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The Absent Spouse: Patterns and Taboos in Egyptian Tomb Decoration¹

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In a typical Egyptian decorated tomb, the male tomb owner is accompanied in many scenes by his supportive wife. She is often shown standing or seated beside him, on the same or a smaller scale, an arm affectionately wrapped around his shoulder or waist. With him, she enjoys musical entertainment, inspects agricultural activities, or receives offerings. She may even be shown independently of her husband, mourning his death.

In some tombs, however, this loyal wife is not shown, even though her children are present in many cases. These omissions, and the omissions of husbands in the rarer tombs dedicated entirely to women, have not usually been considered worthy of remark. When they are noted, they tend to be used to argue against an identification,² or as evidence for the early death of the spouse,³ or for the anomalous importance of other family members,⁴ or for the tomb owner's

celibacy,⁵ or for his homosexuality,⁶ or even for marital strife or divorce.⁷ When the evidence for such omissions is viewed in a larger context, however, the absence of spouses can be shown to occur in general patterns that make such explanations of individual examples unlikely.

Recognizing these patterns is important, and not only because they prevent the drawing of incorrect conclusions about particular tomb owners. The decoration of Egyptian tomb chapels portrays an idealized society,⁸ from the point of view of the (usually male) tomb owner, but the contents of the scenes were also governed by general rules of decorum. The patterns in the absence or presence of the spouse thus reflect the relationship between the sexes in ancient Egyptian society, and have implications for the study of

¹ This paper was originally presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, held in Toronto, and it benefits from the suggestions and comments made by many colleagues who attended the meeting.

² For example, "It is equally significant that *Bj3:jrrj* and his children are absent from the latter woman's tomb chapel" (implying that the latter woman is not the wife of *Bj3:jrrj*). Yvonne Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom: Studies in Orientation and Scene Content*, Studies in Egyptology (London and New York, 1987), 15.

³ "Her husband is never mentioned or represented in her tomb—most probably he was already dead . . . and buried in some other place." A. Bolshakov, "Princess *Hmt-R(w)*: The First Mention of Osiris?," *CdE* 67 (1992), p. 205.

⁴ C. F. Nims in *The Epigraphic Survey, The Tomb of Kheruef: Theban Tomb 192, OIP 102* (Chicago, 1980), p. 25 n. 55, says regarding Kheruef and Amenemhet-Surer, "In both cases . . . it is possible that the high position of the mother and her influence on her son's career led to her being pictured with her son. This would not preclude the marriage of either man."

⁵ For example, in the case of the Theban tomb of Senenmut, C. Meyer, *Senenmut: Eine Prosopographische Untersuchung* (Hamburg, 1982), 8–9. Meyer argues that the absence of a wife from his tombs and stelas, and the representation of his parents in her place, indicates that he never married. Her supplementary argument that a brother rather than a son is shown carrying out the funerary rites is stronger, but it is possible that he was married but had no sons.

⁶ S. Whale, *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty* (Sydney, 1989), 245.

⁷ Whale, *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty*, 245, suggests that a wife might be excluded from her husband's tomb in the Eighteenth Dynasty because of "early death, infertility, incompatibility, and adultery." A. Badawy, *The Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah at Giza and the Tomb of Ankhmahor at Saqqara* (Berkeley, 1978), p. 47, suggests the (secondary) possibility that a "family feud" involving the erasure of one son of Ankhmahor may be ascribed to "dissent relating to Ankhmahor's wife," who is missing from his tomb decoration.

⁸ For a discussion of the selectiveness of representations, see K. Weeks, "Art, Word, and the Egyptian World View," in: *Egyptology and the Social Sciences*, K. Weeks, ed., (Cairo, 1979), 59–81.

gender; and comparison between the patterns expressed in different periods may reflect changes in gender roles over time. That the presence and absence of spouses has not been discussed has meant that related questions, such as the presence and absence of mothers, fathers, children, and other relatives, have also remained largely unexamined.⁹ For these reasons, it is worthwhile to discuss the evolution of these patterns and the extent of their manifestation, as well as the degree to which they may have distorted our understanding of Egyptian society and may even have led to misinterpretations of Egyptian history.

The present article is far from a full study of the question. Its aim is merely to sample the evidence for a few selected places and periods, in order to suggest some possible patterns. The omission of the wife is examined only in the Memphite cemeteries of the Old Kingdom, and in the Theban necropolis. The omission of the husband is treated more generally, but by no means exhaustively. Possible reasons for the resulting patterns are proposed, and some questions are raised about existing interpretations on the basis of these patterns.

I. The Omission of the Wife

In the earliest times, the few funerary monuments that were decorated seem to have been decorated individually. Women did not appear on the monuments of their husbands; husbands did not appear on the monuments of their wives; and children were never shown.¹⁰ The first

⁹ There have been several recent attempts to look at such questions, however. For the first part of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Whales, *The Family of the XVIIIth Dynasty of Egypt* is a laudable beginning; but it is also somewhat problematic, both in its assumptions and in its limitation to published sources. Erika Feucht, in her *Das Kind im alten Ägypten* (Frankfurt, 1995), 454–60, has surveyed Old Kingdom representations of husbands and children, but the restriction of the time period has also limited her conclusions. To judge from its title, Rainer Stadelmann's paper, "Fréquence des membres de la famille dans la représentation privée," at the colloquium "L'art de l'Ancien Empire égyptien" (Paris, April 3–4, 1998) also dealt with these issues.

¹⁰ Examples of this phenomenon would be the slab stelas of the first two dynasties at Helwan, the tomb of Hesi-Re (*PM*² III 437–39), and the two very separate false door niches of Kha-bausokar and his wife Neferhetep-Hathor (*PM*² III, 449–50).

appearance of the spouse on mortuary monuments was in the Fourth Dynasty private tombs of Meydum. There, wives are shown in their husbands' tombs and husbands are depicted in their wives' tombs, not only in the wall decoration, but on the false door itself.¹¹ Children also occur for the first time on these monuments, and remain important thereafter.

This sudden and consistent depiction of family members may signal an unusual emphasis on marriage and children during this period, perhaps to be related to the emerging sun cult.¹² Later evidence for such cults shows that they stressed fertility and sexual reproduction, as in the depiction of the seasons in the sun temple of Abu Gurob.¹³ It is in a scene from a shrine from the temple of Re^c at Heliopolis that a royal family is first depicted (the wife, daughter, and possibly mother of Djoser, seated at his feet).¹⁴ The ennead of Heliopolis was also constructed on a genealogical, multi-generational model, as opposed to the earlier cult of Horus, in which family relationships were not stressed.¹⁵ Significantly, the sun cult of Akhenaton in the New Kingdom is also characterized by a significant increase in depictions of the family (especially the royal family) in stelas and tomb decoration.

¹¹ Petrie, *Medum* (London, 1892), pl. 9ff. The women are not specifically identified as wives by the title *hmt.f*, as is usual in later men's tombs, so it is possible that they are the men's mothers rather than their wives. (A royal parallel to such mother-son burials might be the Meydum pyramid complex itself, which according to a later graffito included the tombs of both Snefru and his mother.) However, this is unlikely, since the men are in most cases kings' sons, and the women have no royal titles. It may be significant, nonetheless, that the phrase *hmt.f*, which later is so important in marking the woman's secondary status in the tomb of her husband, is omitted here, where the spouses' roles seem unusually symmetrical in other ways.

¹² I proposed this interpretation in "Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty: The Spatial Organization of Pyramids, Tombs, and Cemeteries," *JARCE* 30 (1993), 54–55.

¹³ E. Edel and S. Wenig, *Die Jahrzeitenreliefs aus dem Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Ne-user-re* (Berlin, 1974).

¹⁴ W. S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* (Boston, 1946), p. 113, fig. 48 right.

¹⁵ At least not during the early period. The family connections that later became so important may have been added in imitation of the cult of Re^c.

Old Kingdom Tombs at Giza and Saqqara

In the Old Kingdom, men continued to depict their wives in their tomb decoration throughout the Fourth Dynasty and throughout the first six reigns of the Fifth Dynasty. During this period, the wife is generally shown at least once in the tomb of her husband, usually at the same scale as her husband, or only slightly smaller. Toward the end of the Fifth Dynasty, however, wives begin to be omitted from the tombs of their husbands.

This change is very clear in seven decorated tombs that form part of a cluster along the northern edge of the Western Cemetery at Giza. These tombs can be securely dated within the latter half of the Fifth Dynasty.¹⁶ The four earliest decorated tombs, which range in date from Niuserre's reign to no later than the early part of Izezi's, all included depictions of the tomb owner's wife, at the same scale as the tomb owner.¹⁷ Where the upper parts of the representations are preserved, the women are also named.

