# WOMEN AND GENDER IN ANCIENT EGYPT
## FROM PREHISTORY TO LATE ANTIQUITY

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An Exhibition at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology
14 March–15 June 1997

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And a preface by Abigail J. Stewart

This exhibition catalogue is dedicated to the first generation of women who worked at University of Michigan excavations at Karanis in Egypt, and who catalogued and published the materials this excavation discovered.

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# Preface

The scholarship that lies behind this exhibition and this catalogue is truly exciting—and I am well aware that a great deal of scholarship is not! This exhibit makes clear that students of ancient Egypt really are piecing together complex accounts of gender relations in that world—accounts that not only enrich our understanding of a particular distant time and place but also expand our awareness of the possibilities everywhere. There is an unmistakable air of genuine discovery in this work—and it is quite contagious.

I am delighted that the Institute for Research on Women and Gender was able to support the preparation of this catalogue. It is a pleasure to see how powerful the tools of feminist scholarship have been in the hands of those studying the ancient world. When the staff from the Institute were taken on a preview tour of some of the exhibitions, we came away filled with wonder at the new ideas we had encountered about gender (and race and class) in ancient Egypt. We are confident that others will share out wonder!

*Abigail J. Stewart*
*Director, Institute for Research on Women and Gender*

# Acknowledgments

Every exhibition at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology is a team effort, the sum total of the work of a group of creative and dedicated people. The present exhibition has also involved an associated lecture series and this catalogue, so the efforts involved have been even more heroic. In alphabetical order, Geoffrey Brown (Curator of Conservation), Dana Buck (Exhibition Preparator), and Robin Meador-Woodruff (Associate Curator of Slides and Photographs) have been central to the planning, design, and preparation of the exhibition, and I appreciate their contributions enormously. I would also like to acknowledge the help and input of the following (in alphabetical order): Helen A. Baker, Administrative Associate; Michelle Biggs, Associates Secretary; Elise Friedland, Visiting Assistant Curator; Nathan Garcia, Photographer; Todd Gerring, Program Assistant and Security Supervisor; Rebecca Loomis, Assistant to the Curator of Education; Margaret Lourie, Editor; Jackie Monk, Office Assistant. Although on leave, Thelma Thomas, Associate Curator, has been a source of support and encouragement. Janet E. Richards, Assistant Curator of Exhibitions and Collections, has provided crucial help and support; in addition to consultation on the choice and identification of objects and her contribution to the catalogue, she generously renounced claim on certain objects from her reinstallation of the Egyptian and Near Eastern collection for the purposes of this exhibition and its catalogue. This project began under the acting directorship of Lauren E. Talalay, Associate Curator of Education and Assistant to the Director, who offered essential help, as well as stimulating discussion of our shared research interests in gender. Finally, Elaine K. Gazda, Director of the Kelsey Museum, has been a great source of encouragement throughout the process, and I have greatly benefitted from her support.

Volunteers and student workers make up an important part of the Kelsey Museum community, and I would like to acknowledge the efforts of those who have contributed to the exhibition, catalogue, and associated lecture series: David Huppert (exhibition preparation), Alexandra Berardi, Michelle Hargrave, Katherine Miller, Tiffany Stanley, and Thyra Throop (conservation), Amy Bennett and Eric Hoopfer (promotion), JoAnne Nahra and Laura Zettel (help in the front office). Our student security workers Eleanor Fruechtenicht, Nadja Hogg,

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# Introduction:
# Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt

The exhibition "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt: From Prehistory to Late Antiquity" uses Egyptian artifacts from the collection of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and the Papyrology Collection of the University of Michigan Library to examine the roles and lives of women in ancient Egyptian society and how these fit into the larger patterns of gender definitions and relations. From ancient times onward, it has been recognized that women occupied special positions within Egyptian society, but only recently has the nature of women's experience and status in ancient Egypt been the subject of systematic study. The wider context of women's lives within ancient Egyptian constructions of gender is only beginning to be explored in a serious way by scholars.

The use of "women *and* gender" in the title of this exhibition highlights the dual concerns behind the research that produced it and addresses the distinction between the two areas as academic disciplines that are complementary but not synonymous. Women's studies and women's history have been established areas of academic inquiry for decades now; indeed, the University of Michigan has one of the oldest programs in women's studies in the United States. Arising out of the concerns of twentieth-century feminists, women's studies and, more specifically, the writing of women's history have their roots in earlier periods, when individual scholars and authors sought to identify and describe the lives of women who had traditionally been excluded from consideration by historians. Modern feminist approaches to history have brought both the impetus to pursue the study of women's history in a systematic way and the theoretical frameworks to facilitate such work and to improve understanding of the results. Gender studies is a more recent development in the academy; under its rubric fall a number of areas of inquiry, all of which have in common an interest in definitions of genders in human society and the relationships between genders. Thus, the study of women and the study of gender often overlap, frequently complement each other, but are not the same thing. Joan Wallach Scott sums up the importance of gender studies for historians in her classic article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (Scott 1986). Gender studies involves the pursuit of basic questions on an advanced level: what are meant by the terms "women" and "men" in a given society, what other gender

categories exist, how is gender defined, what is the social organization of relationships between different genders? Concentration on both women and gender in the context of this exhibition helps to maximize the benefits of both approaches to the evidence from ancient Egypt.

