Near Eastern Archaeology and Children’s Literature to Argue for Social Change* (Ch. 9), Kevin McGeough and Elizabeth Galway contend that Nesbit sought to inspire social change and cultivate national sensibilities in her 1906 *The Story of the Amulet*. This book, which provided British children with an entertaining fantasy story and an educational account of ancient civilizations, is dedicated to E. A. Wallis Budge of the British Museum, whose influence is evident in the book’s use of Edwardian scholarship about the Near East. McGeough and Galway examine the ways in which the study of the Near East provided a framework for understanding contested issues in Edwardian society, including concepts of progress and decline, problems of empire, conceptions of race, and the evaluation of gender roles. Nesbit’s understanding of Near Eastern history, though more sophisticated than that of many popular writers, reflects many assumptions about the Near East, some of which remain unquestioned in current scholarship and public outreach.

Final Notes

The articles in *The World of Women in the Ancient and Classical Near East* make an important contribution toward combating modern scholarship’s marginalization of women in antiquity. They prove beyond all doubt that women’s roles in the home and in the workplace were essential for the survival of the family and the community. This is true even when (or, perhaps, especially when) the workplace was the home. Locating women within the domestic sphere no longer diminishes appreciation of their extensive responsibilities and accomplishments. To the contrary, their domestic contributions are proven to be essential components of human survival; it is only in recent times that this fact has been questioned.⁶ In addition, women’s contributions are evident elsewhere throughout society, in royal, religious, and funerary contexts,

⁶ See Nakhai, “Gender and Archaeology in Israelite Religion,” for a discussion of the impact biases in modern scholarship have on the reconstruction of women’s roles in antiquity.

highlighting the fact that the traditional scholarly reliance upon dichotomization and compartmentalization must be resisted, and new paradigms developed and adopted. This book takes important steps in that direction.

The World of Women in the Ancient and Classical Near East would not be possible without the support of a number of people, and I would like to acknowledge and thank them. In the American Schools of Oriental Research, they include Rudolph Dornemann, who as Executive Director gave me access to 30 years of ASOR/SBL Annual Meeting programs; Douglas Clark, who as head of ASOR's Program Committee encouraged me to introduce the *World of Women: Gender and Archaeology* into the Annual Meeting; Carol Meyers and Susan Ackerman, whose keynote addresses in the first year of the session set the highest of standards; and, the many presenters who have contributed to its on-going success. Thanks, too, to my editors at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Dr. Andy Nercessian, Carol Koulikourdi, and especially Amanda Millar, without whose diligence this book would never have been published. I am grateful to Cynthia Finlayson for the cover image, and to Nuala Coyle of Cambridge Scholars Publishing for the eye-catching cover design. My thanks to Gary Christopherson, Director of the Center for Applied Spatial Analysis at The University of Arizona, who generously produced our map. Thanks, too, to Jeanne Davenport and to financial support from the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies at The University of Arizona for the index. I am grateful for the friendship and support of Jeanne Davenport and Martha Castleberry at the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies. Two dear friends, Jennie Ebeling at the University of Evansville, and J. Edward Wright, Chair of the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies, provide me with invaluable collegial support. My husband Farzad and our daughter Mandana Lily bring great joy to my life. The memory of my grandmother, Rea Cohen Racoosin, is always with me. I dedicate this book to my mother, Esther Racoosin Alpert, and to my late father, Seymour Alpert, M.D., with much love.

