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Patterns of change and disclosures of difference: the feminine element as medium of transformation in New Kingdom tomb representations

Reinert SKUMSNES

Abstract

This article addresses the change in reference to ‘his wife’ from *hmt.f* to *snt.f* and argues that this change was a consequence of larger ideological developments within the solar-Osirian cycle of life. The article also examines how it is possible to get a more nuanced picture of Egyptian thinking with regard to women and transformation by analysing the representation of women in tomb paintings with a view both to the representation of the relationship between men and women in the paintings and to the relationship between the representations and their surroundings. By way of detailed analysis of four scenes—two from the tomb of Rekhmire (TT100) and two from the tomb of Ramose (TT55)—the article questions the argument that creation and rebirth was a male prerogative in ancient Egypt, and instead points out that the potential life-giving force was not thought possible or sustainable without the manifestation and indeed participation of both the masculine and feminine elements. Furthermore, there was no single, all-inclusive strategy for reaching the afterlife: in addition to offerings of food and drink, the traditional husband-wife dualism and interaction with the gods, strong symbolism is also found in father-son, father-daughter, mother-son and mother-daughter relationships.

[N]o society or culture is totally consistent. ... The problem in the past has been that all of us engaged in this debate were trying to pigeonhole each case (is it male dominant or not?) either through data purification (explaining away the inconvenient bits of information) or through trying to add up the bits and arrive at a score ... the most interesting thing about any given case is precisely the multiplicity of logics operating, of discourses being spoken, of practices of prestige and power at play. ... The analytical question will be precisely that of the relationship between the elements, both at a given moment and—ideally—across time.¹

One lesson I remember particularly well from my time as a student is when professor Meyer showed a photo of three men who were in the process of putting shoes on a cow, with a number of children in the background.² He asked us: what do you see? He waited patiently for our answers before he explained the *true* context of the picture: while doing fieldwork in Turkey he had come across three women putting shoes on a cow. He had asked if he could take their picture for his research. Although they agreed to the picture being taken, he had to wait until the roles had been shifted (i.e. the husbands in the roles of their wives) before this could be done. The only clue to something being wrong in the picture is arguably the presence of children, but this is, of course, also based on the assumption that children belonged to the female sphere. What, then, when the context is ancient and largely unknown?

1. Ortner 1996 [1990], 146.

2. Jørgen Christian Meyer has had an immense impact on me, shaping my way of understanding and thinking about the past, in becoming a critical social historian. He also made it possible for me to explore the topic of women, and later gender, in ancient Egypt. For this, I am forever grateful, and it is with great pleasure that I contribute to this Festschrift in his honour.

In this article, I follow the lesson from Ortner and Meyer in my effort to maintain the complexity of the records. I try to show how we can get a more nuanced understanding of the hidden realities behind tomb representations by paying attention not only to patterns of change and continuity, but also to disclosures of difference, in the representations and their relationships with their surroundings. More specifically, I question the argument that creation and rebirth (henceforth ‘transformation’³) was a male prerogative in ancient Egypt,⁴ that in the Egyptian mind, ‘the woman “receives” the child, already fully created, from the man’.⁵ Instead it will be argued that death, and transformation, marked the return to the androgynous state of origin in the primeval waters of Nun, and that upon reunification with Re and Osiris—the masculine elements par excellence—the cycle of (re)generation(s) was already well under way. Because of this, transformation was far from a male prerogative but depended instead on the presence and activities of, and interaction with, the feminine element. The crucial point in the Heliopolitan creation myth is when Isis and Nephthys restore the deceased Osiris to new life through mummification and funerary rituals. During this process, Isis also conceived her son Horus by Osiris, and finally helped Horus to avenge his father, asserting himself as the rightful heir to the throne of Egypt. Osiris was made king of the underworld (*dw3t*), to judge who among the deceased were to be granted eternal life.⁶ By way of the combined solar-Osirian cycle of life, moreover, the deceased hoped to join the sun god Re on his daily journey. This was to rise from the eastern mountains every morning, born by his mother/daughter—the sky goddess Nut/Hathor; to travel the sky in his solar boat during daytime, and set in the western mountains every evening; being swallowed by his mother/daughter; to travel through her body, known as the underworld, unite briefly with the god Osiris, to be regenerated, before being born again by his mother/daughter at sunrise.⁷ In New Kingdom (c.1539-1077 BCE) tombs, the solar-Osirian cycle of life is very much present, marked by the entire architectural layout and decorative scheme of the tomb.⁸ Deceased men (and women) are referred to as Osiris (*ws3r*), while (sister-)wives, mothers and daughters are depicted in the tombs of their husbands, fathers and sons while arguably identifying and performing the same sexual multigenerational role for the deceased as Isis/Nephthys and Nut/Hathor in the creational myths.⁹ This paper examines a few offering and banquet scenes in the 18th Dynasty (c.1539-1292 BCE) tombs of Rekhmire and Ramose located in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna (west bank, modern Luxor), and addresses the change in reference to ‘his wife’ from *hmt.f* to *snt.f*. The tombs of Rekhmire and Ramose have been chosen because they carry reference to ‘his wife’ as *hmt.f* in some scenes and *snt.f* in others, and thus may inform us about the significance of their specific use. It will be argued that the change is a consequence of larger ideological developments within the solar-Osirian cycle of life, connected to the role of the feminine element within this cycle. It is suggested that: (1) *hmt.f* and *mwt.f/.s* usually functioned as signifiers of the feminine element within the tomb; (2) *snt.f* had less to do with the symbolic feminine element, and more to do with an increased recognition of the wife as ‘his sister’, as his alter ego and co-occupant of the tomb;¹⁰ and (3)

3. I deliberately chose the term ‘transformation’ rather than the commonly used term ‘rebirth’. As I see it, the latter carries unfortunate connotations of, for example, Christianity and Hinduism.

4. Cooney 2009, 101-102. See also Bryan 1996.

5. Roth 2000, 189.

6. See Armour 2001 [1986], 54-76.

7. The exact functioning of the union between Re and Osiris ‘can vary depending on the nature of the source and the context in which it was employed. What is not subject to variation, however, is the cycle itself’ (Smith 2017, 334). See also Hornung 1982, 181; Snape 2011, 182.