The material presented in "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt" spans nearly 4,000 years, from later prehistoric times through the Muslim conquest of Egypt. This chronological range was chosen, in part, to encompass the available materials in the collections from which exhibited objects were drawn. But such a range was also chosen to illustrate change and development over time. Even in a culture with remarkable continuities over long periods of time, the roles and status of women, as well as gender definitions and relations, obviously developed and changed through the millennia. Within this time frame, Egyptian history is customarily divided into the Pharaonic period (a time of predominantly indigenous rulers) and the Graeco-Roman period (when Egypt was under the control of Macedonian Greek and Roman rulers), while further chronological divisions reflect additional outside and internal factors that sometimes affected the definition and understanding of gender in ancient Egypt. Historical events and cultural imports are often the most obvious influences on women's roles and gender relations, while factors such as class and status, sexuality and ethnicity affected understandings of gender in ways that are, in some cases, only beginning to be understood.

Class and status are crucial factors in any consideration of gender roles and relations in ancient Egypt. It is important at the outset to note a major bias in part of the source material from ancient Egypt: texts and images most often come from elites in Egyptian society and reflect their views. Much of what we currently know about women and gender in ancient Egypt comes from textual and representational sources with this elite bias, so our understanding of these issues is skewed towards those elites. This is not to say that we cannot know about the lives of non-elites and the roles that gender played among them but merely that the relevant evidence has not usually been examined from this point of view. For the most part, only the archaeological sources provide any substantial amount of unfiltered evidence for non-elites; remains of their dwellings and burials offer insight into non-elite lives not found in other sources. Texts and images tend to be relatively explicit about gender, but archaeological remains require more work to discern biological sex from human remains, gender in the artifactual record, and gendered space. Non-elite domestic and mortuary remains contain important information for gender in ancient Egypt that can greatly expand our understanding of all classes in Egyptian society.

Another significant area for the study of women and gender in ancient Egypt is sexuality. Sexuality tends to be linked to gender and status in human culture, since patterns of sexual behavior and construction of sexual identity are closely tied to gender definitions and roles. As is common in pre-modern agrarian societies, sexuality in ancient Egypt was frequently connected to fertility, although not exclusively. Surviving sexually explicit imagery and texts from ancient Egypt can be of erotic, humorous, satirical, or even religious intent as well. Past work on sexuality in ancient Egypt tends, all too often, to be descriptive and essentialist, useful for identifying relevant sources but usually projecting modern categories of sexual identity and experience back onto the ancient Egyptians. In the past few years, however, scholars have begun to avail themselves of the methodologies and theoretical approaches of historians of sexuality in other periods and disciplines, thus greatly improving our understanding of the complex connections between gender and sexuality among ancient Egyptians.

Ethnicity remains an important but not yet fully under-stood factor in ancient Egyptian constructions of gender roles and relations, especially in the later periods of Egyptian history. Throughout the nearly 4,000 years covered by this exhibition, Egypt was influenced by the people of many different ethnic groups. The most conspicuous were the Macedonian Greeks and Romans who successively ruled Egypt after 332 BCE. Egypt was under the control of Nubians, Libyans, Canaanites, Assyrians, Persians, and Arabs for various lengths of time, while many other groups from all over the Mediterranean world had a presence in Egypt or some sort of impact on Egypt. Certainly Greek and Roman traditions concerning gender—the more dependent status of women in these cultures, as well as the different approaches to gender relations and definitions— had a major impact on Egyptian life during the Graeco-Roman period. Trends relating to gender also seem to come into Egypt from other cultures and groups, but the evidence is scarcer and the trends less easy to detect. The ethnicity of the Egyptians themselves and its impact on gender roles has been the focus of increasing numbers of Afrocentrist scholars in recent years. Such interest is not limited to the purely academic but often translates into political and practical developments, such as the use of ancient Egyptian models of gender relations as a tool for empowerment and personal development among modern African-Americans. Egyptologists have only recently begun to address these concerns, and little of the discussion addresses issues of gender. With the increasing interest in ethnicity and gender in Egypt, though, more thorough work in this area can be anticipated.

Much past work on women and gender in ancient Egypt

has been descriptive: identification of the relevant evidence, consideration of the problems posed by the evidence, and examination of trends within this evidence. Such work is essential, especially in a field in which the sources are often fragmentary, the languages and visual vocabularies involved are so remote from the present, and the relevant material pertains to subjects often ignored or marginalized. More recent work, however, shows encouraging turns towards analysis of the evidence, application of theoretical frameworks from a wide range of disciplines, and a greater openness to new approaches to the material. Moreover, the increasing publication of material relating to women and gender in ancient Egypt in formats accessible to nonspecialists—ancient texts in translation, collections of images, and the increasing availability of relevant material in electronic form—bring such evidence to the attention of scholars in other disciplines, opening the door to collaborative and interdisciplinary work that has the potential to take this area of study into fascinating and unexpected directions. This is an exciting time in which to be researching women and gender in ancient Egypt.