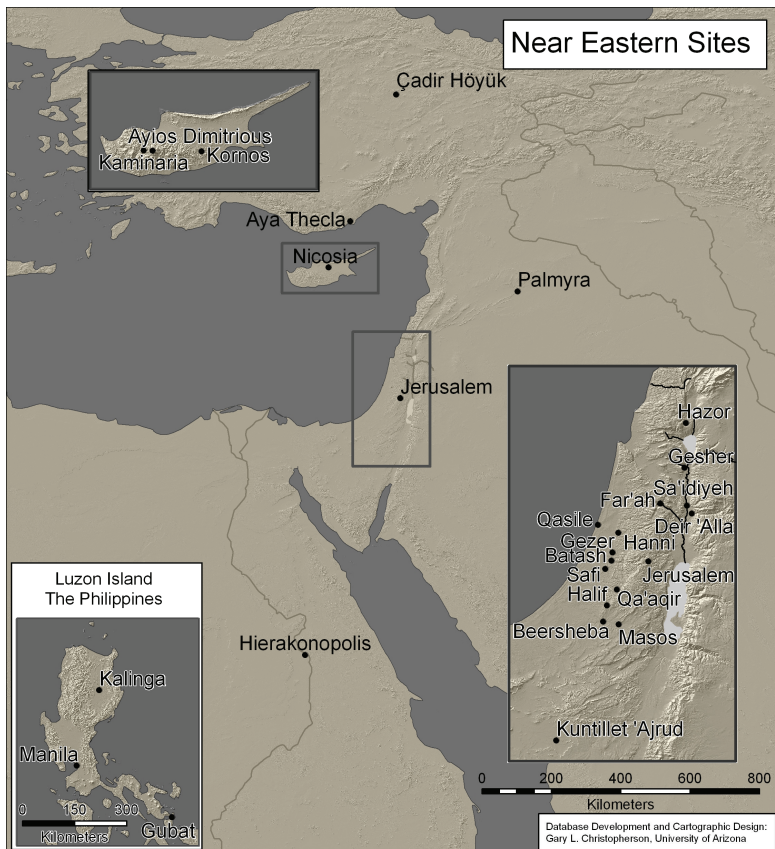
**Papers Presented in ASOR's *World of Women:*
Gender and Archaeology and Published in Other Venues**

- Susan Ackerman, "Digging up Deborah: Recent Hebrew Bible Scholarship on Gender and the Contribution of Archaeology," *NEA* 66/4 (2003): 172-84.
- Celia J. Bergoffen, "Plank Figures as Cradleboards," in *Proceedings of the Conference Finds and Results from the Swedish Cyprus Expedition: A Gender Perspective*, March 31–April 2, 2006. Medelhavsmuseet: Focus on the Mediterranean 5 (2009).
- Joan Branham, "Women as Objects of Sacrifice? An Early Christian 'Chancel of the Virgins'," in *La cuisine et l'autel: Les sacrifices en questions dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (eds. S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre and F. Schmidt; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 371-86.
- Norma Dever, "They Also Dug! Archaeologists' Wives and Their Stories," *NEA* 67/3 (2004): 162-73.
- Nili Fox, "Gender Transformation and Transgression: Contextualizing the Prohibition of Cross-Dressing in Deut 22:5," pp. 49-71 in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay* (eds. N. Fox, D. Gilad-Glatt, and M. Williams; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009).
- Jack D. M. Green, "Anklets and the Construction of Gender and Age in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Southern Levant," in *Archaeology and Women: Ancient & Modern Issues* (eds. S. Hamilton, R. D. Whitehouse, and K. I. Wright; Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2007), 283-311.
- Gloria A. London, "Women Potters and Craft Specialization in a Pre-Market Cypriot Economy," in *Engendering Aphrodite: Women and Society in Ancient Cyprus* (ASOR Archaeological Reports Series 7, CAARI Monographs 3; eds. D. Bolger and N. Serwint; Boston: ASOR, 2002), 265-80.
- Carol Meyers, "Engendering Syro-Palestinian Archaeology: Reasons and Resources," *NEA* 66/4 (2003) 185-97.⁷
- Jane D. Peterson, "Gender and Early Farming Societies," in *Handbook of Gender in Archaeology* (ed. S. M. Nelson; Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2006), 537-70.

⁷ While this paper was not delivered in the *World of Women: Gender and Archaeology*, its publication was an outcome of Meyers' 2000 keynote address.

- Susan Pollock, "The Royal Cemetery of Ur: Ritual, Tradition, and the Creation of Subjects," in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East* (eds. M. Heinz and M. Feldman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 89-110.
- Joe D. Seger, "Queen or Crone? Gendered Archaeology in an LB Tomb at Gezer," in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and the "Other" in Antiquity, Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers*, AASOR 60/61 (eds. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough; Boston: ASOR, 2007), 85-93.
- Jurgen Zangenberg, "The 'Final Farewell.' A Necessary Paradigm Shift in the Interpretation of the Qumran Cemetery," *Qumran Chronicle* 8 (1999): 213-18.
- Jurgen Zangenberg, "Bones of Contention. 'New' Bones from Qumran Help Settle Old Questions (and Raise New Ones). Remarks on Two Recent Conferences," *Qumran Chronicle* 9 (2000): 51-76.