Of the three later decorated tombs, dating from the later reign of Izezi and the reign of Unis, two clearly show no representations of the wife, despite the specifically labeled sons and daughters shown in one and a small boy in the usual position of a son in the other.¹⁸ The third tomb, probably the last major tomb built in the cluster, also depicts children.¹⁹ There, an unlabeled woman is shown seated at the tomb owner's feet. She may be a wife, since wives are sometimes shown in that position in the late Fifth Dynasty;²⁰ however, the fact that she is unnamed suggests

¹⁶ A. M. Roth, *A Cemetery of Palace Attendants*, Giza Mastabas 6 (Boston, MA, 1995).

¹⁷ These are tombs G 2086, G 2088, G 2091, and G 2092+2093. The depictions in 2086 and 2088 are barely preserved: in 2088, the seated wife must be extrapolated from a single carved line and the placement of the scene on the wall.

¹⁸ G 2240 shows the daughters of the tomb owner; G 2097 shows a small boy grasping the tomb owner's staff. I know of no tomb that depicts anyone other than a child of the tomb owner in the latter position.

¹⁹ G 2098.

²⁰ For example, the wife of Ti (L. Epron and F. Daumas, *Le tombeau de Ti*, vol. 1, MIFAO 65 (Cairo, 1939), pl. 55–56) and the wives of Niankh-Khnum and Khnum-hotep (A. Moussa, and H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchchnum and Chnum-hotep* (Mainz am Rhein, 1977), pls. 5–6, 18–19).

TABLE 1. Wives in Old Kingdom Tombs at Saqqara

Date of Tombs	Without Wife	With Wife
Total:	45	69
clearly 6th dynasty	15	27
earlier or possibly earlier	30	42
Of the (possibly) earlier tombs:		
not datable	12	25
Izezi or later (incl. 6th)	14	7
pre-Izezi	4	10
Of the pre-Izezi tombs:		
3rd/4th transition	3	1
4th	0	4
early 5th	1	3
mid 5th	0	2

that she may be a daughter rather than a wife. A fourth construction in the area²¹ built during this later period (an addition made to an earlier tomb by the son of the owner) also fails to depict a wife, although it is less fully decorated than the other seven decorated tombs.

These men all bore the title *hntj-š*, and were all buried in the same area of the Giza necropolis. But this chronological pattern was not limited to people with this title or to the cemetery of Giza, as can be seen in a survey of the Old Kingdom tombs at Saqqara, made using the information provided in the Porter-Moss *Topographical Bibliography*.²² Based on the references cited there, 69 tombs were collected in which a wife was represented. In another 45 tombs, with a significant amount of decoration, no wife was represented. The results of this survey are tallied in Table 1.

All the tombs that were dated to the Sixth Dynasty, and thus post-dated the proposed period of omission, were first removed from the corpus. The remaining tombs were then divided into three groups: the tombs clearly dating before the reign of Izezi, those dating clearly to the reign of Izezi or later, and (inevitably the largest

²¹ The courtyard of G 2088.

²² B. Porter, R. L. B. Moss, and J. Malek, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, vol. 3, part 2, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1981).

group) tombs that could not be dated to either group.

Of the fourteen tombs that clearly date before the reign of Izezi, there are ten tombs where the tomb owner's wife is shown and only four fail to show the wife. Of these four, three date to the late Third-early Fourth Dynasty period. None of these tombs include representations of the tomb owner's children, although Metjen mentions his parents. These tombs thus probably represent tombs decorated before the representation of family members became universal. The fourth is the tomb of Wash-Ptah,²³ who died in the presence of King Neferirkare, and whose tomb was a gift of that king. He does have sons, who are shown on his doorjambs; however, since only these jambs and a false door are published, it may be that Wash-Ptah's wife was represented in a part of the tomb that is either not published or not preserved.

Of the tombs dating to Izezi or later (but not definitively to the Sixth Dynasty), there are fourteen tombs where the wife is not shown. Of these fourteen, ten can date no later than the early Sixth Dynasty, and so clearly fall into the same range as the later tombs in the Giza group. By comparison, there are only seven tombs dated to Izezi or later where a wife is represented, and all but three of these may be of later date than the reigns of Izezi and Unis, the period when the depiction of the wife seems to have been avoided. As with the exceptional examples from the earlier period, the three exceptions may have been transitional.

A summary of these results is given in Table 2. The sample is small, due to the difficulty of dating tombs; but when combined with the Giza examples, the change in the percentage of tombs where the wife is absent is striking. After wives were introduced into their husbands' tomb decoration in the early 4th dynasty, they were almost invariably represented at least once in each tomb until sometime in the reign of Izezi. During the last two reigns of the Fifth Dynasty, wives are absent from over two-thirds of the tombs, which

TABLE 2. The Fraction and Percentage of Men's Tombs at Saqqara in Which Wives are Absent, Arranged by Date

late 3rd/early 4th	3/4	75% absent
4th to middle 5th	1/10	10% absent
Izezi-Unis	10/13	77% absent
6th	15/42	35% absent

seems likely to represent a disappearance of women from all male tombs during a part of that time. Wives reappeared in the early Sixth Dynasty; however, they continued to be omitted from over one-third of the tombs throughout the Sixth Dynasty.

Nadine Cherpion has made an interesting observation that may be related to the disappearance of the wife from her husband's tomb. She has pointed out that there is a marked decrease in affectionate gestures extended towards husbands by wives, which she dates to a period just preceding the period that I have suggested for their disappearance.²⁴ Although this might suggest that Egyptian women suddenly became less affectionate towards their husbands, and that their husbands left them out of their tomb chapels in retaliation, this hardly seems likely. Instead, the most probable explanation for all these phenomena is that the support of the wife gradually came to be seen as less important for the husband's resurrection, perhaps due to a change in funerary beliefs. The restoration of the wife in the Sixth Dynasty would then represent either a return to the old beliefs, or integration of the older beliefs about the wife into the new beliefs.

Another change that occurs at about the same time as the disappearance of the wife is the appearance of the god Osiris. The name of Osiris occurs in two of the three later tombs in my sample at Giza, and the absence of the name in the third is probably due to the fact that no false door or lintels are preserved. (It is in offering formulas on these elements that the name of

²³ Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography* III, p. 456; A. Mariette, *Mastabas de l'ancien empire* (Paris, 1882-89), 267-71.

²⁴ "Sentiment Conjugal et Figuration à l'Ancien Empire," *Kunst des Alten Reiches*, SDAIK 28 (Mainz, 1995), 33-47, and Taf. 2-8.

Osiris most frequently appears.) The sudden rise of Osiris, probably in the reign of Izezi, marks the end of the great stress on the solar cult. (Izezi was the first Fifth Dynasty king who did not build a sun-temple.) It was suggested above that it was the rise of this solar cult that initially led to the inclusion of the wife and family in men's tombs. There is no obvious reason that the Osiris cult should lead to her exclusion, and clearly it did not in later periods. The role of Isis is very important in the Pyramid Texts, and it is difficult to imagine that the appearance of her cult would have led to a diminution of female status.

In fact, the omission of the wife seems to have occurred slightly before the appearance of Osiris in *h̄tp-dj-nswt* formulas. This can be seen in the tomb complex of Ptahhotep I, Akhethotep I, and Ptahhotep II, three successive generations of a family that spanned the reigns of Izezi and Unis. The earliest tomb, that of Ptahhotep I, has neither a *h̄tp-dj-nswt* formula nor a depiction of a wife, although in both cases this may be because no part of the tomb where one would expect to find these features is preserved. Akhethotep I, in the second generation, has a false door with a *h̄tp-dj-nswt* formula referring frequently and exclusively to Anubis, and his wife is clearly omitted from his tomb's decoration. The tomb of his son Ptahhotep also fails to depict a wife, but his *h̄tp-dj-nswt* formula refers to Osiris in parallel with Anubis. This sequence indicates that the wife disappeared before Osiris appeared, which might suggest that both changes were secondary results of some other change, perhaps a decline in the importance of the sun cult. (Izezi's decision not to build a sun temple was probably made near the beginning of his reign, and would predate both events.) Alternatively, the disappearance of the wife may have some other explanation altogether; another, very hypothetical, suggestion will be offered below, on the basis of the New Kingdom examples.

Thebes in the Early Middle and New Kingdoms

A chronological pattern like that noted in the Old Kingdom may also be detected in the omission of wives from the Theban tombs of officials of the late Eleventh or early Twelfth Dynasties.