## Exhibiting Gender

Putting together an exhibition on "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt" is a challenge. There have been relatively few precedents, and almost all of these have focused on "women" in ancient Egypt, without involving any wider considerations of gender. Such an approach is, in itself, enormously useful; women have been omitted or marginalized in so much of the past work on ancient Egypt that it is entirely appropriate to concentrate specifically on women to restore them to their highly visible place in Egyptian society. Exhibitions on women in ancient Egypt tend to include images of women in Egyptian art, objects of daily life assumed to have been used by women, funerary equipment belonging to women, and items worn by women (ornaments, clothing, etc.), often from a specific time period. Such material can also lend itself to the exploration of more general issues relating to gender: how gender was defined in ancient Egypt, what gender roles, relations, and categories in Egyptian society were, and how Egyptian understandings of gender developed over time. To examine such issues in depth, however, additional material is necessary; the present exhibition includes objects illustrating gender ambiguity, family relations, the relationship between fertility and sexuality, and "third" gender categories, as well as artifacts pertaining specifically to women. Thus, the aim of the present exhibition is twofold: to show and interpret material relating to women's lives in ancient Egypt but also to

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place the women of ancient Egypt back into the wider context of definitions, constructions, and representations of gender in ancient Egypt.

The present exhibition results from the specific research interests of the people involved, as well as the general interest at the University of Michigan in issues of women and gender in the ancient world and the history of the University's involvement with women's studies and gender studies. Another factor in the development of the exhibition was the unusual richness of the material available; the Kelsey Museum and the Papyrology Collection of the University Library share the rich legacy of the University of Michigan's excavations in Egypt at Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Terenouthis, as well as a wealth of other material from ancient Egypt. The enthusiasm and support for the exhibition from the University's recently established Institute for Research on Women and Gender contributed substantially to the development of this project. Additionally, an important source of inspiration was "Caught Looking: Exhibiting the Kelsey," an experimental exhibition at the Kelsey Museum in 1996 curated by Mariana Giovino, Carla Goodnoh, Kirstina Milnor, and Jennifer Trimble, then graduate students at the University of Michigan. This innovative exhibition addressed how objects can be seen in a museum context and included components on issues of gender and sexuality. The curators' approach to the material they exhibited influenced the thinking that went into "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt."

In closing, it is appropriate to note some exhibitions devoted to women in ancient Egypt and the ancient world in general in the past few years. One of the first was the 1984 German exhibition "Nofret—Die Schöne: Die Frau im alten Ägypten" (*Nofret* 1984). A number of others followed, including the important 1995 exhibition of material from the British Museum at Emory University (Robins 1995). Recently, there have been major exhibitions on women in ancient Greece and Rome relevant to the study of Egypt in these periods (Reeder 1995; Kleiner and Matheson 1996). When the Kelsey Museum exhibition opened, at least two other concurrent exhibitions were dealing with women in ancient Egypt in some way: the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition on the royal women of the Amarna Period (Arnold 1996) and the comprehensive exhibition "Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt," which originated in Cincinnati before moving to the Brooklyn Museum (catalogue forthcoming). The Kelsey Museum exhibition "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt" was conceived independently of these concurrent exhibitions; the different approaches taken by each of them shows the range of the available material and the possibilities for interpreting it.

## Suggested Reading

The standard reference for women in ancient Egypt by Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (1993), is by far the most accurate and reliable of the recent surveys on this subject. Geraldine Pinch's article surveying private life in ancient Egypt also has much revelant information (1995b), as does Lise Manniche's *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt* (1987). The exhibition catalogues cited above are also useful sources. For women in Graeco-Roman Egypt, no single survey is currently available, although the sourcebook of translated texts relating to women in Graeco-Roman Egypt currently being edited by Jane Rowlandson (forthcoming) will be a useful resource. For women in Ptolemaic Egypt from Greek sources, Sarah Pomeroy's *Women in Hellenistic Egypt* (1990) is a useful survey, although ignoring much of the Egyptian language evidence; there is no comparable work for Roman Egypt. Dominic Montserrat's *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (1996a) illuminates many aspects of women's lives and gender relations and is valuable for its up-to-date approach. For later Roman Egypt, Roger Bagnall's *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (1993) frequently attends to the status and roles of women. For putting issues of women and gender into the wider context of the ancient Near East, the collection of essays edited by Barbara S. Lesko *Women's Earliest Records* (1989) is a useful starting point with extensive bibliography. For slightly more recent bibliography, see Wilfong 1992, currently available on-line at http://www-oi.uchicago. edu/OI/DEPT/RA/WOMEN.HTML.

General guides to the past University of Michigan excavations in Egypt can be found in catalogues from previous exhibitions on Karanis (Gazda 1983b) and Terenouthis (McCleary 1987). Information about the Kelsey Museum, its collections, and its past exhibitions can be found on its World Wide Web site at http://www.umich.edu/~kelseydb. For Greek papyri at the University of Michigan, see Gagos 1995 and http://www.lib.umich.edu/pap/. An on-line version of the present exhibition, with installation views, expanded information, and links to other relevant sites, will be made available after the exhibition closes, accessible through the general Kelsey Museum URL above.