MAP



CHAPTER ONE

DARK MEN, LIGHT WOMEN: ORIGINS OF COLOR AS GENDER INDICATOR IN ANCIENT EGYPT

MARY ANN EEVERLY

Throughout the millennia of Dynastic rule, Egyptian art adheres to a series of formulae that regulate representation. For example, figures in relief sculpture are shown in profile view, while freestanding statues are posed frontally. Sculptors use canons to establish proportional relationships between the various parts of the human body. Scale is manipulated to emphasize importance: Pharaoh is always shown much larger than his enemies; tomb owners are larger than the servants they supervise. All of these features give Egyptian art its remarkable feeling of permanency. Scholars have long recognized that this “unchanging” quality of Egyptian art reflects and in turn helps to construct a worldview based on *maat*—the concept of a carefully balanced cosmos with pharaoh serving as guarantor. As Gryzmiski notes, pharaoh was “...the key element of the society, not because of the political power of his office but because of his centrality to Egyptian ideology and religion. Without a king there would be no society to speak of, no state, no order; there would only be chaos.”¹ Tombs—the source of the best-preserved Egyptian art—were designed as microcosms of the established order. Funerary art provided the visual manifestation of this phenomenon, serving as a site which “...associated earthly life processes of birth, maturation, parenthood and

¹ K. Gryzmiski, “Royal Statuary,” pp. 51-56 in *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids* (eds. D. Arnold and C. Ziegler; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 51.

death with cosmic cycles and enduring time,”² thus formalizing the relationships between individuals and classes of individuals within society.

As Wilkinson notes, “The formation of the Egyptian state at the end of the fourth millennium BC crystallized social distinctions in a particularly marked way, placing the king at the apex of the pyramid.”³ This system was designed not only to exalt the pharaoh but also to promote the vision of an unchanging and right social order that his rule guaranteed.⁴ Many indicators suggest that the change to pharaonic rule was supported by a deliberately controlled artistic program. Among these is the fact that artistic production is placed under the control of the state and artists are trained in the canonical style. Cult statues, temple decorations for the gods, and images to house the spirits of the deceased throughout the afterlife were used as vehicles to convey pharaoh’s message.⁵ Even access to the materials used (hard stone, wood, precious metals, etc.) was under the king’s control.⁶ While scholars have studied intensely the Roman use of art in the service of the state, other than for the Amarna period, scholars have generally not recognized “pharaonic agency” in the creation of Egyptian art. That Augustus, the first Roman emperor, could manipulate art to legitimize his rule is a scholarly given.⁷ It seems no less likely that the earliest unifiers of Egypt would have done the same thing. Rice points to a “powerful, united and supremely well-focused elite” as the catalyst for such a deliberate iconographical program.⁸ An important component of this artistic program was the articulation of the status and role of women within society.

Analyses by Robins have revealed artistic devices that prioritize male over female.⁹ For example, in group statues men are shown standing on the right or dominant side, women on the left. Men are shown striding (implying the capacity for action), while women stand with their feet

² J. Lustig, “Kinship, Gender and Age in Middle Kingdom Tomb Scenes and Texts,” pp. 43-66 in *Anthropology and Egyptology, A Developing Dialogue* (ed. J. Lustig; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 63.

³ M. Rice, *Egypt’s Making: The Origins of Ancient Egypt 5000-2000 B. C.* (London: Routledge, 2003), 72.

⁴ K. Michalowski, *Art of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.) 191.

⁵ A. Kozloff, “Sculpture: an Overview,” pp. 218-28 in *OEA 3*, 218.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See, for example, P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

⁸ Rice, *Egypt’s Making*, 72.