8. Seyfried 1987, 219-222. See also Kampp-Seyfried 1998, 250; Robins 2016a, 202. Smith points out that although ‘only a small number of non-royal individuals incorporated guides to the underworld in the decoration of their tombs, a much larger number, however, incorporated their most salient themes and motifs in texts written on papyrus and other media so that they too could benefit from them’ (Smith 2017, 345-346.). See also Smith 2009.

9. McCarthy 2002, 173; Robins 1988.

10. In order to understand the significance of *snt.f* as a new way of referring to the tomb owner’s wife, I draw on

the role of the *šmꜣyt* (and those others who acted as musicians and dancers) was to invoke and attract the divine—in particular, the presence of the goddess Hathor—the feminine element par excellence in the Ramesside period (c.1292-1077 BCE). It is my claim that all these elements combine to show that the feminine element is the ultimate medium of transformation within the New Kingdom tomb iconography. The masculine element could simply not do without the feminine. More specifically, scenes that include the feminine element were able to act upon themselves, i.e. they were active representations. Scenes without the feminine element, on the other hand, were passive representations that would have to be acted upon by neighbouring scenes, or ritual activity in the tomb proper. This need for the feminine element is a constant, even if the holder of this element changes as a consequence of broader developments within the religious and ideological outlook.

Tomb representations and decorum

It is widely held that New Kingdom tomb representations ‘follow the basic canon of Egyptian art in order to convey meaning in a certain way and have a specific vocabulary that is suited to the function of these representations’.¹¹ Although artists could be experimental and innovative, for indeed no two tombs are exactly alike, ‘conformity not individualism was encouraged, and there was hardly a place for an artist (or tomb owner) with a personal vision that broke the accepted norms’.¹² These representations reflect a selective, albeit constrained choice. Individuals are most often presented with what Kitchen has called ‘their moral “Sunday best”, as paragons of conventional Egyptian virtues, and it can be difficult for us moderns to gain a more human picture of a man and his family, or to perceive traces of individuality’.¹³ We thus understand that tomb representations were not simply copies of past lived life, or about who s/he personally had been (although surely that was part of it), but more about who s/he wished to become, or be remembered as.¹⁴ It was a display of an ideal future identity—a prospective memory of the deceased—that carried a clear purpose:¹⁵ to facilitate the reunification of the different constitutive elements of the deceased.¹⁶ Through mythological references and sexual allusion,¹⁷ it was to make sure that the tomb owner (and his family) was granted an ideal afterlife in the eternal cycle of life (‘not dying again’).¹⁸ The male tomb owner is usually the focal point of the tomb, and is always shown in a formal pose, standing or seated, with the head and legs in profile and a frontal torso. He is always perfectly groomed, usually wearing a wig, and dressed in fine linen and jewel-

anthropological theory. According to Ortner, ‘cultures in which kinship (especially sibling) definitions of womanhood have hegemony over sexual and marital definitions appear to be both more sex-egalitarian and less sex-antagonistic than cultures in which the opposite is the case’ (Ortner and Whitehead 1992, 23). See also about the metaphorical use of the term *sn* (Revez 2003).

11. Dodson and Ikram 2008, 77.

12. Robins 2007a, 29. Tombs varied considerably in size, texts displaying the owner’s titles, names and sometimes a biography, depictions of the owner’s official duties, inclusion of family members, scene choice, and the style, compositional skills and inventiveness of the artists he employed. Nevertheless, the decorative programme found in each tomb chapel drew on a canonical corpus of scene types that reproduced, displayed and reinforced the world view of the elite and their superior place in it (Robins 2016a, 214.).

13. Kitchen 1991, 91. See also Baines 2007, 24; Whale 1989, 271-275.

14. Davies 1917, 29. See also Baines and Froot 2011, 8; Dodson and Ikram 2008, 252.

15. On ideal future identity, see Manniche 2003, 45. The concept of prospective memory was suggested by Willeke Wendrich in discussions following a critical paper on the paradigm of the afterlife, given by Rune Nyord at the Lady Wallis Budge Symposium ‘Egyptology and Anthropology: Historiography, Theoretical Exchange, and Conceptual Development’ at Cambridge, 25-26 July 2017. See Nyord 2018. Scott’s concept fantasy echo may also illuminate this discussion by showing that the focus on identity, whether individual or collective, has a retrospectively stabilizing effect that distorts and diffracts individual variation (Scott 2011 [2001]).

16. Smith 2017, 7. See also Assmann 2005 [2001]; Bell 2007 [1997]; Naguib 1994.

17. McCarthy 2002, 173. See also Robins 1988.

18. Dorman 2003, 30.

lery.¹⁹ He is either shown as youthful, with only a kilt and see-through dress covering his muscled taut body, or as an older more mature man, with a larger garment covering his corpulent body with rolls of fat, and a staff or sceptre as a sign of his rank.²⁰ His primary position is revealed in a number of ways. For example, sitting is classed higher than standing²¹ in the same way as passivity signals dominance, while activity (with a few exceptions) signals subordination.²² The wife is usually represented standing or seated beside her spouse in a supportive manner. Her embrace has been interpreted to symbolize protection and sexual union, but also signals her status as subordinate to her husband.²³ The man was usually identified by his titles, referring to his official duties, while the woman was rarely identified by anything more than her name and her relationship to the man, usually as *hmt.f* (his wife), *snt.f* (his sister), *sht.f* (his daughter) or *mut.f* (his mother).²⁴ In the same manner, men are more often than women shown engaged in official duties, as well as other outdoor activities. The wife is usually shown as eternally youthful; her proportions are smaller with fewer muscles and slender limbs and wearing a full-length, yet very revealing dress.²⁵ Unlike representations of her husband, the genital areas (and breasts) of the wife (indeed all women) are usually shown,²⁶ and her skin is most often pale, in a light ochre/yellow colour.²⁷ Tomb representations say something about what was thought appropriate or desired,²⁸ and reflect the male elites' efforts to maintain, shape and enact the world around them.²⁹ They were meant to affect reality, the same way as reality affected representations.³⁰



Fig. 1: Offering scenes—or the so-called Meal of the dead—occurs repeatedly, often near the focal point of the tomb. Here we see Rekhmire seated, together with his mother Bet, behind an offering table, while receiving offerings from his son. Second scene from below (see fig. 2), far northern end of the east wall in the longitudinal hall of TT100. Drawing from Davies 1935, pl. XIX.