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# Egyptian Chronology

PREDYNASTIC PERIOD
Badarian               4800–4200 BCE
Naqada I–III           4200–3100 BCE

EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD
1st–2nd Dynasties   3100–2750 BCE

OLD KINGDOM
3rd–6th Dynasties   2750–2260 BCE

FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
7th–10th Dynasties 2260–2035 BCE
11th Dynasty (1st half) 2134–2040 BCE

MIDDLE KINGDOM
11th Dynasty (2nd half) 2040–1991 BC
12th–13th Dynasties 1991–1783 BCE

SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
14th–17th Dynasties 1720–1570 BCE

NEW KINGDOM
18th–20th Dynasties 1570–1070 BCE

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
21st–25th Dynasties 1070–656 BCE

SAITE PERIOD
26th Dynasty           685–525 BCE

LATE PERIOD
27th–30th Dynasties  525–404 BCE

PERSIAN PERIOD         343–332 BCE

PTOLEMAIC PERIOD       332–30 BCE

ROMAN PERIOD       30 BCE–284 CE

BYZANTINE PERIOD       284–641 CE

MUSLIM CONQUEST OF EGYPT   641 CE
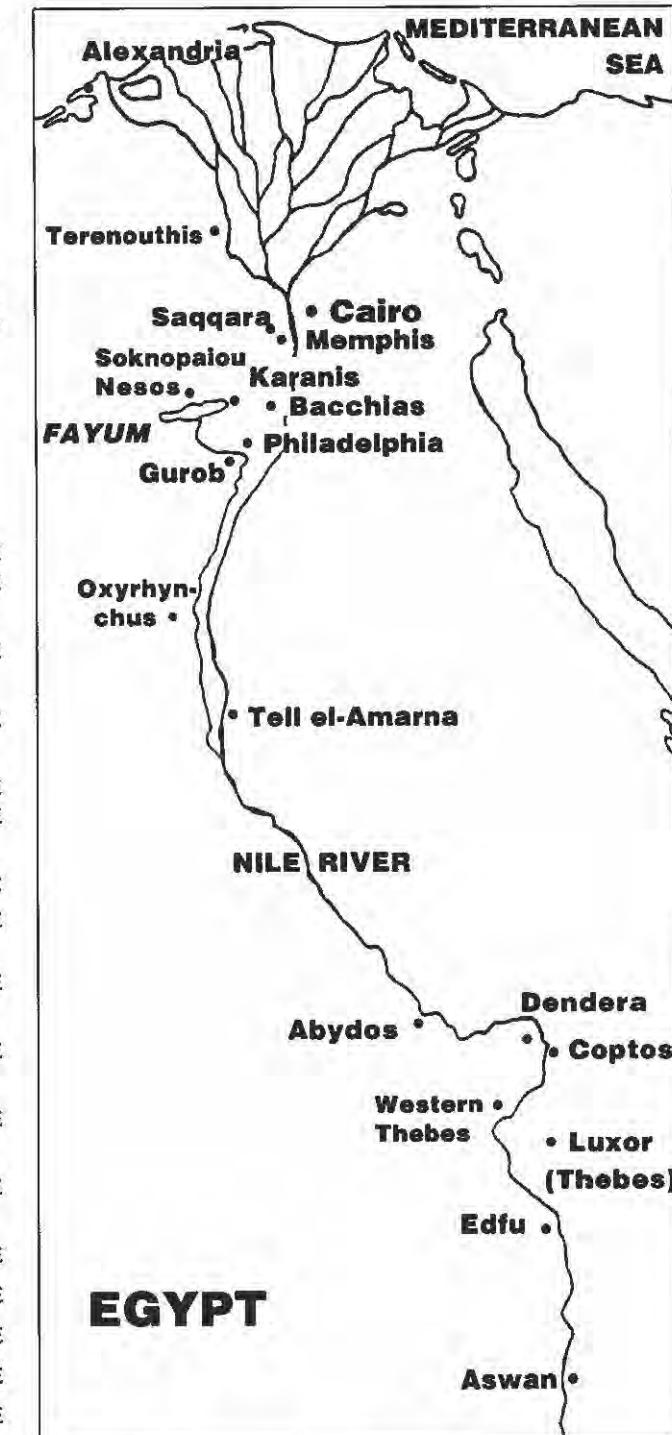
# Ancient Egypt from Prehistory to Late Antiquity: Continuity and Change

The material in this exhibition all comes from ancient Egypt, but what we know as "ancient Egypt" covers an enormous range of time. Egypt became a unified political entity around 3100 BCE; there was considerable activity in Egypt before this, and ancient Egypt persisted in some form for thousands of years after this date. The objects on display in "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt" range in date from about 3100 BCE to around 700 CE—almost four thousand years. During this period Egypt changed substantially, but there were also striking continuities of society, language, and culture over these thousands of years.