Of the ten tombs of male officials dating to that period, none unambiguously show a wife.²⁵ This omission may be another instance of chronological patterning; another possibility will be discussed further below.

A different, at least partly non-chronological, pattern in the omission of wives occurs in the New Kingdom and into the Late Period. Here again, only a limited number of tombs were surveyed, those in the non-royal Theban necropolis. Out of 456 private tombs listed in the *Topographical Bibliography I/1*,²⁶ only 97 tombs that name the owner do not also name his wife. Of these, 10 date to the Eleventh and early Twelfth Dynasties, and are discussed above. Excluding from the remaining 87 those tombs where the *Bibliography* lists a representation of "wife" and those with only fragments of decoration left (a total of 56), the number of tombs where the wife seems to have been excluded can be further reduced to only 31.²⁷ This number represents less than 7% of the 446 New Kingdom and later tomb owners. In several cases, there is evidence (children, other monuments) to show that the tomb owner was married. Sheila Whale, who has done a similar analysis for the tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty between the reigns of Ahmose and Thutmose IV, arrives at a similarly small number (6 out of 93).²⁸

²⁵ A survey of B. Porter and R. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings I/1*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1960), yields the following tombs that date from that period: TT 103 (a woman is shown who could be the owner's wife or mother), TT 240, TT 280, TT 310 (unclear), TT 311, TT 313, TT 314 (the owner's mother is shown), TT 315, TT 316 (the owner's mother and an unidentified woman are shown), and TT 366 (no women at all are shown).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ The tomb of Ankhhor, not listed in the *Topographical Bibliography*, was added to the tombs listed in the *Topographical Bibliography*. M. Bietak and E. Reiser-Haslauer, *Das Grab des Anch-Hor I* (1978), 42–43, discuss the absence of Ankhhor's wife in this tomb, and the evidence that he had children.

²⁸ Whale, *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty*, 244–45. Her corpus of 93 tombs (from the early Eighteenth Dynasty only) includes some examples from sites other than Thebes. Of these, she lists six in which wife and children are both absent (TT 71/353, 125, 343, 20, 112/86, 94) and seven in which a wife might have been excluded from a tomb (TT 29, 64, 82, 84, 87, 109, 172, and the tomb of Reneni from El Kab). Although there is considerable overlap between her listing

This low number is not surprising, given the importance that has been proposed for the sexual role of the wife in conceiving and giving birth to the deceased in the afterlife.²⁹ The wife's role as her husband's sexual partner is stressed in many ways in the decorative scheme, presumably because he metaphorically impregnates her with himself, so that he can be reborn, as a reenactment of the "bull of his mother" metaphor. Given her importance to his resurrection, it is surprising that the wife should ever be omitted, yet she clearly is in these few cases. Many of these men show their parents, especially their mothers, as a substitute for their wives.

The 31 tomb owners in my sample who do not seem to depict their wives are listed in Table 3. The most significant common trait of this group is that so many seem to have served women. Almost a third (9) bear titles indicating their service to the God's wife of Amun. Two more of them, Hray and Khereuef, worked for queens (Ahhotep and Tiye). Most striking, however, is the circumstance that almost half of these tombs (14) date to the reigns of Queen Hatshepsut or Thutmose III, and their owners thus presumably served Hatshepsut at some point during their careers.³⁰ In view of the omissions of the wife from the tombs of other men who served women,

and mine, she includes in the second category examples in which a wife is represented but is not prominent, or in which a second wife may exist who is not represented.

²⁹ C. Desroches-Noblecourt, "Concubines du Mort," *BIFAO* 53 (1953), 15–33; W. Westendorf, "Bemerkungen zur 'Kammer der Wiedergeburt' im Tutanchamungrab," *ZÄS* 94 (1967), 139–50; G. Robins, "Some Images of Women in New Kingdom Art," in: *Women's Earliest Records from Ancient Egypt and Western Asia*, Barbara Lesko, ed. (Atlanta, 1989), 109–10. M. Eaton-Krauss and E. Graefe, *The Small Golden Shrine from the Tomb of Tutankhamun* (Oxford 1985), 29–40, contest this interpretation.

³⁰ Whale has also noted this concentration, although with some perplexity: "There is no reason to suppose that Egyptian society did not have its share of men who were homosexuals. The fact that three or four men out of ninety-three were not married is not beyond the bounds of possibility. The puzzling aspect is that these men all lived during the reigns of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III and were not spread throughout the whole period under consideration." *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty*, 245. Whale here oversimplifies the phenomenon of homosexuality, and fails to note that in some societies "gay" men may marry at the same rate as heterosexual men.

this seems not to be a purely chronological pattern. If men who served women did not (for whatever reason) include the names or figures of their wives in their tombs, this explanation would account for 24,³¹ or over 75%, of the 31 examples where the wife is omitted. Only 7 of the 31 cannot be explained by the hypothesis that they worked for Hatshepsut, other queens, or God's wives.

Of the seven exceptions, six can be explained in other ways. Three tomb owners may have been too young to marry. Their tombs list "child of the nursery" and other titles connected with a royal education as their major titles, rather than the achieved titles of an adult career. The three are Ramose/Aamy (TT 94), whose titles of fan bearer and herald sound largely honorary, and whose brother performs his funerary ceremonies; and two other children of the nursery, Montu-iywy (TT 172) and Menkheper (TT 258). None of these three tombs depict any children of the owner.

In two other tombs, the omission of the wife may be a result of incomplete preservation. Huy clearly mentioned his wife, and may also have depicted her in one damaged scene, as can be seen in the full publication of his tomb (TT 40).³² The wife of Neferssekheru (TT 107) may have appeared inside his chapel, since only the decoration from his portico is preserved. A different explanation may be suggested for Amenemhat, the owner of TT 97. His tomb is dated tentatively to the reign of Amenhotep II, but A. Gardiner notes that he is said to have obtained the high priesthood of Amun at age 54 from him "whom Amun himself selected," a phrase that may refer to Thutmose III, who was singled out by the oracle of Amun. If that is the case, Amenemhat may have spent much of his active career under Hatshepsut.³³

³¹ The two tombs of Senenmut are counted only once, although they are listed in two groups in the table: Senenmut served a god's wife and also lived in the reign of Hatshepsut.

³² T. Davies and A. H. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Huy* (London, 1926), pl. 9. The scene in question shows Huy proceeding to the temple of Amun in the company of a female figure at the same scale, who is not well preserved.

³³ A. D. Gardiner, "The Tomb of Amenemhet, High-Priest of Amon," *ZÄS* 47 (1910), 87–99.

TABLE 3. Theban Tombs of the New Kingdom and Later in Which the Wife is Absent

<i>Served God's Wife</i>	<i>Served Queen</i>	<i>Dates Hatshepsut/T III</i>	<i>No Explanation?</i>
36 Ibi (M)	12 Hray (M) ³⁴	11 Djehuty (H)	40 Huy (M)
37 Harwa	192 Kheruef	20 Mentuherkhepeshef	48 Amenemhat-surer
71/353 Senenmut (H)		62 Amenemwaskhet	94 Ramose/Aamy (N) ³⁵
191 Wahibre-nebpehty		67 Hapuseneb (M)(H) ³⁶	97 Amenemhat (M)
196 Padihorresnet ³⁷		71/353 Senenmut (H)	107 Nefersekeru
197 Padineith		73 Amenhotep (H) ³⁸	172 Montu-iywy (N)
279 Pabasa		86/112 Menkheperresonb	258 Menkheper (N)
404 Akhamenrau		109 Min (M)	
414 Ankh-hor		121 Ahmose	
<i>Key to Annotations</i>		125 Duaneheh (H)	
(M) = clearly married		155 Intef (M)	
(H) = Hatshepsut prominent		252 Senimen (M)(H)	
(N) = "Child of the nursery"		343 Benia/Pakhemen ³⁹	
		A.5 Neferhotep	

The apparent exception to the rule is Amenemhat-Surer (TT 48), a chief king's steward and overseer of cattle of Amun during the reign of

³⁴ Whale, *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty*, 12, notes that he is shown with an unidentified woman, but that this would be "a very unusual method of representing husband and wife." It may be his mother.

³⁵ Whale, *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty*, 244, points out that the omission of his wife may be an illusion, since only four scenes survive. A circumstance arguing against this assumption is the depiction of his mother, which is particularly common in tombs where the wife is not represented.