19. Robins 2016a, 204.

20. Dodson and Ikram 2008, 82. See also Robins 2007b; 2015, 128.

21. Robins 1994, 39.

22. Baines 2013, 237. See also Roth 2015.

23. Roth 1999, 37. See also Troy 1986, 45.

24. Robins 1994, 34. See also Robins 2007a, 74.

25. Sweeney 2004.

26. Robins argues that the erect phallus was the primary marker of masculinity through the presentation of male gods (Robins 2007b, 208-212).

27. Robins 1989, 108. See also Eaverly 2008, 2013; Kozloff 2015.

28. Robins 1989, 113.

29. Baines 2007, 16; Robins 2007a, 21. Variation between tombs may be understood as ways to negotiate, interpret, understand and categorize the cosmos, and were part of overlapping material and discursive practices that together made up the complex making and remaking of historically situated realities (Nyord forthcoming).

30. Bahrani 2014.

Patterns of change: the solar-Osirian cycle of life and the feminine element

Decorated tombs belonging to male officials increase dramatically in both number and size during the early New Kingdom. They are found all over Egypt, but the largest density is no doubt in the necropolises of western Thebes and Sakkara. New Kingdom tombs usually include representations of the mother, wife, daughter and/or other (female) relatives and colleagues of the male tomb owner. It should be noted, however, that representations of female family members are usually omitted in tombs belonging to male officials who served the female king Hatshepsut. Husbands are also usually omitted in the few tombs known to belong to women.³¹ New Kingdom tombs gradually turn into family monuments: representations of the tomb owner together with his mother are particularly common during the early 18th Dynasty, but decrease towards the 19th Dynasty. The wife is by far the most common female to be represented in the tombs of male officials during the New Kingdom.³² In fact, one of the most frequent scenes to be seen is the tomb owner seated together with his wife (or mother), sometimes accompanied by children, while receiving offerings from family members, friends or other participants.³³ Texts usually accompany these representations, and ‘identify actions, gifts and individuals and may include offering lists and prayers’.³⁴ It is argued that these scenes represent the deceased ‘in their potential, transcended state as the blessed dead’, and as such illustrate the eternally desired state of continuous interaction between the deceased and his wife, their followers, the living and the dead/divine. This illustrates that it was the symbolism of food and drink that perhaps, above anything else, created the basis of eternal life. In addition to the offerings, however, the interaction between the deceased and his wife (or mother) stand out, and it is argued that her presence ‘promised the sexual union through which the husband (or son as the bull of his mother) would be reborn’.³⁵ She was the feminine element that, through interaction with the masculine element, ensured the cyclic existence of the deceased. Although overt sexual activity, pregnancy, childbirth and suckling are almost never found in tomb representations, more subtle symbols of sexuality and fertility are abundant.³⁶ According to Manniche, for example, the banquet scene appears ‘to render an ideal feast with the tomb owner and his wife as the main characters, but they are so pregnant with symbols, all pointing in the same direction, that there can be no doubt about the deeper significance of the occasion’.³⁷ The participants are shown ‘in perfect circumstances, dressed in their finest gear, seated on mats and chairs in great numbers, drinking to their hearts’ content, enjoying each other’s company’.³⁸ They are all in a state of perpetual youth, often represented with large wigs and unguent cones on their heads, while carrying a papyrus or lotus flower/bud in their hands, in their hair, around their necks or right under their noses,³⁹ and at the same time being served liquids by naked girls. The *menat* and *sistrum* were also gradually introduced as important features in these scenes. The larger context of these scenes is not only found in the accompanying texts, but also in the often-nearby representations of the deceased as s/he is coming forth to spend a happy day (*irt hrw nfr*).⁴⁰ In addition to tombs turning into family monuments, with increased emphasis on feasts and festival activity, there are also other changes, in particular in

31. Roth 1999. See also McCarthy 2002.

32. Skumsnes 2018, 129-138.

33. Robins 2016b.

34. Hartwig 2004, 87.

35. Hartwig 2004, 94. See also Desroches-Noblecourt 1953.

36. Robins 1989, 109. Suckling is occasionally shown when the tomb owner’s wife is a royal nurse, i.e. when it is an occupation, but never in the context of mother and child. See Manniche 1987, 34-35, fig. 21.

37. Manniche 1987, 40-41.

38. Robins 1993, 164.

39. Manniche 1997, 29-30.

40. Hartwig 2004, 86-103. See also Harrington 2016; Manniche 2003; Robins 2016b.

non-royal female titles. For example, *hmt.f* was the most common way of referring to ‘his wife’ from the Old Kingdom to the early New Kingdom. From the reigns of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III, however, there is a clear decrease in the use of *hmt* that occurs proportionally with an increase in the use of *snt* (sister). This change is only found in the reference to ‘his wife’ in the monumental remains: although *hmt.f* continues to occur throughout the New Kingdom, *snt.f* is by far the most common way of referring to ‘his wife’ from Thutmose IV onwards. More specifically, we can see that *snt.f* is used exclusively at Amarna,⁴¹ and that the occurrence of *hmt.f* resurfaces and increases in usage during the reigns of Ramses II, and possibly also Ramses III.⁴² It should also be noted that a possibly connected pattern can be recognized in the use of the titles *šmꜣyt* and *wsꜣr*. The title *šmꜣyt* (musician) becomes common from Hatshepsut/Thutmose III onwards; it is rare during the Amarna period, but seems, soon after, to become increasingly popular in the titles of women in the monumental remains. The title *wsꜣr* (deceased/Osiris) is commonly found in the monumental remains from the reign of Tutankhamen onwards (post-Amarna). The use of this title indicates that women also aspired to transform into a new state of being—to remain with their family in much the same way as men did. It is curious to note that women are never referred to as *wsꜣr* and *hmt.f* or *snt.f* in the same title-string, but may be referred to as *wsꜣr* and *šmꜣyt* in the same title-string.⁴³ The significance is suggested to be as follows: while there is a stronger emphasis on the Osirian part of the combined solar-Osirian cycle during the early 18th Dynasty, the solar part gradually seems to become more prominent. As Roth has argued for the Old Kingdom, there seems to be a connection between the cult of Osiris and the lack of female representation, on the one hand, and the cult of Re and increased female representation, on the other.⁴⁴ It is suggested here that for the Osirian cycle, women functioned as a medium, to stimulate and facilitate transformation. The wife (or mother) is then associated with Isis, signified by the use of *hmt.f* (or *mwt.f*) as the feminine element in the scene. This may also explain why the mother had such an important role in some of the early 18th Dynasty tombs. In the solar cycle, the wife no longer functioned as the medium for her husband’s transformation, but instead became more prominent in her own right. The wife was therefore more commonly referred to as *snt.f*. Together with daughters, she is often represented as *šmꜣyt*, while shaking her menat and sistrum, calling on the attention of the gods, in particular Hathor. It was direct interaction with the gods themselves that, above anything else, facilitated the transformation of the deceased during the Ramesside period.