⁹ G. Robins, “Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art,” *JARCE* 31 (1994): 33-40.

together. These compositional devices reflect the dominant role of men in Egyptian society. While women in Egypt had greater legal rights than women of the ancient Classical world (they could, for example, own property) the bureaucracy of government was entirely male and the role of pharaoh was gendered male, even in the rare cases when a woman occupied the throne.

Egyptian sculpture and painting also distinguish male from female through color—men are painted dark brown /red and women white/yellow (Fig. 1-1). Traditionally, scholars have attributed this feature to a difference in lifestyle, i.e., a natural difference of skin tone between men, whose lives are conducted outside, and women, who remain secluded within the house. Yet, because of the many formulae regulating Egyptian art, the question of an artistic choice based on “natural” considerations remains problematic. It is more instructive to ask how such a distinction functions in the ideology promulgated by the Egyptian world-view of *maat* and the consequent role of pharaoh as guarantor of equilibrium. This essay explores the role that the adoption of the use of male/female color differentiation may have played in the establishment and promotion of pharaonic ideology.

While it is not possible to trace all the steps in the development of the Egyptian political system—since during the formative years of Dynastic Egypt, i.e., the Late Pre-Dynastic and Early Dynastic periods (3200 B.C.E.-2600 B.C.E.) material evidence is fragmentary—some conclusions can be drawn. After a period in which rival kingdoms vied for supremacy, Egypt was eventually unified under one ruler. As Rice notes “... three outstanding achievements must be set to Egypt’s account at this time which represent an extraordinary level of creative accomplishment: these are the institution of divine kingship, the concept of the unified political state and the construction of monumental funerary architecture.”¹⁰ The major evidence for social structure and artistic production for this period comes from graves at the most important sites (Hierakonpolis, Naqada, el-Amra, Mahasna, Abydos, Mattmar, Gerza, and Minshat Abu Omar).¹¹

¹⁰ Rice, *Egypt’s Making*, 72.

¹¹ T. A. H. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 29.



**Fig. 1-1. Pair Statue of Ptahkhenuwy and his wife.
Egyptian Old Kingdom, Dynasty Five¹²**

Pottery is the most plentiful source for iconography during this period, although it is limited both in color palette (red paint on buff clay) and range of motifs. The images depicted include schematically rendered outline figures of boats, human figures, and, occasionally, landscape. Men and women are distinguished not by color but by shape. Women are usually shown as broad-hipped figures, nude from the waist up and wearing a long skirt. They often hover above the boats with upraised arms.

¹² Photograph © 2008, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Pair statue of Ptahkhenuwy and his wife, Egyptian, Old Kingdom, Dynasty Five, about 2460-2323 B.C.E. Findspot: Egypt, Giza tomb G 2004. Painted limestone. Height: 70.14 cm. (27 5/8 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, 06.1876.

Men are usually shown with triangular chests, narrow waists, and erect phalluses.¹³

Analogous figure types are found in the clay figurine repertoire. These early clay figurines are very simply shaped—arms, legs, torsos, and neck are all formed from long rolls of clay. Their pinched, un-detailed faces resemble a bird's beak. The waist is very narrow. The figurines are not differentiated by skin color—all figures are the red color of the fired clay—but by the indication of the genitals for men (the males wear penis sheaths) and breasts and broader hips for women. The women either wear a skirt with no top or are nude with the separation between the legs indicated only by an indentation.¹⁴

The only context provided for these figurines is their funerary provenance and the iconography of the vases—the range of activities which male and female figures are shown performing in the scenes on the vases. These scenes are ambiguous and subject to a variety of interpretations. Female figures are always shown as larger than males and are usually shown with raised arms. Proposed identifications include dancers, mourners, fertility figures, or goddesses.¹⁵ The raised arms could certainly support the mourner or dancer identification. Nudity could argue for fertility figures, although recent scholarship suggests that we are often too quick to identify any prehistoric female figure as related to fertility.¹⁶ The larger size of the female figures is significant, especially given the fact that, in the later canon of Egyptian art, scale is manipulated to suggest importance. The larger the figure, the more important he or she is in a scene. In searching for a high-status female with which to equate these

¹³ For examples, see A. Capel, "Goddesses: catalogue entry 53a and b," pp. 121-22 in *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt* (eds. A. Capel and G. Mark; New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996), fig. 53b; and G. Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), fig. 23.