³⁶ R. Caminos, *Gebel es-Silsilah I. The Shrines* (London, 1963) p. 44 and pl. 37, notes that a woman called *nbt pr mrt.f J. . . htp mꜣt hrw* is represented above the man reciting the offering formula to Hapuseneb and his mother, and since Hapuseneb's wife is known to be an Amenhotep, Caminos identifies her with this woman. However, her name is incomplete and no wifely title is given, so the woman is more likely to have been Hapuseneb's daughter, whom one would expect to find playing such a role. Alternatively, since both her scale and position are unusual, she might be his wife, added to the existing scene once the reason for her suppression ceased to exist.

³⁷ E. Graefe, "Zwei Ergebnisse einer Inspektion des Grabes No. 196 in Assasif," *CdE* 46 (1971), 238, has identified Shepennute, previously believed to be this man's wife, as his mother. He lists no wife.

³⁸ T. Säve-Söderbergh, *Four Eighteenth Dynasty Tombs* (Oxford, 1957), describes a fragmentary wall where Amenhotep is seated with a woman, but since both parents were originally named in the tomb, this probably represents his mother. That no wife or family is depicted in the traditional marsh scenes (*ibid.*, pl. 7) suggests that the wife is entirely omitted here.

Amenhotep III. Although five statues of royal women appear in his chapel decoration,⁴⁰ he has no titles that connect him with queens or a god's wife, and he twice shows his mother in places where one would expect to see a wife.⁴¹ However, he has no children, and may simply not have married.

There are, however, examples of men who worked for women, but whose wives are not omitted from their tombs. The least consistent category seems to be the category of men who worked for queens. Although few of these men are explicitly attested in the Porter-Moss Bibliography, only Hray and Kheruef clearly omit their wives for this reason. One other tomb owner, the unknown owner of TT 226, was the overseer of royal nurses, and does not seem to name his wife (although his tomb is very badly preserved); another, the overseer of the *harim* Userhat (TT 47), gives his wife's name and titles only on his funerary cones, which were presumably outside of his tomb chapel. On the other hand, the owner of TT 24 (dating to Thutmose III), Neb-Amun, a

³⁹ Whale, *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty*, 281, cites W. Hayes, *JEA* 46 (1960), 34-35, as evidence that Pakhemen served Hatshepsut; however, the Deir el-Bahri ostrakon that mentions him might equally well come from the construction of Thutmose III's temple.

⁴⁰ Säve-Söderbergh, *Four Eighteenth Dynasty Tombs*, pls. 37 and 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pls. 50 and 51.

steward of a royal wife named Nebtu, depicts his wife and identifies her by name; and Mosi, a custodian of the estate of Queen Tiye and owner of TT 254, also names and depicts his wife. The pattern may thus be more subtle than can be determined here.

Of the 14 tombs whose date-range in the Porter-Moss Bibliography includes the reign of Hatshepsut, only 5 depict the owner's wife, and they can all be explained by the assumption that the tomb was actually constructed under an earlier or later king. The examples explicitly dated to Hatshepsut's reign and emphasizing her favor omit the name of the tomb owner's wife without exception. Interestingly, the tomb of Intef (TT 155), which may contain a reference to Thutmose III,⁴² had marsh scenes that included unidentified female figures that may have represented his wife and also depictions of his sons in the same scene. However, one of the women has been awkwardly placed, standing at the tip of the prow, squeezed in front of Intef's foot; and his sons are shown on separate register lines raised above the water level behind their father. These awkward and unusual placements suggest that the wife and sons were added after the scene had been completed.⁴³

Among the tombs of men who served god's wives, exceptions are even rarer. Not everyone who worked for a god's wife shows this omission, but most do. E. Graefe's study of the administration of the office lists 40 Theban tombs that mention the office of god's wife, of which 20 belong to male officials in that administration.⁴⁴ Of these 20 tombs, 13 show no evidence of a wife.⁴⁵ Of the seven men who do depict women who may be their wives, two (TT 252 and 271) do not name them, so it may be a mother or a

daughter who is depicted. Three more have financial titles (*tnj n hmt-ntr* or "counter of cattle"), which may have been an aspect of service that was exempted from this taboo. Another (TT 41) clearly shows the wife, but does not mention the connection of her husband with the god's wife. The most interesting exception, however, is the tomb of Wahibre (TT 242), a chancellor of the god's wife Ankhnesneferibre. His sons are shown offering to him and his mother; however, his wife, though not depicted, is named in an inscription. Since Ankhnesneferibre was the last of the god's wives, it may be that the taboo ended with the end of the institution, and the chancellor was able to add his wife's name to his tomb.⁴⁶

In Theban tombs of the New Kingdom and later periods, the absence of the name and representation of a wife thus correlates with employment of the owner by a woman: either by Queen Hatshepsut, by another queen, or, most often, by a god's wife of Amun (a title that Hatshepsut also held, although queens Ahhotep and Tiye did not). The fact that so many tomb owners who failed to depict their wives in their tombs worked for women is merely a correlation, not an explanation. The reason for the correlation is not obvious. It is unlikely that the god's wives were jealous of the wives of their stewards and forbade their representation. Working under female supervision would hardly so sour men on the sex that they would pass over the hope of rebirth that the presence of their wives offered. (And, in fact, most men whose wives were omitted were careful to include their mothers.) Nor is it probable that the tomb owners' female superiors were thought to fulfill the sexual roles necessary for rebirth. The pattern still awaits explanation; I can suggest none.

Whatever its ultimate cause, this pattern may have begun in the Old Kingdom. It is perhaps significant that the two reigns during which the omission of wives takes place in the Old Kingdom, Izezi and Unis, have been thought by some scholars to bridge the transition from the Fifth

⁴² The damaged royal serekh shows a trace that would fit with the "strong arm" sign of "Strong Bull . . ." the beginning of Thutmose III's Horus name.

⁴³ The scene survives only in a drawing by Hay, reproduced by Säve-Söderbergh in *Four Eighteenth Dynasty Tombs*, pl. 14.

⁴⁴ E. Graefe, *Untersuchungen zur Verwaltung und Geschichte der Institution der Gottesgemahlin des Amun vom Beginn der Neuen Reiches bis zur Spätzeit* (Ägyptische Abhandlungen 37), Wiesbaden, 1981: vol. 2, pp. 167–68.

⁴⁵ TT 27, 36, 37, 71, 191, 197, 224, 279, 346, 404, 407, 411, and 414. Some of these tomb chapels are admittedly very badly preserved.

⁴⁶ Graefe, *Untersuchungen zur Verwaltung und Geschichte der Institution der Gottesgemahlin*, p. 57, dates Wahibre's tomb to the reign of Ankhnesneferibre or shortly after the Persian conquest.

to the Sixth Dynasty.⁴⁷ Such transitions are often characterized by powerful queens (for example, Khentkawes at the end of the Fourth Dynasty, Nitocris at the end of the Sixth, Sobeknofru at the end of the Twelfth, and Tawosret at the end of the Nineteenth), who ruled as regent for a young son, or independently after his death. In the extraordinarily large "queen's complex" attached to the mortuary complex of Djedkare Izezi, royal emblems were added to the depictions of the queen after their completion, suggesting that this queen, presumably Izezi's wife, had an independent reign at the end of his reign and before the reign of Unis. The circumstance that the complex has been so thoroughly attacked that the queen's name is not known may also point to her assumption of royal power.⁴⁸ Lacking further evidence, however, such a correlation between this queen and the omission of wives in tombs at the end of the Fifth Dynasty can be no more than an interesting speculation.⁴⁹ (It is clear, however, that service to dead women did not necessarily lead to the absence of the wife in one's tomb, since of the ten men listed as mortuary priests of an Old Kingdom royal wife or mother,⁵⁰ seven clearly mention a wife, and two more probably do so.)

As for the Middle Kingdom evidence at Thebes, it is interesting that one of the clearest cases of the omission of women among these officials is that of TT 366, which belonged to Djar, a custodian of the king's *harim*. His tomb not only avoids

the depiction of a wife, but no women at all are depicted. This man clearly worked closely with royal women, so the situation is somewhat analogous with that found in the New Kingdom. While none of the other men of the era seem to have titles that connect them so closely with royal women, the bay in which most of these tombs were located also held several tombs of women from this and later periods: TT 60 (Senet); TT 308 (Kemsit); TT 319 (Neferu); TT 320 (the royal nurse Inhapi); TT 358 (Ahmose-Merytamun); TT 390 (Irutru, a female scribe, chief attendant of the divine adoratrice Nitocris under Psamtik I); and of course the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut and the tombs of the wives of Mentuhotep I in his mortuary temple.⁵¹ It has been noted that the goddess Hathor seems to be extremely important in this area,⁵² and it is possible that some variation of the same taboo that caused the subordinates of powerful women to omit their wives was in force here.