Disclosures of difference: reference to ‘his wife’ as both hmt.f and snt.f

Patterns of change and continuity are never unison, nor absolute. Hegemonic patterns surely exist, but there will always be alternative (competing or complementing) patterns operating at the same time. This article therefore strives for an approach that not only encompasses multiple patterns but also acknowledges the symbiotic relation between them: it is of the utmost importance to strive for an account that does not miss the overarching look into the detailed—the specific can only be understood through the system to which it belongs. This approach not only limits the risk of flattening out variation—what I call ‘disclosures of difference’—it also accentuates that although the different records that we have found and that are available at hand may suggest change, the records are only fragments, bits and pieces, and do not necessarily give the full picture. Four scenes—two from the tomb of Rekhmire (TT100) and two from the tomb of Ramose (TT55)—illustrate this well: although there is an overall pattern of change and continuity, there is also significant variation within this pat-

41. During the Amarna period, access to the gods (and the eternal cycle of life) went through the royal couple only.

42. The reigns of Ramses II and III show clear signs of archaism.

43. Skumsnes 2018, 84-111, 310-313.

44. Roth 1999, 38-41.

tern. And this is not just a matter of different scenes (from a larger corpus) but comprises a variety of different symbolic expressions all aimed towards the same goal.

Scene set 1

The tomb of the ‘mayor’ and ‘vizier’, Rekhmire (TT100), is located at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna in western Thebes (modern-day Luxor) and is dated to the reign of Thutmose III-Amenhotep II. It is a rock-cut T-shaped tomb comprising a forecourt, transverse hall and longitudinal hall with a statue niche. The longitudinal hall is unusually long and has a sharply rising ceiling, reaching a height of more than 8 metres at the inner end. The statue niche is placed some 6 metres above ground level and is a unique feature of this tomb.⁴⁵

The northern wall in the longitudinal hall (PMI, 21), with a statue niche on top of two false doors, one above the other, is the focal point of the tomb and symbolizes the liminal space between the realm of the living and the dead/divine. The wife of Rekhmire, his mother and sons are particularly prominent in this area of the tomb. The statue of the couple, which once stood within the statue niche, at the very top of the northern wall, is unfortunately today lost. Within the statue niche (PMI, 21:I), on both sides of where the statue once stood, there are representations of Rekhmire and his wife seated behind an offering table, facing outwards, while a son presents offerings to them. On the left side, the wife is referred to as follows:

hmt.f nbt-pr mryt his wife, lady of the house, Meryt.

On the right side, the wife is referred to as follows:

hmt.f nbt-pr mryt m3ct-hrw his wife, lady of the house, Meryt, justified
hr ntr 3 by the good god.

Rekhmire and his wife are also represented on the false door (PMI, 21:II), which today is in the Louvre museum (Louvre C 74). On the panel of this false door, the couple is seated behind an offering table, facing right. The wife is embracing her husband with her left arm and holding a lotus flower with the other. She is referred to as follows:

snt.f nbt-pr hkrat-nswt his wife, lady of the house, royal acquaintance,
mryt m3ct-hrw Meryt, justified.

It is suggested here that the representations in the statue niche, in particular the wife as *hmt.f*, had a particular function towards the statue that was crucial for the continued existence of the deceased. On the panel on the false door, however, Rekhmire and Meryt were primarily represented as tomb owners, to which the ancestor cult was dedicated in order to maintain their continued existence. This means that the scenes in the statue niche were active in themselves, while the panel on the false door was not.