¹⁴ For examples, see W. S. Smith, *Ancient Egypt as Represented in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, (Boston: T. O. Metcalf, 1960), fig. 4; Capel, "Goddesses," fig. 53a; and J. Malek, *Egypt: 4,000 Years of Art* (London: Phaidon, 2003), p. 502, fig. 18, female figurine, Brooklyn Museum of Art, N.Y., from a grave at El-Mamariyz, height: 33.8 cm., collection fund 07.447.

¹⁵ B. K. Hartwig, "Painting," pp. 1-13 in *OEAE* 3, 4-5; B. S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 10-11.

¹⁶ R. Tringham and M. Conkey, "Rethinking Figurines," in *Ancient Goddesses, The Myths and the Evidence* (eds. L. Goodison and C. Morris; Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 22-45.

figures, many scholars have identified them as goddesses.¹⁷ Support for the life-giving aspect of the female goddess comes from a female figurine found at Naqada by Petrie, which is decorated with images of flora and fauna, perhaps suggesting that the “goddess” is the source of these benefits.¹⁸ The pottery and figurine imagery suggests that the not-yet-unified local chiefdoms had a religious pantheon based on goddesses and male ithyphallic gods/consorts.¹⁹

The above discussion indicates a feature of Pre-Dynastic society significant for our analysis, namely that women played an important role, at least in the funerary ideology of the period. Pre-Dynastic graves may provide supporting evidence for a status for women equal to or even more prominent than that of men at this time. Mortuary analysis of Pre-Dynastic gravesites suggests equality in tomb size and wealth of offerings between male and female.²⁰ There are, however, distinctions in spheres of activity. At Cemetery N7000 at Naga-ed-Der, Savage identifies eleven artifact clusters, including objects such as mace heads, beads, and ceramics, which he interprets as connected to social roles. However, Savage only identifies these roles by number. Female burials are associated with all eleven, while male burials are associated with seven. Caution must be used, since some social roles are only represented by a few burials, but it is noteworthy that these patterns suggest a broader range of at least symbolic social roles for women than for men.²¹ These observations have important implications for our study. They indicate a society in which women may be equal to or even higher than men in status. While funerary ritual may distort reality by altering or idealizing societal roles,²² such distortion should be consistent with the symbolic fabric of a society. The mortuary patterns discussed above suggest a more equal status for women before pharaonic unification than after.

The catalyst for change from equality appears to be the consolidation of Egypt under a central dynastic authority. Silverblatt has shown that a shift

¹⁷ Lesko, *Great Goddesses*, 10-13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-16, fig. 1.

¹⁹ F. Hassan, “Earliest Goddesses of Egypt: Divine Mothers and Cosmic Bodies,” pp. 98-112 in *Ancient Goddesses, The Myths and the Evidence* (eds. L. Goodison and C. Morris; Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 101.

²⁰ S. Savage, “The Status of Women in Pre-Dynastic Egypt as Revealed through Mortuary Analysis,” in *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record* (ed. A. Rautman; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 77-92.

²¹ Savage, “The Status of Women,” 86.

²² *Ibid.*

in the status of women is often a product of state formation.²³ The specific nature of whatever state is formed determines the ideology behind the diminution of women's status and, in particular, the way women are represented. In Egypt, the state emphasizes pharaonic rule, elevating the male pharaoh as a superior force. As Hassan notes, the unification "brought about a dramatic change in ideology, legitimating the role of a national king who incorporated and assimilated earlier deities within a cosmogenic myth that placed him as the descendant and legitimate inheritor of the throne."²⁴ This ideology of rule presents itself in a new religious framework in which the creator god, Atum, is closely connected with pharaonic political ideology. Atum is often shown wearing the royal Double Crown of Egypt. The crown is a symbol of unification and indicates that kingship, as a concept, is thus an integral and divinely authorized aspect of the universe, ordained by Atum.²⁵

While the male principle is dominant, textual and artistic evidence shows that during the Dynastic period goddesses are closely associated with kingship. For example, the upper corners of each side of the Narmer palette depict human-faced cow heads flanking a *serekh* with the name of the king. These figures are usually considered to be representations of a goddess, either the sky goddess Bat or Hathor,²⁶ the goddesses most closely associated with early kingship.²⁷ Their emblematic apposition suggests protection; they support the rule and power of the pharaoh.