II. The Omission of the Husband

The case of the absent husband is far simpler than that of the absent wife. In the Meydum tombs, as noted above, the husband appears in the tomb of his wife. Nefermaat, for example, is shown trapping birds for his wife while their sons bring offerings.⁵³ After the reign of Snefru, however, with few if any exceptions, the rule is that a husband is *never* named or depicted in the tomb of his wife. While it is true that few women outside the royal family had independent tombs, those who did have such tombs did not depict their husbands in them; and neither did their royal counterparts.

Although this apparent taboo is obvious to Egyptologists who have worked on individual women's monuments,⁵⁴ it has not been stated as

⁴⁷ K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom* (Chicago, 1960), 298–99, citing J.-P. Lauer, "Fouilles du Service des Antiquités à Saqqarah," *ASAE* 39 (1939), 454, as well as new evidence based on Ahmed Fakhry's excavation of the pyramid of Djedkare Izezi. However, Manetho is unambiguous in putting the transition between Unis and Teti.

⁴⁸ Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom*, 299. The question has also been discussed recently by P. Munro, *Der Unas-Freidhof Nord-West I: Das Doppelgrab der Königinnen Nebet und Khenut* (Mainz, 1993), p. 10 and note 30. Munro also cites discussions by M. Moursi, *ASAE* 71 (1987), p. 185ff. and P. János, *MDAIK* 45 (1989), p. 187ff.

⁴⁹ Arguing against the explanation that the late Fifth Dynasty omissions were caused by service to a queen regnant is the reduction in the comparative scale of the wife, which follows the wife's disappearance and is presumably related to it.

⁵⁰ From the Porter-Moss *Topographical Bibliography* III, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1974–81), pp. 98, 99, 111, 210, 213, 257, 260, 262, 284, 284.

⁵¹ The presence of these tombs cannot, however, completely explain the absence of wives in men's tombs in the Middle and New Kingdoms, since many tombs in the area do mention wives, and many of the tombs that do not mention wives are in other parts of the Theban necropolis.

⁵² D. Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep von Deir el-Bahari I*, *AVDAIK* 8 (Mainz am Rhein, 1974), 83.

⁵³ W. M. F. Petrie, *Medum*, pl. 22.

⁵⁴ Gay Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," *JARCE* 31

a general pattern in the literature, and many scholars are unaware of it. As a result, the absence of a husband on an individual woman's monument might be taken to imply excessive independence, virginity, or divorce. When the pattern has been identified, usually in a more limited corpus, the omission of the husband has been attributed to his higher or lower status.⁵⁵ However, since it is only rarely possible to determine who the husband is, such arguments are usually circular. Moreover, parallel situations, for example tombs of children that show royal fathers and tombs of women that show high-ranking fathers, suggest that a difference in status need not preclude representation.

Old Kingdom

Women's tombs were most common in the Old Kingdom. The Memphite volumes of Porter-Moss list 43 independent tombs belonging to royal and non-royal women during this period; and several further examples could be added. Most women who had tombs independent of their husbands belonged to the royal family, but some did not,⁵⁶ so it is clear that this was not simply a royal taboo. In none of these women's chapels does the figure or the name of the husband occur. Although kings are never shown in any tombs of this period, the omission in other cases is clearly not a matter of a higher social rank of the husband,⁵⁷ because in some cases the

wife was of higher rank.⁵⁸ Nor can these omissions be explained by the fact that men, as men, had a higher status than women, since in the tomb of Meresankh III, a father is mentioned and depicted. Nor do they necessarily imply that the woman is unmarried. On the contrary, children are almost invariably shown.

The taboo seems to have been instituted soon after the earliest decorated tomb chapels. At the same time that wives and children begin to be included on their husbands' tomb chapels in the late Third or early Fourth Dynasty monuments at Meydum, husbands begin to be shown in the monuments of their wives. The northern chapels of these Meydum mastabas are the only examples known to me in which husbands' names and figures appear in chapels dedicated principally to their wives. Whatever its reason, the presence of men in the tombs of their wives seems to have been short lived.

Already by the middle Fourth Dynasty, the husband is strictly omitted from the wife's cult place. Several king's daughters and king's wives of this period have tombs that survive, and none of them name or depict their husbands. Fathers occur in several Fourth Dynasty or early Fifth Dynasty tombs, notably that of princess Nisedjerkaï⁵⁹ and that of princess Meresankh III, who bears the title king's wife, but did not depict her royal husband (or possibly husbands) in her tomb chapel at Giza.⁶⁰ With the exception of a single cartouche in an outer room, which may have had a special purpose,⁶¹ this pattern also holds in the tombs of Nebet and Khenut, the queens of Unis. Princess Idut, in the same cemetery, also fails to mention a spouse, although her

(1994), 33–40; E. Feucht, *Das Kind im alten Ägypten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), pp. 453–58; H. G. Fischer, *Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom* (New York, 1989), p. 21. Oddly, Fischer seems not to have recognized the frequency of this omission; on the contrary, he notes that "The . . . situation, where a non-royal woman makes no mention of her husband, is exceedingly rare." (Ibid., p. 2).

⁵⁵ Feucht, *Das Kind im Alten Ägypten*, 454–55.

⁵⁶ H. Fisher, *Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom*, pp. 21–22, figs. 18–22, and addendum, cites the remains of the tomb of a woman named *Htpt*, who is *ḥt-nswt, ḥmt-ntr Hwt-Hr, ḥntjt-š*. Several of the other female tomb owners seem to be granddaughters, rather than daughters, of a king.

⁵⁷ This omission has been noted by Erika Feucht, who explains some examples as due to the husband's higher status and others as due to his lower status. She does not seem to have noticed that *all* husbands are omitted, regardless of status.

⁵⁸ For example, Princess Watetkhehor, who was married to the vizier Mereruka, who had no high hereditary titles.

⁵⁹ H. Junker, *Giza II* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1934), Abb. 8, p. 117.

⁶⁰ W. K. Simpson, *The Mastaba of Mer-sy-anekh*, Giza Mastabas I, (Boston, 1970).

⁶¹ P. Munro, *Das Doppelgrab des Königinnen Nebet und Khenut* (Mainz am Rhein, 1993), Tafel 33. A similar cartouche presumably also occurs in the lost part of the parallel scene of Nebet. The cartouche is broken off at the end, but it is not part of a pyramid name (see below), since it is prefaced by the title *njswt-bjtj*, which is not used in pyramid names elsewhere. The scene, however, is that of shaking papyrus (*zššl wšd*), a ritual explicitly done "on behalf of" the king. Munro has suggested that the outer rooms of the tombs, which deal

portrayal with the pony-tail of a young girl and the fact that she is accompanied by a nurse probably imply that she died before she was old enough to marry.⁶²

The most striking example of this omission is the chapel devoted to Princess Watetkhethor in the mastaba complex of her husband Mereruka, dating to the early Sixth Dynasty.⁶³ In the three rooms of the complex devoted to the mortuary cult of Watetkhethor, neither the name or figure Mereruka appears. (The *Topographical Bibliography* citations for Watetkhethor's chapel obscure this omission, since Watetkhethor is invariably described as "Wife" rather than as the chapel's owner.) Were it not for the adjoining tomb of her husband, throughout which the couple is frequently depicted together and in which Watetkhethor is identified as Mereruka's wife, her marital status and connections would be completely unknown. Nor is her father named or depicted, though she bears the title king's daughter. Instead, she is almost invariably depicted with her son, and once also with her daughter.

The wives of Pepi II in the Sixth Dynasty were also buried in tombs that, like Watetkhethor's, adjoined the larger complex of their husband. In these tombs, we see the degree to which the prohibition of the husband's name could be circuitously avoided. On the outside of the entrance to the tomb enclosure of Iput, for example, which opened directly opposite the enclosure wall surrounding the pyramid of Pepi II, his cartouche occurs frequently.⁶⁴ In fact, however, it occurs independently only on the top of the doorway,

with the eroticism that is so important in the rebirth of the king himself, are in fact closely tied to, and hence to some extent part of, the adjacent mortuary complex of Unis. He has even suggested an equation of these rooms with the *mrt*-chapels of the king's burial complex, known from textual sources. If the rooms were seen as an extension of the king's mortuary temple, it is clear why his name occurs.

⁶² R. Macramallah, *Le mastaba d'Idout* (Cairo, 1935). One of the women shown behind Idout (pls. 6–7) is given the title *mn^c[t]*, "nurse," which might also point towards her youth.

⁶³ A. Badawy and A. M. Roth, *Princess Watetkhethor: The Chapel of the Wife in the Mastaba of Mereruka at Saqqara* (in preparation).