45. See Davies 1935; Davies 1943; Porter and Moss 1960, 206-214 (referred to as PMI in the text).

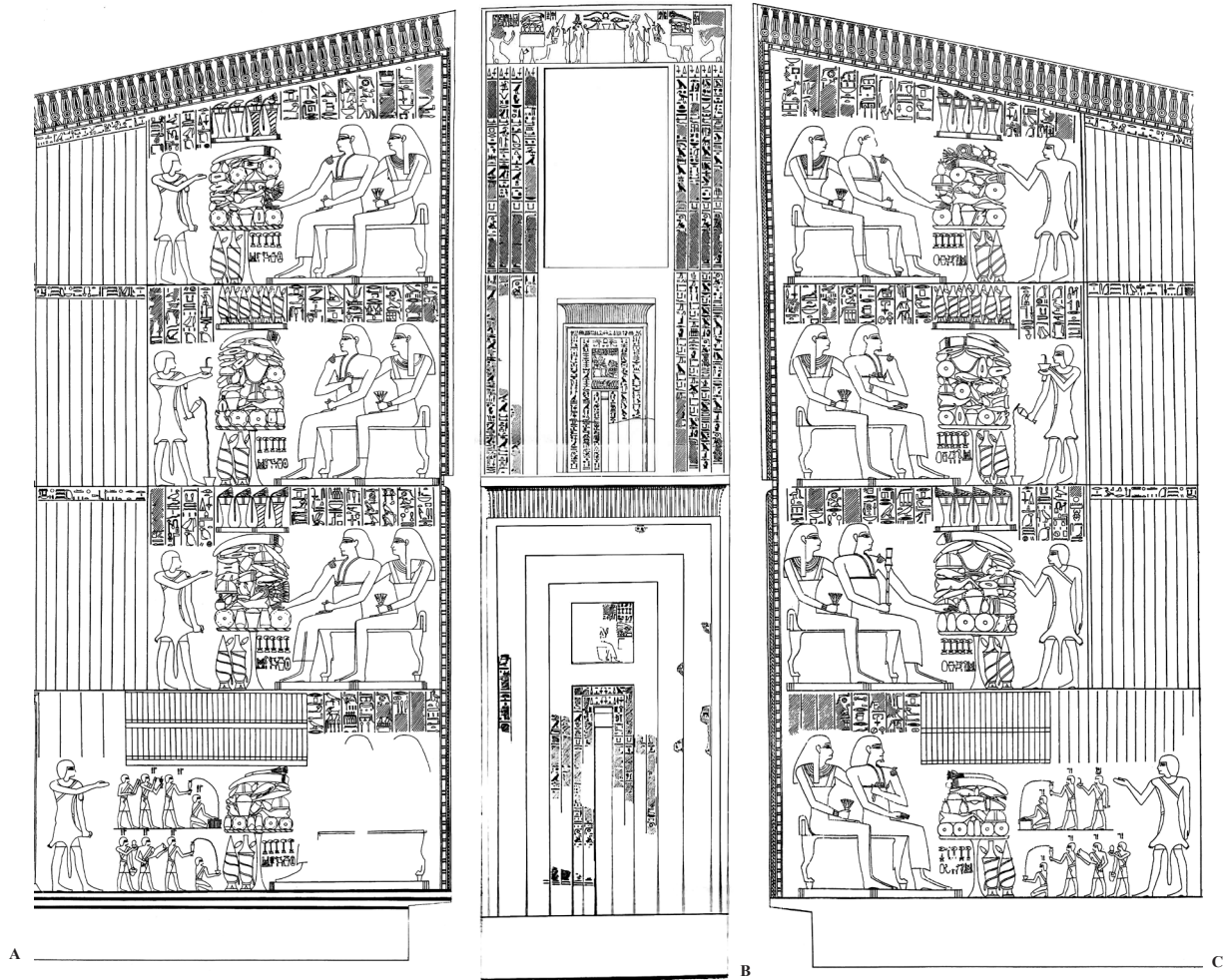


Fig. 2 A-C: The focal point in the tomb of Rekhmire: (B) the northern wall, with statue niche on top of two false doors, flanked by the far northern end of the (A) eastern and (C) western wall, in the longitudinal hall of TT100. Line drawings from (A) Davies 1935, pl. XXIV, (B) Davies 1943, pl. CXIII, and (C) Davies 1935, pl. XXV.

The scenes directly next to the northern wall all contain representations of Rekhmire with his wife/mother. In all the scenes on the far northern end of the west wall in the longitudinal hall (PMI, 16:I-IV), Rekhmire and his wife/mother are seated behind an offering table, facing outwards, while a son performs rituals to them. While the representation of Rekhmire varies slightly in the different scenes, the wife/mother is shown in more or less identical representations: she is always embracing Rekhmire, with her right arm, while holding a lotus flower in her left hand. The wife/mother is referred to as follows, from top to bottom:

snt.f mrt.f hkrt-nswt

nbt-pr [mryt] m3ct-hrw

hmt.f nbt-pr [mryt m3ct-hrw]

snt.f nbt-pr mryt m3ct-hrw

[mwt.f ...] bt3 m3ct-hrw

his wife, his beloved, royal acquaintance,

lady of the house, [Meryt], justified.

his wife, lady of the house, [Meryt, justified].

his wife, lady of the house, Meryt, justified.

[his mother ...] Beta, justified.

In all the scenes on the far northern end of the east wall in the longitudinal hall (PMI, 20:I-IV), Rekhmire and his wife/mother are seated behind an offering table, facing outwards, while a son per-

forms rituals to them. While the representation of Rekhmire varies slightly in the different scenes, the wife/mother is shown in more or less identical representations: she is always embracing Rekhmire with her left arm, while holding a lotus flower in her right hand. The wife/mother is referred to as follows, from top to bottom:

<i>[mwt].f [mr]yt.f hkrt-nswt</i>	his [mother], his beloved, royal acquaintance,
<i>nbt-pr b3t m3ct-hrw</i>	lady of the house, Bat, justified.
<i>snt.f mrt.f nbt-pr</i>	his wife, his beloved, lady of the house,
<i>hkrt-nswt [mryt] m3ct-hrw</i>	royal acquaintance, [Meryt], justified.
<i>[mwt.f mrt].f nbt-pr</i>	[his mother], his [beloved], lady of the house,
<i>b3t m3ct-hrw</i>	Bat, justified.
<i>[snt.f ... mryt ...]</i>	[his wife ... Meryt ...].

These scenes are interesting because there seems to be a pattern between who between wife and mother is represented where, and which relational term is being used in the different scenes. Despite damage and reconstruction on some of the title-strings, it appears to alternate, with the wife being *snt.f* in one scene, and the wife being *hmt.f* or the mother being *mwt.f* in the scene that directly follows. It also seems that the wife is never represented as *hmt.f* in a scene adjacent to the representation of the mother as *mwt.f*.

The significance in this set of scenes, located at the focal point of the tomb of Rekhmire, is the inclusion of the wife/mother, as the feminine element, as marked by the use of *hmt.f* or *mwt.f*. Scenes that included the feminine element were active representations that made transformation possible in and of themselves. Scenes without the feminine element, those without the use of *hmt.f* or *mwt.f*, were passive representations that had to be acted upon by neighbouring scenes, or ritual activity in the tomb proper.

Scene 2

In the top register, on the middle-southern end of the eastern wall in the longitudinal hall (PMI, 18:I-IV), Rekhmire and his wife are seated behind an offering table, facing outwards, while receiving menats and sistra from what is likely four daughters: two small girls, with side locks of youth, stand in front of the offering table, while two women stand behind it. They are followed by four registers of female guests and musicians. The wife embraces her husband with her left arm and holds a lotus flower in her right hand. She is referred to as follows:

<i>snt.f hnc.f mrt-ib.f</i>	His wife, whom he is with, whom he loves dearly,
<i>nbt-pr.f [mr]yt m3ct-hrw</i>	his lady of the house, [Mer]yt, justified.