For this essay, however, the question remains as to whether the absence of the color convention during the Pre-Dynastic period is indeed a reflection of an "egalitarian" situation—and thus ideologically significant—or is simply a function of a limited color palette. A vital piece of evidence in this discussion is the only monumental painting from this period and indeed the earliest yet found in Egypt. The painting from Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis dates to the Naqada II Period (3500–3200 B.C.E.).²⁸ As the only painted tomb in the cemetery, it is clearly marked as elite and offers important evidence of the development of the iconography of rule.²⁹

²³ I. M. Silverblatt, "Women in States," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 17 (1988): 427-60.

²⁴ Hassan, *Earliest Goddesses of Egypt*, 101.

²⁵ K. Myśliwiec, "Atum," *OEA* 1, 158-60; Narmer Palette, Cairo Egyptian Museum from Temple of Hierakonpolis; Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, fig. 25.

²⁶ Hassan, *Earliest Goddesses of Egypt*, 102.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ H. Case and J. C. Payne, "Tomb 100: the Decorated Tomb at Hierakonpolis," *JEA* 48 (1962): 5-18.

²⁹ Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 32-33.

The major scene is a procession of six boats. Subsidiary vignettes include hunting (a person pointing a spear at animals), combat (a figure tying and smiting captives, a bound figure with a mace suspended above), and control of animals (a figure flanked by animals, penned animals). These are all activities that can be connected with the emerging role of chieftainship.³⁰

Themes, which are staples of later Dynastic Egyptian art, are also present. For example, the boats may represent funerary barques, important in later Egyptian art.³¹ Most significant for our study is the use of color in a potentially symbolic manner—some of the figures are painted black and others red. I use the term “potentially symbolic” since, as with Gerzean pottery and figurines, the precise meaning of the scenes is impossible to judge. As noted above, the general theme of the painting seems to be the exercise of authority of some figures over others and also over animals. No specific identification is possible for any of the figures or even for the situations depicted. It may, in fact, be true that the artist did not intend to show an “actual” event.³²

Nevertheless, color is used with some degree of consistency, not to distinguish male from female but rather as if to depict two distinct groups of people. Several red, white, and green ships carry red passengers and face right. Another ship is painted black, as are its passengers, and it sails in the opposite direction. It is not possible to securely identify any of the figures in the painting as female based on the typical artistic conventions for depicting women shown on the pottery of the period. There are figures placed above the central red boat in a position analogous to that of the women on the pottery, although they do not exhibit the typical upraised arm gesture of the women on the pottery.³³ They are painted red.

The colors used in the Hierakonpolis painting could be symbolic of two ethnic groups. In Dynastic Egyptian art, foreigners are distinguished from Egyptians by their skin color. Nubians are painted black, Asiatics yellow. Thus one possible use of the two colors is a “realistic” depiction of skin color. That is, the black figures could represent Nubians. While there is clear archaeological evidence of Nubian connections during this period

³⁰ B. Midant-Reynes, *The Prehistory of Egypt: from the First Egyptians to the First Pharaoh* (trans. I. Shaw [orig. 1997]; Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 209-10; B. Adams and K. M. Cialowicz, *Protodynastic Egypt* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, 1997), 36; B. J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1989), 47.

³¹ Midant-Reynes, *The Prehistory of Egypt*, 209.

³² *Ibid.*, 208.

³³ Case and Payne, “Tomb 100,” 17.

in the form of non-figural pottery characteristic of Nubian Group A, the total scene does not support an identification of “foreign invasion.”³⁴ Although early scholarship attempted to identify some of the ships as foreign, especially Mesopotamian, more recent work has shown that all are types common to Egypt.³⁵ Based on analysis of the relationships of figures in the scenes and their activities, Case and Payne suggest that they are in fact rival political or ethnic groups.³⁶ Yet no group is seen as the victim or victor in every vignette.