⁶⁴ G. Jéquier, *Les pyramides des reines Neit et Apouit* (Cairo, 1933), p. 42 fig. 22.

directly under the winged sundisk, and in this location the name of the queen is not connected to his. On the lower register of the lintel inscription, where Iput herself is named, she is not identified as the wife of Pepi II, but as the wife of his pyramid, the name of which incorporates his name: "Enduring is the life of Pepi."⁶⁵ The same formula is used on the funerary monument of other queens, Neith, Ankhnesepi, and Oudjebten.⁶⁶ This rather awkward phrase is attested as early as the reign of Unis,⁶⁷ and testifies to the strength of the taboo against connecting the name of the wife explicitly with that of her husband in her own domain. In some cases the king's name was included on the sarcophagus, independent of his pyramid,⁶⁸ but he is still not explicitly said to be her husband. This indicates that the taboo was less strict in the burial chamber of the tomb.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Her miniature obelisks bear similar inscriptions (*ibid.*, p. 43).

⁶⁶ The obelisks of Queen Neith (*ibid.*, p. 4). Oddly, the false door of Queen Ankhnesepi, the mother of Pepi II, calls her both king's wife of the pyramid and king's mother of the pyramid (*ibid.*, p. 53). The references in the complex of Queen Oudjebten are more numerous: an offering table (Jéquier, *La Pyramide d'Oudjebten* [Cairo, 1928], p. 15), a lintel (p. 21), and a lintel leading to a chapel of her mortuary priests (p. 22). A fragmentary wall relief (p. 15) seems to name the king, but since the name is part of an inscription attributed to a goddess, again it is not a direct indication of his marriage to the queen.

⁶⁷ Munro, *Das Doppelgrab des Königinnen Nebet und Khenut*, 88, discusses this way of referring to the king.

⁶⁸ On the sarcophagus of Ankhnesepi, the mother of Pepi II, vertical inscriptions give the Horus name and the throne name (Mery-re) of her husband, Pepi I (Jéquier, *Neit et Apouit*, p. 51). She is not, however, explicitly called his wife. On the sarcophagus of Oudjebten (Jéquier, *Oudjebten*, p. 18), the inscription names the king by his personal name (son of Re, Pepi, given life) and states that he made the coffin as his monument for "Enduring is the life of Pepi, hereditary princess and king's wife. . . .", which clearly indicates that the pyramid name was part of her titulary. Note that this coffin again does not make the relationship explicit.

⁶⁹ This might also be concluded from the presence of multiple references to Snefru in the funerary furnishings of Hetepheres I. Although it is generally assumed that she was the wife of Snefru and the mother of Khufu, it should be noted that Hetepheres's marital and genealogical position is far from proven. Furthermore, if she was the wife of Snefru, her burial dates precisely to that brief period in which men were occasionally shown in their wives' tomb chapels, so that her tomb cannot be used as evidence either way.

In some Fifth and Sixth Dynasty chapels of men, this taboo seems even to have extended to wives' false doors. As with the chapel of Watekhetor, these false doors occur in a subsidiary position in the chapels of the husband, but they do not mention or depict him. In the tomb of Ti, for example, on the false door of his wife Neferhetepes, she is called "venerated before her husband," rather than "venerated before Ti."⁷⁰ This avoidance of the husband's name is clearly not a matter of their comparative status, since the names of divinities occur in the same position.

In the tomb of Nefer and Kahai, the wife of Kahai appears on his false door and in his offering scenes, but he does not appear on hers.⁷¹ The result is that she is depicted more often than he is in the tomb. In a recent popular book this was noted, and the author suggested: "Dare one deduce female persuasiveness, or outright dominance from [her] inescapable presence . . . ?"⁷² The attribution of an aggressive personality to this woman is completely unfounded, since she is simply following a common tradition of her time in excluding her husband from her false door. As with the speculation about men who fail to depict their wives, an understanding of the taboo that governs the presence and absence of spouses would prevent such distorted interpretations.

Middle Kingdom

In the Middle Kingdom and later periods, fewer women have independent tombs, and most of those who do are members of the royal family. The women who do have tombs continue the tradition of omitting their husbands from their tomb decoration.

Several apparent violations of this taboo occur in the late Eleventh Dynasty.⁷³ The tomb of Queen Neferu clearly contains a scene of the

king smiting foreigners as well as fragments of the name of Mentuhotep the Great. While there is thus no doubt that both the name and the depiction of the king were present in her tomb, these violations of the pattern might be explained in three different ways. One explanation would be that, although Neferu bears the titles king's wife and king's daughter, she was not married to Mentuhotep, but to one of his predecessors. Another possibility is that the scene was included for apotropaic purposes, and the king's depiction as king rather than husband was not thought to violate the taboo. (There are many odd motifs in tomb decoration in this period, and royal symbolism is common). Still another possibility would be that the provincial Theban dynasty had not yet adopted the taboo established in Memphis during the Old Kingdom.

More problematic are the shrines of the six women behind the massif in Mentuhotep's temple itself. On one of these, the king and his wife are depicted as a couple, and although the woman's most frequent titles seem to be "king's sole ornament" and "prophetess of Hathor," she and her counterparts are sometimes also called "king's wife, whom he loves." Since the decoration depicting the king is on the outside of the shrine, it may have been thought of as part of Mentuhotep's own mortuary monument rather than that of his wife, and thus escaped the taboo. Another possibility is that the shrines were not originally intended to be mortuary.⁷⁴ Neither of

⁷⁰ L. Épron and F. Daumas, *Le Tombeau de Ti*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1939), pl. 39.

⁷¹ A. Moussa and H. Altenmüller, *The Tomb of Nefer and Kahai: Old Kingdom Tombs at the Causeway of King Unas at Saqqara*, AVDAIK 5 (Mainz am Rhein, 1971), pl. 32. (The plate shows both doors.)

⁷² G. Hart, *Pharaohs and Pyramids: A Guide Through Old Kingdom Egypt* (London, 1991), p. 173.

⁷³ I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Dorothea Arnold and her staff for giving me access to the unpublished photographs of some of these monuments.

⁷⁴ D. Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep I*, p. 64, follows Naville in dating the shrines to a phase earlier than the construction of the king's tomb, based on their positions and the early form of the king's name used in their decoration. The shafts behind these shrines, in which the queens were buried, also clearly date before the final form of the temple, since several of them had columns resting over their entrances. However, the fact that the priesthood of Hathor is stressed by these women inclines one to wonder if these chapels were not an early (and much smaller) manifestation of the sort of chapel to Hathor and a royal wife built by Ramesses II for Nefertari at Abu Simbel. (Interestingly, the women are shown with darker skin than the red-brown skin of the king, perhaps suggesting Nubian ancestry. E. Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el-Bahari II* [London, 1910], pls. 12, 13, 16, 18, and 20; III [London, 1913], pls. 2, 3, and 4.) The shafts thus may have been added afterwards, when it was decided to build the king's tomb in this area, and some of them may then have been filled and sealed before that building was completed.

these explanations is entirely satisfactory, especially in view of the parallel example of Queen Neferu. The taboo was clearly not entirely abandoned during this period, however, since the stone sarcophagi of these women, which seem to be the recipients of many elements of the traditional chapel decoration, include no mention of their husband.

Moreover, a non-royal woman's tomb of the early Twelfth Dynasty continues the Old Kingdom tradition. In the tomb of Senet, only her son and daughter-in-law are shown with her in the tomb's entrance corridor. (The tomb was, in fact, published under the name of her son, Antefoker.)⁷⁵ As with women's tombs of periods both earlier and later, no husband is shown.

Stelae belonging to women are only slightly less rare than decorated women's tombs during this period, but they seem also to exclude the husband. For example, two stelae of a woman named Senet-ites were found at Abydos (CG 20016 and 20017) that do not depict or name her husband,⁷⁶ and this seems to be the general pattern.⁷⁷ Thus, although women's monuments are rarer during this period, those that exist suggest that the pattern found in the Old Kingdom monuments was essentially maintained.

New Kingdom and Later

In the New Kingdom, the pattern is equally clear. The tradition of the omission of the husband continues in the tombs of royal women, the only women who had separate decorated tombs. Although the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri and the tomb of Tawosret in the Valley of the Kings both contain captioned depictions of their husbands, the names labelling these depictions are in both cases secondary, and not part of the original decoration. It is even possible

that the depictions of Thutmose II and Seti II were inserted by the successors of these queens to dispossess them of their mortuary monuments, by referring to spouses that would be omitted in a woman's tomb.