Although the four women/girls are not referred to by titles, they are likely to be daughters, or other female relatives who act as daughters. Above the scene the text reads:

<i>dd.sn twr n imy-r niwt</i>	They speak to show respect to the mayor:
<i>hsy.tw s3t rc</i>	May you be praised by the daughter of Re (Hathor).
<i>mrr.tw di.s s3.s</i>	May you be loved. May she place her protection
<i>h3.k n rc nb iw.s kni hsw.k</i>	around you every day, while she embraces your body.
<i>rmn.k hmt.s ist.sy</i>	Your shoulders (touch) her majesty, while she,
<i>hpt.sy hr-s3 nhbt.k</i>	she puts her arms around your neck,
<i>ir.k qhc im3h tp-nfr</i>	so that you may enjoy a long and fortunate life
<i>t3 n hnm.tw</i>	on earth, and that you may receive
<i>qh wd3 snb</i>	life, prosperity and health.

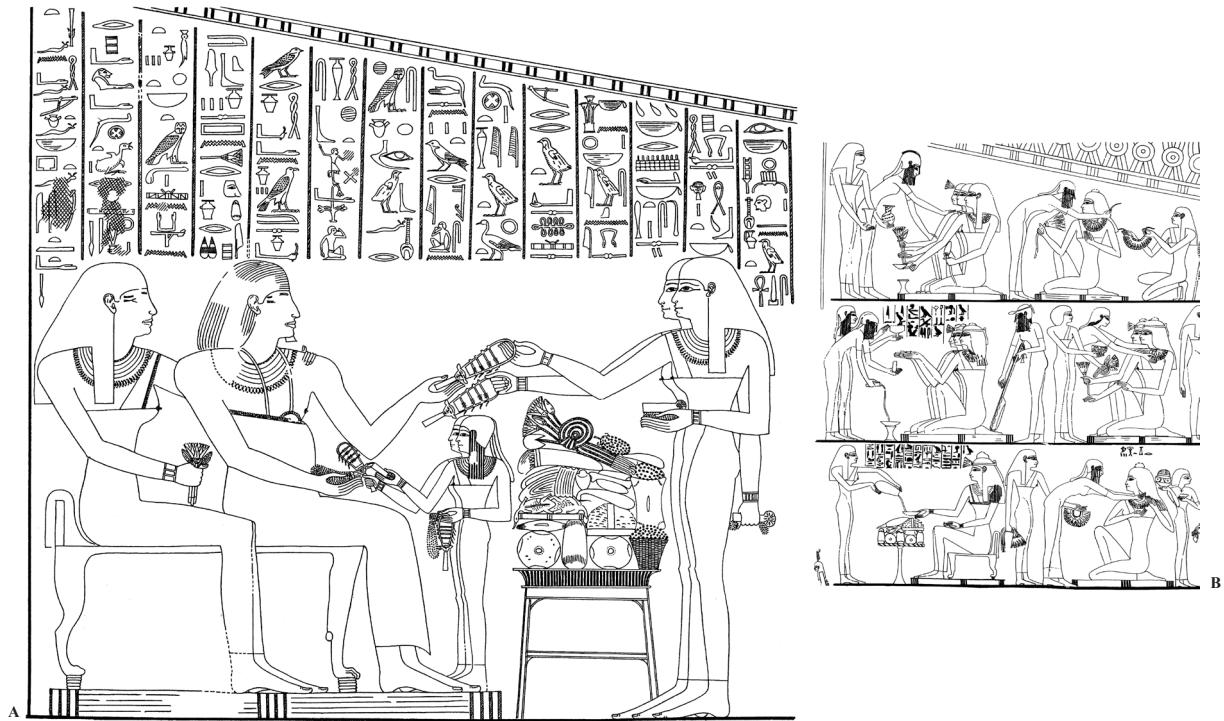


Fig. 3 A-B: Banquet scene with (A) Rekhmire and his wife seated behind an offering table, facing outwards, while receiving menat and sistra from four daughters. (B) They are followed by four registers of female guests and musicians, and in the third register, Rekhmire's mother is seated behind an offering table, facing towards the couple. Top register, middle-southern end of the eastern wall in the longitudinal hall of TT100. Line drawings from (A) Davies 1943, pl. LXIII, and (B) Davies 1943, pl. LXIV.

Among the guests, in the third register, Rekhmire's mother is seated behind an offering table, facing towards the couple, while being served by a servant girl. The mother is referred to as:

mw.t.f *mrt.f* *hkrt-nswt*
bt m3ct-hrw

His mother, his beloved, royal acquaintance,
 Bet, justified.

This scene includes familiar aspects, but is also different, and foreshadows a new kind of symbolism. It not only includes the reference to 'his wife' as *snt.f*, while his mother is represented as *mw.t.f*, but more importantly for this scene, the daughters(?) with their menats and sistra, call on the attention of the gods, in particular Hathor. The menat and sistrum can be understood as mediums intended to appease the gods, and as such stimulate the eternal cycle of life.⁴⁶ In this new kind of symbolism, the wife/mother is no longer sole mediums for the transformation of the deceased. Instead, it is direct ritual interaction with the gods, often carried out by daughters (or sons), that makes the representations active, and it is the gods—in particular the goddess Hathor—who are the feminine element par excellence.

Scene 3

The tomb of the 'mayor of the town' and 'vizier', Ramose (TT55), is located at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna in western Thebes and is dated to the reign of Amenhotep III-Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten. It is a large T-shaped rock-cut tomb comprising a forecourt, a columned hypostyle hall, a columned longitudinal

46. See Manniche 2006, 100.

hall and an inner shrine with statue niches. Only the hypostyle hall is decorated. The tomb was never finished, probably due to abandonment when the capital moved to Amarna.⁴⁷

The tomb is interesting because it illustrates a stylistic breaking point. It combines two very different styles of both architecture and decoration. Most noticeably, while the decorations on the east and south walls are pre-Amarna, the decorations on the west wall (from south to north) shift dramatically to typical Amarna style, focusing exclusively on the reciprocal relation to the royal family. The family of Ramose including his wife Merytptah are thus only represented on the walls in pre-Amarna style. No children are explicitly represented.