Located in the northeastern corner of the African continent, Egypt is centered, both geographically and conceptually, along the Nile River. Until relatively recently, the annual flooding of the Nile brought unusual fertility to the land around the river, making an otherwise arid region capable of great agricultural production. In prehistoric times, the early inhabitants of Egypt lived in tribal groups at various points along the Nile. Gradually these groups began to coalesce in a period known as Predynastic. Eventually, they united into a single entity along the Nile, sharing a common culture, language, and ruler. Thus begins what is known as the Early Dynastic Period, which produced the first written records from Egypt, set down in Egyptian hieroglyphs, soon followed by a more cursive form of this writing system known as hieratic. The thousands of years after the unification of Egypt under a single ruler are often known as the "Pharaonic" period, after the later designation of the Egyptian ruler as Pharaoh. The chronology of this period is traditionally divided into dynasties of rulers, with the dynasties grouped into larger periods. Eras of great central control are referred to as the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, each of which is followed by an Intermediate Period of decentralization and regionalism. The Third Intermediate Period is also characterized by heavy foreign involvement in Egypt; both Libyans and Nubians gained ascendancy in Egypt in this time. Egypt returned to indigenous rulers in the Saite Period, but this was followed by a time of changing control known as the Late Period. It is during this time that the Egyptian language came frequently to be written in a highly cursive script known as Demotic.

Throughout the Late Period, Egypt was increasingly the destination of foreigners—for travel, trade, and conquest. After a short period under Persian rule, Egypt was conquered by Alexander the Great and, following his death, taken over by Alexander's Macedonian general Ptolemy, the first of a series of kings to bear this name. Greek became the official administrative language of Egypt, frequently used for business and literature; the Egyptian language (written in hieroglyphs, hieratic, and Demotic) continued to be used as well. The Ptolemaic Period was a time of great change in Egypt: the marsh region known as the Fayum was reclaimed for farmland and went through an explosion of growth, resulting in the founding of new towns like Karanis and Soknopaiou Nesos. The death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BCE resulted in Roman rule of Egypt, and a new administration of Egypt as a Roman province began. Although Latin was the language of the Romans, it was never used very widely in Egypt, and Greek and Egyptian continued to be the primary languages. This period is often known, for obvious reasons, as "Graeco-Roman" Egypt. The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology collections are especially rich in material from the Graeco-Roman period, much of which derives from University of Michigan excavations at the sites of Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Terenouthis. Roman rule over Egypt survived the division of the Roman Empire into eastern and western portions; Egypt was a part of the Eastern Roman Empire, later known as the Byzantine Empire. Another innovation of the period was the gradual predominance of the Christian religion; in Egypt, this coincided with the development of an alphabetic system for writing the Egyptian language, known as Coptic. In spite of these changes, earlier cultural and intellectual traditions persisted to the extent that the period from about 200 CE onwards is often also known as "Late Antiquity." Byzantine rule of Egypt persisted until the seventh century CE, when Egypt was briefly taken by invading Persians, retaken by Byzantine forces, and then conquered by Arabs. The Muslim Conquest of Egypt in 641 CE introduced many elements of Egyptian cultural and religious life that remain there today, most conspicuously the Arabic language and the religion of Islam. Elements of earlier traditions in Egypt, however, persisted long after the Conquest, with some surviving to the present.

Over this lengthy period of time from Prehistory to Late Antiquity, Egyptian constructions and definitions of gender changed and evolved as a result of internal development and outside influences. Certain consistent trends are, however, observable during these thousands of years. Both the continuous trends and the changes in Egyptian ideas about women and gender will be examined in the following pages.

# 1. Gender Ambiguity

*It seems appropriate to begin any discussion of gender categories and definitions in ancient Egypt by assessing the limitations of the evidence and also the difficulty in understanding what evidence does survive. On the whole, it is safe to say that ancient Egypt, in both the Pharaonic and Graeco-Roman periods, was a highly gendered culture. On a very basic level, all languages in Egypt were gendered to the extent that every thing was either masculine or feminine, if only by virtue of its pronominal referents. Representations of human beings tended also to be definitely gendered, although not always confined to a bipolar male-female division. Ungendered representations of human beings did occur, often in a context in which a generic "human" image was required or desirable. But many of the instances of ungendered or ambiguously gendered representations of humans from ancient Egypt that exist now are unintentional—accidents of preservation or interpretation that would have presented no uncertainty in their original state. So part of the challenge of addressing issues of gender in ancient Egypt is identifying the signs of gender and how they were used.*

## Marks of Gender and Accidents of Preservation

Many representations of human beings from ancient Egypt were gendered in some way. Such images were intended and recognizable as either male or female (along with a few other gender categories to be discussed below under objects **96–98**). Aside from representations of difference in biological sex, gender could be indicated in a number of ways in Egyptian art—position of human figures with respect to each other, relative size, and color differences. Thus, seemingly ungendered representations of people almost always indicate that the image is unfinished, incomplete, or damaged in such a way as to remove the signs of gender (obvious or not) from it. Few objects from ancient Egypt have reached us in perfect condition, and given the great age of these artifacts and the conditions under which many of them have survived, it is not surprising that in many representations of people the gender is uncertain. Some images, however, were not explicitly gendered, often to serve the very practical expedient of being able to represent any gender.

The gilded face mask **1** is a good example of how an

ancient Egyptian object can be ambiguously gendered. The mask, once placed over the head of a mummy, is fragmentary, preserving only an eye, mouth, nose, and cheek on one side of the face. As it is now, it is impossible to determine whether it originally represented a man or a woman. Had more details been preserved of the headdress surrounding the face, or even more details of the face, they might have given some clue as to the gender of the person represented. But the image might have also been intended as a generic mask, suitable for anyone.