The most illuminating examples of the taboo, however, are to be found in the Valley of the Queens. Here are found burials of two types of royal people with secondary status, queens and young sons, and the contrast between the patterns of decoration is instructive. In the queens' tombs, the husband is invariably omitted, a circumstance that has caused problems in dating several of the tomb owners. The omission of the husband is most striking in the tomb of Queen Nefertari,⁷⁸ which may represent the only decorated royal monument of Ramesses II's reign that nowhere bears his name. This omission stands in marked contrast to the kings' highly visible presence in the tombs of their young sons. These boys' tombs depict their owners being introduced to the gods by their royal father.⁷⁹ If the omission of the husband in women's tombs were simply a matter of relative status, this status difference was also true of the king and his son, and one would not expect to see the royal father any more than the royal husband. On the surface, there seems no reason why a king should not introduce his queen to the gods as he does his son. As it did for the young son, this arrangement would have simultaneously established the queen's position as tomb owner and her subordinate status. However, this mechanism was not used in queens' tombs. That the two cases are so different again underlines the fact that the omission of the husband was not simply a matter of avoiding the representation of a higher-status individual.

Although New Kingdom women unconnected with the royal family did not have independent, decorated tombs, the continuing effects of the taboo can be seen on their funerary stela. Though less universal than in decorated tombs, the absence of men on stelae of their wives has been

⁷⁵ N. de Garis Davies and A. H. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Antefoker and of his Wife, Senet* (London, 1920).

⁷⁶ I am grateful to Denise Doxey, who brought these stelae to my attention.

⁷⁷ Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), p. 172. Robins, however, attributes the absence of husbands in these depictions to "rules of decorum," which would require that if the husband were depicted he would take the most prominent place.

⁷⁸ H. Goedicke and G. von Thausing, *Nofretari, Eine Dokumentation der Wandgemälde ihres Grabes* (Graz, 1971), passim. (The absence of Ramesses II is not specifically noted by the authors.)

⁷⁹ Such scenes can be seen in QV 42, 43, 44, 53, and 55.

pointed out by Gay Robins.⁸⁰ She argues that these omissions are the result of a practical conflict between two rules of artistic decorum: that which decreed that the owner of the monument should be represented more prominently than the other figures, and that which prevented a husband from being shown in a less prominent position than his wife. (Robins believes that many stelas showing both members of a couple were actually made for the woman, and that a separate stela was an unusual solution to the problem of gender hierarchy; however, the numbers are probably similar to the numbers of women with separate tombs in earlier periods.) That it would have been possible to ignore her first rule, however, is demonstrated by the tombs of the royal sons in the Valley of the Queens. There is also no reason that the name of the husband need have been omitted as well as his figure. I would argue that these stelas, to the extent that they served as a substitute for funerary monuments for non-royal women of the period, continued the pattern of the omission of the husband.

A special case is the tombs of the god's wives of Amun of the Third Intermediate Period and Saite Renaissance, whose tombs also mention and depict no spouses, although the royal father is usually named. It might be argued that these tombs do not contribute to the evidence for the taboo on the representation of the husbands, since these women are generally described as a kind of vestal virgin,⁸¹ married to the god only, with no earthly spouse. The custom of adopting their successors lends weight to this assumption; on the other hand, it was certainly not the case with prominent early holders of the title, such as Ahmose Nefertari and Hatshepsut. The assumption of virginity seems to be based on the facts that these women are not called "king's wife" and that they are not succeeded by their own daughters.⁸² Neither of these arguments would neces-

sarily rule out a non-royal husband, and such a husband is also not ruled out by the absence of husbands from these women's mortuary monuments. It may be that these women's virginity is only an illusion.

That the taboo was clearly still in place in the Saite Period can also be seen from the two tombs of non-royal women dating to this era where the husband is absent: TT 390, belonging to Irturu, a scribe and attendant of the god's Wife Nitocris, and the tomb of Mutirdis, chief follower of the god's Wife, dating to Psamtik I. J. Assman, who published the latter tomb, noted that "Unter den Kindern der Grabherrin, von deren Vater wir nirgends hören, nimmt ein Sohn. . . ."⁸³ Three daughters are also depicted.

The more general taboo noted for Old Kingdom women's stelas within the monuments of their husbands and New Kingdom votive stelae dedicated to women also continued to hold true to varying extents for women's monuments through the Third Intermediate Period. Husbands of that period are occasionally identified by name, but not depicted, on votive stelas and mummy cases.⁸⁴

The omission of the husband in individual monuments, therefore, cannot be dismissed as an assertion of independence by a few early Egyptian feminists. It was almost universal, although the degree of exclusion seems to have varied from period to period. It cannot be attributed purely to the tendency to give men precedence in situations where both men and women appear, as is shown by the monuments of women in which

definitively that the later god's wives were not married, only that they were not king's wives as their predecessors had been.

⁸³ J. Assmann, *Das Grab der Mutirdis* (Grabbung im Asasif 1963–70, Band 6) (Mainz am Rhein, 1977) p. 17 (italics mine).

⁸⁴ Women's names on coffins and stelas are sometimes followed by *l3 hbst*, and then a man's name. (The man is not usually represented, however.) See S. D'Auria, P. Lacovara, and C. H. Roehrig, eds., *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1988), cats. 118 and 121, for example. This designation is generally translated "wife of" but literally means "the one dressed (by)," and could be a reference to another male relative or guardian who supplied clothing. In other cases, the husband is left unidentified and the mother or both parents are identified in the same position.

⁸⁰ Robins, *JARCE* 31 (1994), 33–40. I am grateful to Prof. Robins for making a manuscript of her article available to me before its publication.

⁸¹ For example, A. H. Gardiner, in his popular history *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford, 1961), p. 343, states that "human intercourse was strictly forbidden." There is, in fact, no direct evidence for this claim.

⁸² C. E. Sander-Hansen, *Das Gottesweib des Amun* (Copenhagen, 1940), 14–15. Sander-Hansen himself does not state

their fathers and sons are depicted. Regardless of the age of the son, he is often depicted as a child in such circumstances; but there are examples in which he is shown as an adult, in a secondary position and at a smaller scale than his mother.⁸⁵ Other men can also be shown in women's tombs: servants, offering bearers, and the like; the Egyptians seem to have had no problem depicting these men in subordinate positions. As noted above, there also seems to have been no problem depicting the higher-status kings in the tombs of their under-age sons. It seems likely that the absence of the husband reflected some underlying belief about husbands and wives, rather than a pattern of artistic decorum based on the differing status of the two sexes.

One reason that might be suggested for the omission of the husband is that it was the blood relationships that were the most important, so that sons and fathers might be depicted, but husbands, whose relationship was only temporary and contractual, were less important. This argument, however, is refuted by the frequent presence of the wife in the tomb of her husband. She was no more his blood relation than he was hers, yet, as Part I showed, the absence of the wife in these circumstances is exceptional. At least in the New Kingdom, her presence in the tomb chapel seems to have been almost universally required, presumably because her depiction fulfilled a requirement for the tomb owner's attainment of the afterlife: as the "mother" in the "bull of his mother" metaphor, she would serve both as a sexual partner for her husband and as the medium for his rebirth.

Indeed, it may be this metaphor that explains the absence of the husband from his wife's tomb. The afterlife for an Egyptian woman was achieved in exactly the same manner as it was for a man. Women made use of the same spells that men did in the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead. As early as the Sixth Dynasty, women were given the title Osiris, and assimilated to that god in the netherworld. Women did not cease to be female when they died, since that was an essential part of their identity, but they became Osiris, and thus took on an active

male sexual role in begetting their own rebirth.⁸⁶ Perhaps the husband was omitted from his wife's tomb decoration not because he would relegate her to a subordinate status in the iconography, but simply because he was unnecessary. His presence and the fact of their sexual relationship during life may even have been thought to impose upon her a subordinate sexual role that might hinder her own rebirth. However, this restriction could not have been absolute, since so many women were buried in tombs that were decorated primarily with images of their husbands, the principal owners of the tomb. It is clear from the tomb decoration, which shows both partners enjoying the amenities of the other world, that (at least in this context) his image was not thought to prevent her from attaining the realm of the blessed dead. The husband's omission when the tomb was her own may have merely been the avoidance of an unnecessary and potentially confusing reference to his wife's earthly sexual role.⁸⁷

The hypothesis that the absence of the husband is connected to rebirth is corroborated by the fact that the omission of the husband in the monument of a woman seems to be an exclusively mortuary phenomenon. In the few temples we have dedicated to queens, for example, to Tiye at Seidinga⁸⁸ and to Nefertari at Abu Simbel,⁸⁹ their husbands are not only depicted, but given greater prominence than the queens themselves. The presence of these kings in temples that clearly belong to their wives does not, apparently, violate decorum or detract from their ownership. Votive stelas of the New Kingdom (as

⁸⁶ See a fuller investigation of this question and the Egyptian views of gender roles in reproduction both before and after death in A. M. Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs about Conception and Fertility," in: *Interpreting the Body: Insights from Anthropological and Classical Archaeology*, Alison Rautmann, ed., to be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁸⁷ The supposition that the husband was omitted simply because he was unnecessary has interesting implications for the understanding of tomb chapel decoration in general: it would imply that nothing and no one was depicted that did not in some way contribute to the rebirth of the deceased.