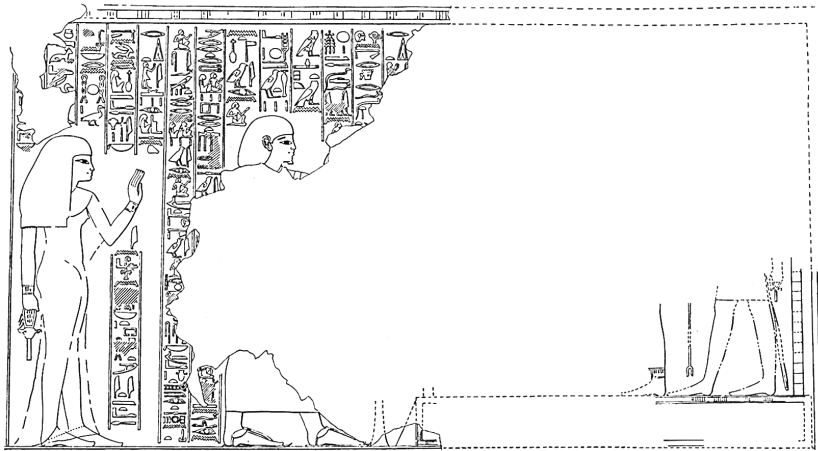


Fig. 4: Merytptah standing behind her husband, in adoration of what originally was Osiris seated on a throne, accompanied by Isis and Horus (or Anubis). Far western end of the south wall in the hypostyle hall of TT55. Line drawing from Davies 1941, pl. XXII.

The wife is represented numerous times. She is represented while seated, or standing behind her husband, or father, with kinship terms pointing out her relation to them. There are also a few examples where kinship terms are not used, and she is represented while acting more independently. For example, on the far western end of the south wall in the hypostyle hall (PMI, 6:I), we find the judgement scene. Merytptah is represented while standing behind her husband in adoration of what originally was Osiris seated on a throne, accompanied by Isis and Horus (or Anubis).⁴⁸ Merytptah has her left arm raised in adoration while her right arm is extended down her side, holding a sistrum. Although Ramose is present in this scene, and part of the ritual, there is distance between Merytptah and her husband. In fact, it seems that she is interacting with the gods in her own right. This is made clear by the text above her, and her title-string, which reads as follows:

r-dit i3w wsir snsy(?) n wnn-nfr
m3t-hrw i.nd hr.k nswt nb r nhh
s3 nwt iw gb [...]
in sm(yt) n(t) [imn]
nbt-pr mryt-ptah m3t-hrw

Giving praise to Osiris, adored(?) by Wennenefer,
 the justified. Homage to you, king, lord of eternity,
 son of Nut and heir of Geb [...]
 by the musician of [Amen],
 lady of the house, Merytptah, justified.

The significance of this scene is that Merytptah is not referred to by a relational term—she is not represented in relation to her husband as is usually the case. Here she is represented while carrying out rituals in her own right. She is not the feminine element herself but is calling on the attention of the gods for them to act on her and her husband's behalf.

47. See Davies 1941; Porter and Moss 1960, 105-111 (referred to as PMI in the text).

48. Davies 1941, 21.

Scene 4

In the banquet scene in the lower register on the southern end of the east wall in the hypostyle hall (PMI, 4:II), Ramose and Meryptah are seated behind an offering table, facing outwards. Meryptah is seated on a lower stool than that of her husband. She grasps his left upper arm with her right hand and holds a lotus flower in her left hand. She is referred to as follows:

<i>snt.f mrt.f šmꜥ(yt) n(t) [imn]</i>	his wife, his beloved, musician of [Amen],
<i>nbt-pr mryt-ptḥ mꜣꜥt-ḥrw</i>	lady of the house, Meryptah, justified
<i>ḥr nꜥr ʿꜣ nb dt</i>	by the good god, lord of eternity.

Behind the main couple, Meryptah's father, Meryptah as daughter and her mother are seated behind an offering table. Meryptah embraces her father with her right arm while holding a lotus flower in her left hand. Her mother embraces Meryptah more fully: her right arm goes around Meryptah's neck and down in front of her chest (making a *kꜣ* sign?), while her right hand grasps Meryptah's upper left arm. They are referred to as follows:

<i>sn.f ...</i>	his brother ...
<i>imy-r prwy-ḥd-nbw</i>	overseer of the treasuries of silver and gold,
<i>imy-r kꜣwt nbt n nswt</i>	overseer of all the constructions of the king,
<i>sš-nswt ... imy-r pr wr n nswt</i>	royal scribe, ... chief steward of the king,
<i>sšm ḥb n nꜥrw nbw m inb-ḥd</i>	who leads the festivals of all the gods in Memphis,
<i>imn-ḥtp mꜣꜥ-ḥrw</i>	Amenhotep, justified;
<i>sꜣt.f mrt.f n(t) st-ib.f</i>	his daughter, his beloved, of his affection,
<i>šmꜥ(yt) n(t) [imn] nbt-pr</i>	musician of [Amen], lady of the house,
<i>mryt-ptḥ mꜣꜥt-ḥrw ḥr wsꜥr</i>	Meryptah, justified by Osiris;
<i>[mw]t.s šmꜥyt nt [imn] nbt-pr</i>	her [mother], musician of [Amen] lady of the house,
<i>ḥsyt n(t) nbt tꜣwy mꜣy</i>	praised by the lady of the two lands, May,
<i>mꜣꜥt-ḥrw nbt imꜣḥ</i>	justified, the revered one.

To the left, Meryptah's parents are again seated behind an offering table, facing towards the main couple, with Ramose's parents and other family members all seated behind them. Meryptah's mother embraces her husband with her left arm while grasping his upper right arm with her right hand (again using both arms). She is referred to as follows:

<i>ḥmt.f mryt.f šmꜥ(yt) [nt imn ...]</i>	his wife, his beloved, musician [of Amen ...],
<i>nbt-pr mꜣy mꜣꜥt-ḥrw nbt imꜣḥ</i>	lady of the house, May, justified, the revered one.