A more subtle color use, one which is an important component of color/differentiation in pharaonic times, may be at work here, namely the use of colors to show duality and, by extension, balance between two distinct elements. The true emphasis, as Case and Payne suggest, is on the restoration of harmony symbolized by the presence of alternating black and red figures (antelopes) in the center of the wall and pairs of black and red antelopes elsewhere in the painting.³⁷ The Hierakonpolis painting would represent a statement of balance. Kemp also sees the painting as a forerunner of later pharaonic symbolism, in which the maintenance of order and balance in the face of the forces of chaos becomes very important.³⁸

By Dynasty Four, usually considered the beginning of the Old Kingdom, there is a codification and stabilization of kingly power and its iconography. Color, just as scale and position, is part of a consistent program of representation, which reflects the Egyptian ruling elite’s view of status and power and reflects underlying gender roles amplified during the shift to pharaonic rule.

The first preserved examples of male/female color differentiation in Egyptian art belong to this period.³⁹ The idea of a balanced universe

³⁴ K. M. Cialowicz, “Pre-Dynastic Period,” pp. 61-65 in *OEA* 3, 64.

³⁵ Adams and Cialowicz, *Protodynastic Egypt*, 36.

³⁶ Case and Payne, “Tomb 100,” 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 46.

³⁹ Examples include Pair Statue of Kate and Hetep-Heres (painted limestone, Trustees of the British Museum, London EA 1181), catalogue no. 82, 290 in D. Arnold and C. Ziegler, “Non-Royal Statuary,” in *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids* (eds. D. Arnold and C. Ziegler; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 51-56; and Pair Statue of Iai-ib and Khuaut (30.8 cm., Ägyptisches Museum, Universität Leipzig 3684), catalogue no. 83, 293 in D. Arnold and C. Ziegler, “Non-Royal Statuary.” Neither the state of preservation nor our lack of ability to precisely date Old Kingdom sculpture allow any one piece to be labeled

guaranteed by pharaoh is supported by this differentiation between men and women. The colors chosen, red and yellow/white, were considered opposites. Egyptian literature reveals that a consistent theme in the maintenance of *maat* is unity achieved through the union of opposites. The union of male and female was an important component of this equilibrium. The sun itself was reborn each day through the union of the setting sun (male) and the earth (female).⁴⁰

The union of male and female takes on even greater significance in the context of the afterlife where women were necessary as the catalyst for reproduction, which, in turn, guaranteed the afterlife. The role of woman as catalyst is clearly seen in Egyptian cosmologies. In the Heliopolitan, "Atum is he who (once) came into being who masturbated in On. He took his phallus in his grasp that he might create orgasm by means of it, and so were born the twins Shu and Tefenet."⁴¹ The hand with which he masturbates is personified as a goddess. The creation act is "male" (ejaculation), but Atum is androgynous in the sense that he contains the possibility for both male and female. In this cosmology, Shu and Tefnut are twins, unlike the Classical creation story in which Pandora belongs to a different "race" or the Biblical story in which Adam is created first (Gen 2:7). For the Egyptians, male and female serve as "complementary sources of generation, which make possible the continuing process of generative creation."⁴² In the human realm, as well, the male was seen as the locus of fertility. The female was the catalyst for stimulating male fertility.⁴³ As Roth states, "The responsibility for fertility and creating new life was not laid on the shoulders of women in ancient Egypt, they were instead expected to be sexually aggressive, to begin the process of creation by enticing their male partners to creation."⁴⁴ Such stimulation was a guarantee of the afterlife. Many of the motifs found in tomb paintings

the first example of male/female color differentiation. It is, however, an established practice by the Fourth Dynasty.

⁴⁰ G. Robins, "Dress, Undress and the Representation of Fertility and Potency in New Kingdom Egyptian Art," pp. 31-39 in *Sexuality in Ancient Art* (ed. N. B. Kampen; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36.

⁴¹ R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1248.

⁴² V. A. Tobin, "Creation Myths," pp. 469-72 in *OEAE* 1, 469.

⁴³ A. M. Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility," in *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record* (ed. A. Rautman; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 187-201.

⁴⁴ Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky," 200.