⁸⁸ According to *PM VII*, 166, the cartouches of Amenhotep III are frequently attested in this temple. (I am grateful to Betsy Bryan for pointing this out to me.)

⁸⁹ *PM VII*, 111–17, again frequently mentions names and depictions of the king.

⁸⁵ Fischer, *Egyptian Women*, pp. 4–5.

opposed to mortuary stelas) seem to show less strictness in the taboo.⁹⁰

Part III: Applications

The patterns that have been suggested for the absence of husbands and wives from the tombs of their spouses cannot be explained with any certainty. Nonetheless, the description of these patterns may prevent the erroneous conclusions that can be drawn when the absence of a spouse is viewed in isolation. Furthermore, the hypotheses that have been proposed to explain the nature of these omissions suggest that the presence or absence of a spouse should be considered in analyzing tomb decoration, with a view to testing the assumptions about the tomb, as well as the hypotheses themselves.

For example, the omission of a wife may have implications useful for interpreting a tomb. If the owner is a royal official, it suggests the possibility that the tomb was constructed during a period when a woman was the ruler of Egypt. Alternatively, an explanation might be sought for the anomaly in the titles of the tomb owner, since service to a royal woman would also be consistent with the pattern. The omission of a wife also may serve as a dating criterion in the Old Kingdom, placing a monument in the late Fifth or the early Sixth Dynasty, while her presence suggests that a tomb is less likely to date to that period.

Given the existence of an overall pattern of omissions, it is clear that the absence of the wife in New Kingdom and Late Period tombs cannot be used to draw conclusions about a man's marital status. So, for example, the romantic fantasies about Senenmut's remaining single in order to carry on a more torrid affair with Queen Hatshepsut, based on the absence of a wife in his tomb, are completely unfounded. He may well have been happily married,⁹¹ like his colleagues Hapuseneb (Hatshepsut's High Priest of Amun, whose wife appears with him on an inscription

at Gebel Silsila⁹²) and Amenhotep (who oversaw the installation off her two obelisks, and who depicts a son, but no wife, in his tomb).

In the case of women's tombs, the almost total consistency with which the husband is omitted suggests that those few tombs where the husband appears to be represented should be reexamined. Such violations of the general pattern might suggest that the man represented is not in fact the tomb owner's husband, but another male relative. If the husband is clearly labeled as her husband, the monument may not always have been mortuary in character; or it may have in fact been dedicated to the husband rather than the wife.

Such a question might be raised, for example, in reference to the problematic tomb 55 in the Valley of the Kings.⁹³ This tomb is generally believed to have originally held the body of Queen Tiye, wife of Amenhotep III, in addition to (or in place of) the male mummy and coffin found by the excavators. A large gilded shrine found disassembled in the tomb is thought to have been dismantled and partially removed at the same time her body was removed, because one of its sides and the adjacent shrine door were found in the entrance passage. The shrine⁹⁴ is decorated with images of Tiye and her son Akhenaton offering to the sun god, Aton. The inscription makes it clear that the shrine was made for Tiye by her son Akhenaton, toward the end of the Amarna period, to judge from the forms of the names of the king and the god. Tiye's husband, Amenhotep III, is also mentioned, but not depicted, an anomaly that might be attributed to the general peculiarity of all evidence dating to the Amarna period. It might also be argued that

wife in the early part of the reign of Thutmose III (Peter F. Dorman, *The Monuments of Senenmut: Problems in Historical Methodology*, [London and New York, 1988] p. 166 n. 6.). C. Meyer argues that the fact that Senenmut's brother plays the role of a son implies that he was never married (*Senenmut: Eine prosopographische Untersuchung*, HÄS 2 [Hamburg, 1982], 8–9), but it is possible that he was simply childless.

⁹² LD III, 28 [4b].

⁹³ Theodore Davis *et al.*, *The Tomb of Queen Tiye* (London, 1910).

⁹⁴ A reconstruction of the shrine, including drawings of the surviving decoration and inscriptions, was proposed by M. Bell, "An Armchair Excavation of KV 55," *JARCE* 27 (1990), 97–137.

⁹⁰ Robins, *JARCE* 31 (1994), 33–40.

⁹¹ There is a woman called *snt.f Nfrt-hr* on the false door of Senenmut's "secret" tomb, TT 353, shown with his brother Amenemhat; and another sister, named Ahhotep, appears in TT 71. Peter Dorman has noted that Winlock called these women wives, but he argues against this identification, citing J. Cerny's conclusion that *hmt*, not *snt*, was used to identify a

it is only the name, and not the figure of the king that appears, and other examples of such exceptions in burial equipment are known. Or it may be that the shrine was not intended as a burial canopy, like those in the tomb of Tutankhamun, but as another kind of shrine, and was placed in the tomb as a way of disposing of it respectfully. In any case, the violation of the pattern should be considered.

The mortuary nature of the taboo against the representation of the husband in the tomb of his wife may also be used to distinguish a mortuary monument from a non-mortuary one. For example, a similar pattern appears in the *Hwt Bnbn*, as it has been hypothetically reconstructed east of Karnak.⁹⁵ This temple shows Queen Nefertiti worshipping the Aton with her daughters, and nowhere depicts her husband, King Akhenaton.⁹⁶ In its depiction of only a woman and her children, the *Hwt Bnbn* resembles the traditional mortuary monuments of Egyptian women dating back to the later Fourth Dynasty. Its similarity to this well established pattern suggests that this temple, too, was a mortuary monument.⁹⁷ It is true that the temple is on the east side of the Nile rather than the west, where tombs and mortuary monuments are traditionally located. However, the later tombs at Amarna were also located in the east. There seem to be no specifically mortuary themes in the temple, but this is also true of

the non-royal tombs at Amarna. The pattern of the omission of the husband in such monuments suggests that the *Hwt Bnbn* was a mortuary temple of Queen Nefertiti, built during an early period of Akhenaton's reign, when both king and queen planned to be buried at Thebes. In view of recent suggestions that Nefertiti held several prerogatives of kingship, it may also be significant that its apparent site in East Karnak is directly across the river from the mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut.⁹⁸ If the temple is a mortuary monument, it would presuppose a tomb in the hills east of Luxor, which have not been so thoroughly surveyed as their western counterparts.

In general, then, it can be said that consistent overall patterns exist in the presence and absence of spouses in the tombs of both men and women. These absences seem to be a result of some sort of taboo, and cannot be entirely explained by differences in rank or artistic decorum. While the reasons for these patterns remain far from clear, their consistency makes it unlikely that the various explanations that have been offered for individual omissions are correct. Recognizing these patterns suggests that we need to reevaluate conclusions based on specific examples, for example, the absence of spouses in the tombs of Senenmut and the god's wives. Moreover, the general patterns suggest hypotheses for other instances in which spouses are omitted, such as the late Fifth Dynasty officials' tombs and the *Hwt Bnbn* at Karnak. And application of these patterns can also reveal anomalies, such as the shrine of Tiye in KV 55, that might benefit from another examination.

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⁹⁵ D. Redford, *Akhenaten: The Heretic King* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 72–81.

⁹⁶ Redford has noted that Akhenaton's name occurs on fragments that seem to come from the architraves of this building (*ibid.*, p. 77), but this possibility hardly diminishes the peculiarity of the reliefs. Moreover, since the lintels are no longer in their original position, it is always possible that they are from some other building.

⁹⁷ Admittedly the reign of Akhenaton was a period when taboos and traditions seem to have been often suspended; but it has recently been pointed out by several scholars that the anomalies and novelties of the Amarna period often camouflage an underlying traditionalism.

⁹⁸ The reference to the *bnbn* (the obelisk) in the name of the temple may also be significant in some way related to Nefertiti's rebirth, since both the name and the shape itself have phallic implications. (The word *bnn* can mean "to beget," and in late texts, "phallus." *Wb* 1 460, 6–7.)