More complex is the case of the statue fragment **2**: it is the lap of what was once a seated human figure, with the figure's right hand on the lap and a fragmentary inscription down the middle. There are no obviously gendered details in the fragment as it is now, but such a statue would definitely have once been either male or female. From parallels, it is clear that this fragment is part of a group statue of two (or more) people seated next to each other from the New Kingdom. The most common such group is a husband and wife, although groupings of other family members are also found. From these parallels it is also clear that the Kelsey figure would have been sitting to the right of its companion and would have had its left arm around the companion's back. In such group figures of husband and wife, some depict the wife with her arm around her husband rather than the other way around; if **2** comes from one of these groups, it is most likely a figure of a woman. But other examples show both man and woman with arms around each other; in these groups the man is almost always on the right, so if **2** comes from one of these statues, it is a figure of a man. Parallels give fewer clues if this fragment came from some other sort of group statue; overall, it is possible, but far from certain, that **2** once represented a woman.

Just how complex and often subtle the signs of gender are, and how susceptible to damage and misinterpretation, can be seen in the object illustrated in a later section, the stela (or commemorative carving) of Shemsu (**45**). This stela illustrates one of the many gender-related discoveries made in the preparation of this exhibition. When it came to the museum, this object was conventionally identified as representing and being made for a woman on the basis of the image, which does appear similar to some contemporary representations of women with its long skirt and seemingly female breasts. This identification has been perpetuated in museum records and even in publication. Translation of the text, however, revealed that the piece was made for the man Shemsu, and, even though it may have been made for him by his sister, it would be very unusual for the sister to have represented herself on the monument rather than the person for whom it was made. So could the image be that of Shemsu? A search for parallels,

however, turned up very similar examples clearly identified as men with long skirts and similar hairstyles (see, for example, Hodjash and Berlev 1982: no. 35 [79–81] and no. 39 [85–86]). Similarly, men in this period are sometimes shown with seemingly feminine breasts (probably due to accentuation of the male nipple in certain contemporary representations). Perhaps the decisive detail in the image is a little mark at the waist of the figure—a tie of the belt of the skirt. Such a detail would not characterize a woman's wardrobe but is frequently seen in representations of men. Cases like this argue for more careful "reading" of gender, in both texts and representations.





1

2

**1**   *Gilded Mask Fragment*
Plaster, gold leaf, stone
Egypt
Ptolemaic–Roman Periods (1st century BCE–1st
    century CE)
14.5 cm h.
Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 4651
Bibliography: Root 1979: 29–30; Richards and
    Wilfong 1995: 38

2   *Statue Fragment*
Limestone
Egypt
New Kingdom (1570–1070 BCE)
11 cm h., 16. cm w.
Source: Dr. Samuel A. Goudsmit, 1981
Kelsey Museum 81.4.6
Bibliography: Root 1982: 24 (no. 11)

# 2. Gender and Religion

*Our knowledge of ancient Egypt is skewed by the sources of our evidence. For Pharaonic Egypt, at least, most of this knowledge is based on material from funerary or temple contexts. Even when these biases of the sources are taken into account, it is obvious that religion played a central part in the lives of ancient Egyptians and that considerable attention was devoted to the religious and material requirements of the afterlife. In all of these areas, gender categories were important, although access to religion and the afterlife themselves were more tied to status than to gender. Instead, gender was a factor in roles of deities in the pantheon, positions in religious employment, and styles of worship. The functions of gods and goddesses, the employment of female and male religious officiants, and the practice of male and female worshippers all show the influence of Egyptian attitudes on gender.*

### Worshipper, Intermediary, and Worshipped

To a certain extent, the gendered activities of Egyptian deities mirrored the lives of their mortal worshippers. Thus, the kings, rulers, fighters, and administrators of the gods tend to be male, while goddesses serve as queens, nurturers, childbearers, and protectors of the gods. In truth, some goddesses served merely as characterless consorts to male gods, so lacking in individuality that their names were mere feminizations of their male consorts. But goddesses also had special functions within the pantheon that went beyond these roles. Isis (**3, 4, 14, 21, 28**) not only embodied the idea of motherhood but was also endowed with exceptional magical powers as well. Hathor (**5, 6, 9,** ) was a popular goddess associated with music, dancing, and pleasure but also had a wrathful aspect that could threaten to destroy humanity. The sky was the body of the goddess Nut (**11**), while storms were personified by goddesses like Sakhmet (**20**) and Tefnut. Divine personifications of abstract concepts tended to be goddesses, the best-known being the personification of truth, order, and the like—Ma'at (**7**). The goddess Mut (**29**) had special associations with kingship. Goddesses were often identified with animals that embodied qualities associated with the deity; thus, cats (**10, 24**), lions, cows (**9**), vultures, and cobras (**8, 17**), among others, were connected with particular goddesses, and the worship of these deities often involved the

maintenance of their associated animals as part of their cult. The animals themselves were not worshipped; rather they were venerated as manifestations of the divinity they represented.