Behind Meryptah's parents, Ramose's parents are seated behind an offering table. Ramose's mother embraces her husband with her left arm and holds a lotus flower in her right hand. They are referred to as follows:

<i>it.[f] imy-r iḥw n imn imy-r</i>	[his] father, overseer of the cattle of Amen, overseer of
<i>šnwty pryw n imn ... sš nby</i>	the two granaries of Amen ... scribe, Neby,
<i>mꜣꜥ-ḥrw ḥr nꜥr ʿꜣ</i>	justified by the good god;
<i>snt.f mryt.f ḥsyt n(t) ḥwt-ḥr</i>	his wife, his beloved, praised by Hathor,
<i>nbt-pr ipwiꜣ mꜣꜥt-ḥrw</i>	lady of the house, Ipuia, justified,
<i>nbt imꜣḥ ḥr wsꜥr</i>	revered one by Osiris.



Fig. 5 A-C: Banquet scene with (C) Ramose and Meryptah seated behind an offering table, facing outwards, with Meritptah's father, Meryptah as daughter and her mother seated behind them. (B) Meryptah's parents are again seated in front of them, facing towards the main couple, followed by Ramose's parents and (A) other family members all seated behind them. Lower register on the southern end of the east wall in the hypostyle hall of TT55. Line drawings from (C) Davies 1941, pl. XII, (B) Davies 1941, pl. XI, and (A) Davies 1941, pl. VIII.



In this scene, Ramose's in-laws take precedence over his own parents. From the titles, it is clear that Ramose's father-in-law, Amenhotep, is also referred to as his brother. Although it cannot be ruled out that they were siblings—and with Ramose being the uncle of his wife, it seems more likely that this is a matter of speech—he is, or acts, like a brother. It is of particular significance here to note that some of the wives in this scene embrace their husbands in the regular manner (i.e. one hand on their husband's opposite shoulder while holding a lotus over their lap with the other), while there is some variation to the way Meryptah and, in particular, her mother, May embrace their husbands/father/daughter: May uses both arms to embrace her daughter and husband. Moreover, while Meryptah is referred to as *snt.f* when seated with her husband, and *s3t.f* when seated with her parents, her mother, May, is referred to as *hmt.f* when seated with her husband alone and *mw.t.s* when seated with her husband and daughter. All the other wives are referred to as *snt.f*.

The point here is that while the more common symbolism was that of male and female dualism, the generational constellations in this tomb (and this scene, in particular) also express another kind of dualism—feminine duality. It was thus the continuum between mother and daughter, facilitated by the mother in some scenes and the daughter in others, that made the cyclic existence possible.

Discussion

New Kingdom tomb representations reflect the male elites' efforts to maintain, shape and enact the world around them. They easily give the impression that they were constructed by and for men only, with women as passive and secondary bystanders. A closer look, however, reveals a more nuanced and multilayered picture. The purpose of the tomb was to facilitate the reunification of the different constitutive elements of the deceased and, through mythological references and sexual allusion, make sure that the tomb owner (and his family) was granted an ideal afterlife in the eternal cycle of life. The solar-Osirian cycle of life is very much present, marked by the entire architectural layout and

decorative scheme of the New Kingdom tomb. Deceased men (and women) are referred to as Osiris (*ws̄ir*), while (sister-)wives, mothers and daughters are depicted in the tombs of their husbands, fathers and sons while arguably identifying and performing the same sexual, multigenerational role for the deceased, like Isis/Nephthys and Nut/Hathor in the creational myths. It is my claim that the feminine element is the ultimate medium of transformation within the New Kingdom tomb iconography. The masculine element could simply not do without the feminine. More specifically, it is suggested that scenes that include the feminine element were able to act upon themselves, i.e. they were active representations. Scenes without the feminine element, on the other hand, were passive representations that would have to be acted upon by neighbouring scenes, or ritual activity in the tomb proper. Not only is there an increase in representations of mother, wife, daughter, other (female) relatives and/or colleagues of the male tomb owner during the early New Kingdom, but the change in reference to ‘his wife’ from *hmt.f* to *snt.f* in the monumental remains suggests that relations between husband and wife shifted. This change is most visible in the tomb iconography from the reign of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III onwards, and may have to do with a shift in the focus of the solar-Osirian cycle: from a stronger emphasis on the Osirian part in the early 18th Dynasty to the solar part gradually becoming more prominent, in particular during the Ramesside period. I have suggested that (1) *hmt.f* and *mwt.f/.s* signified the feminine element in the tomb; (2) *snt.f* had less to do with the symbolic significance of the feminine element, and more to do with an increasing recognition of the wife as his sister, as his alter ego and co-occupant of the tomb; (3) during the later 18th Dynasty, particularly following the Amarna period, the way to achieve the afterlife was first and foremost through the gods. Although *hmt.f* was in use throughout the Ramesside period, I think it is safe to say that, based on both the change in reference to his wife from *hmt.f* to *snt.f* and on the larger transformation of the function of the tomb from ancestor cult to mortuary temples, there is little doubt that the focus in the tomb, and the medium for reaching the afterlife, turned towards direct ritual interaction with the gods. We thus start to see husband and wife, both separate and together, performing the spells and rituals in the different Book of the Dead vignettes that were intended to help the deceased reach the afterlife. As part of this, the *šmcyt* (musicians and dancers) with their menats and sistra seem to gain importance, to call on the attention of the gods and to appease them. It thus seems that in the Osirian cult, women were primarily needed as a medium—as the feminine element—to stimulate and facilitate transformation, while in the solar cult, the wife became less important as a medium, but more important in her own right. It seems to me that it was Hathor, and not the tomb owner’s wife, or mother, who acted as the feminine element par excellence in the Ramesside period.

In order to better understand the picture that the records paint, I have suggested approaching them from two different perspectives: one that seeks patterns of historical change, and another that seeks disclosures of difference. This is because privileging any single perspective will always be reductionist: the most important find that I have made is that the creative role was not attached exclusively to the masculine element, nor was there one single, all-inclusive strategy for reaching the afterlife. The potential life-giving force was not thought possible or sustainable without the manifestation and indeed participation of both the masculine and feminine elements, but multiple different strategies coexisted: in addition to offerings of food and drink, the traditional husband-wife dualism and interaction with the gods, strong symbolism is also found in father-son, father-daughter, mother-son and mother-daughter relationships.

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