The coming of Greek religion in the Graeco-Roman period brought new gods and goddesses and new religious traditions to Egypt, but the old traditions remained active; indeed, the two were often combined in some way. Thus, the Greek goddess Aphrodite was worshipped alongside the Egyptian goddess Isis, and the attributes of the two goddesses were merged together in a combined form of Isis-Aphrodite. The cult of Isis herself gained great popularity outside of Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period while maintaining great prominence within Egypt. The eventual predominance of Christianity in Egypt in the fourth century CE gradually supplanted the older religions, although the iconography of early Christianity adapted many earlier forms. Representations of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus, for example, often bore a close resemblance to images of Isis and her son Horus. Even after Christianity became firmly established in Egypt, the old Egyptian gods and goddesses were still evoked in magical texts.

Throughout ancient Egyptian history, roles in religious employment were connected to the gender of the employee. In general, men were in charge of temples and their administration, but women could and did fill a variety of religious offices in the Pharaonic period. In the earlier periods, women were often priestesses associated with the cults of goddesses, especially Hathor. By the New Kingdom, this was no longer the case; the priesthood had become part of the state bureaucracy, an area from which women were excluded (Robins 1993: 142–45). As if to compensate, though, we find an increase in the number of elite women associated with temples as "musicians" of a particular deity. These women participated in religious rituals in a temple context: the shaking of the rattle known as the sistrum sacred to the goddess Hathor (6 and 25) was an essential component of religious worship in ancient Egypt. These musicians also sang and danced in religious ceremonies (Teeter 1993). Also in the New Kingdom, the important office of "God's Wife" to the god Amun came to be held by elite women based in the city of Thebes. In the Graeco-Roman period, women could and did fill priestly roles in a variety of contexts. Under Christianity, however, women were again excluded from formal religious office in Egypt. Female officiants were often associated with the cults of female deities, although by far the most common female religious titles relate to the worship of male gods. Similarly, male priests would often officiate for goddesses; see 3 below and the offering cup 5 inscribed by a man for the "Great Goddess" Hathor.

Religion was not just for the priests and temple employees;

Figure 1
*Stela: Mnevis Bull with Male and
    Female Worshippers Hedy and Wiy*
Limestone
Egypt (Mataria?)
Late 18th–19th dynasties (1300–
    1185 BCE)
50.5 cm h., 31.0 cm w.
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88807
Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman
    1977: 62 (no. 42)



although we may never know to what extent the Egyptians
believed in their own religion, we do have extensive evidence
for their religious activities. The stela in the Kelsey Museum
permanent Egyptian display (fig. 1) offers a good example of
the way in which nonpriestly religious activity was recorded.
Here a man named Hedy and his wife Wiy are shown per-
forming acts of worship before the Mnevis bull, another of
these specially venerated animals maintained in a temple cult.
Hedy and Wiy both raise their hands in a gesture of adoration
before offerings for Mnevis; the relative positioning, with the
husband in front and wife in back, is typical of the Egyptian
way of representing male-female couples. Wiy is identified in
the text as Hedy's "sister," which in monumental inscriptions
of this period is a common designation for "wife" but most
probably does not indicate a brother-sister marriage of the kind
so common in Roman Egypt. Wiy is also identified as "mistress
of the house," a title that will be discussed in chapter 4. Hedy
was an official connected with the king, so both he and his
wife were part of the elite. The Greek language question to an
oracle of Isis (4) shows another way in which people could
communicate with the gods, and the votive figures of animals
connected with goddesses (8–10) yet another. Little is known

of the religious activities of the non-elites, except that domestic religion was an important part of Egyptian life, as is evident for the Graeco-Roman period from the University of Michigan excavations at Karanis (Gottry 1995).

Perhaps the best-attested religious practices of the ancient Egyptians are those connected with death and burial. The Egyptians conceived of the afterlife as an extension of their daily life on earth that had to be carefully planned for. The dead body was prepared and protected, both through physical embalming and through a complex of funerary texts designed to ensure a smooth transition to the afterlife. Artifacts of the Egyptian preparations for life after death show this to have been an endeavor open to both men and women—both a coffin fragment (13) and a copy of the Egyptian text known to modern audiences as the *Book of the Dead* (12) show the care to ensure survival after death. Funerary stelae, stone carvings that represent the dead and commemorate their names (45, 46–52), show similar concerns, while mummy masks and portraits (54–63) preserved an idealized image of the dead person. Preparations for the afterlife also invoked the specific protection of goddesses such as Isis and Nut (11); in general, goddesses tended to serve as protectors of the dead.

3   *Stela: Ptah-en-adjed Worshipping Isis*
    Limestone
    Mit Rahina, Egypt
    19th Dynasty (1293–1185 BCE)
    31.1 cm h., 20.7 cm w., 11.3 cm thickness
    Source: N. Tano, 1952
    Kelsey Museum 88806
    Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 22 (no. 1); Richards and Wilfong 1995: 23

In this scene, the priest Ptah-en-adjed makes offerings to the goddess Isis, shown with her usual attributes of sun disk and cow horns on her head, uraeus cobra on her forehead, life symbol and lotus scepter in her hands. Isis was the archetypal mother in the Egyptian pantheon (here identified in the text as the "divine mother"), as well as a magician of great skill. The inscription by the figures reads: "Words spoken by the great Isis, [divine] mother, mistress of heaven and the two lands: May she give life, prosperity and health to Ptah-en-adjed." There are traces of reddish-brown paint on Ptah-en-adjed's face; originally, the entire stela would have been painted.



3

**4**  *Oracle Question to Isis, Written in Greek*
Ink on papyrus
Egypt, Fayum
Roman Period (2nd–3rd centuries CE)
6 cm h., 4 cm w.
Source: Loan, University of Michigan Library,
Papyrology Collection, P.Mich. Inv. 1258

*Commentary and Translation by Traianos Gagos:*
The Egyptians, like many other people in antiquity, believed that if a deity was approached correctly, s/he could reveal the future. Among the Egyptian pantheon, Sarapis enjoyed particular devotion. The oracle of Zeus-Ammon in the Siwa-Oasis became particularly popular after Alexander the Great went there to ask the oracle about his future. If we are to believe the available evidence, it seems that oracles grew in popularity everywhere during the first three centuries of Roman rule. They were more popular than other divine manifestations because the ordinary individual could converse directly with the god. By contrast, such manifestations as horoscopes required the services of a professional to help decipher the astrological arcana. So popular were the oracles that some people would consult one as often as every ten days!

Individuals made use of the oracle in two basic ways: (1) They addressed a question in two forms, one positive and one negative. Then, the questions were placed in a jar, which was shaken. The answer of the god depended on which of the two questions came out of the jar. (2) They used a standard set of questions and answers preceded by a number. The oracle was probably thus "canonized" and streamlined in order to accommodate the increasing demands of the crowds. Under such circumstances, it was very easy for priests or other "experts" to abuse their power. There is concrete evidence of official disapproval, which was occasionally reinforced by sanctions. In 199 CE the emperor Septimius Severus declared: "Therefore let no man through oracles, that is by means of written documents supposedly granted under divine influence, nor by means of the parade of images or suchlike charlatanry, pretend to know things beyond human ken and profess to know the obscurity of things to come, neither let any man put himself at the disposal of those who inquire about this or answer in any way whatsoever" (Rea 1977).

Oracular questions to the goddess Isis written in Greek, such as the present one, are very uncommon. The only other known instance is a papyrus from the Munich collection [P.Münch. III 117] of the first century CE, in which Isis is invoked together with the Dioskouroi and Sarapis.

*Translation:*
Lady Isis: if my suffering comes from you and you are willing to give me the cure, cause this (i.e., lot) to be brought forth for me.

*Bibliography:*
Henrichs 1973; Lewis 1983: 97–99; Papini 1990.



5

**5**  *Offering Cup with Demotic Inscription*
Silver
Karanis, Egypt: Surface find
Roman Period (1st–2nd centuries CE)
3.2 cm h., 5.9 cm diameter
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1927
Kelsey Museum 3727
Bibliography: Spiegelberg 1928: 38–39

A simple silver cup that was presumably used for offerings, this object bears an inscription in Demotic that reads "In the presence of [. . .], the Great Goddess, from the hand of Wedjahor, son of Panas." The "Great Goddess" alluded to is almost certainly Hathor. Comparable silver cups with Demotic inscriptions to Hathor are Louvre E 11661 and E 11662, both of which come from Hathor's cult center at Dendera (see Farid 1994: 124–26 and pl. 17).

Figure 2. 6, reconstructed



Figure 3. 7, detail

**6**     *Sistrum Handle with Hathor Figure*
Bronze
Fayum, Egypt
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
10.8 cm h., 2.4 cm max. w.
Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 3115
Bibliography: None

This bottom portion of a sistrum—the rattle used in ancient Egypt for music in cultic worship—preserves the handle, a representation of the head of the goddess Hathor, a seated animal (probably a cat), and the lower portions of the sides of the rattle itself. The Hathor head is typical on such objects: here Hathor is shown with the cow ears and curling wig usual in full-face representations of the goddess. When complete, a loop would have risen above the base, through which bars strung with metal disks would be passed (see fig. 2). When shaken, this rattle would have produced the sound important for cultic activity in ancient Egypt.

**7**     *Book of the Dead Fragment: The Goddess Ma'at in the Hall of Judgment*
Painted papyrus
Egypt
Late–Ptolemaic Periods (525–30 BCE)
25.0 cm h., 9 cm max. w.
Source: Samuel A. Goudsmit, 1981
Kelsey Museum 81.4.22
Bibliography: Root 1982: 29 (no. 7)

A fragment from a much larger scene from the *Book of the Dead*, this papyrus shows the goddess Ma'at presiding over the judgment of the dead person before the god of the dead Osiris. On her head, Ma'at wears her usual attribute—a feather. The heart of the deceased is weighed against this feather, to see whether his/her life comes up to the standards of Ma'at—not only the name of the goddess but also an Egyptian word translated variously as "order," "rightness," and "truth." Ma'at, in effect, is the standard by which entry into the afterlife is decided. She is often described as the Egyptian "goddess of truth" but

symbolized something more complex—right, justice, and the order and continuity of the world. She embodied a concept central to the worldview of ancient Egyptians and without which they believed the world would end (for other scenes involving Ma'at, see Teeter 1997).

8     *Uraeus Cobra on Base*
      Bronze
      Egypt
      Late–Ptolemaic Periods (525–30 BCE)
      11.8 cm h., 4.0 cm w., 8.5 cm l.
      Source: A. C. Hoskier, 1925
      Kelsey Museum 4673
      Bibliography: None

The cobra was an emblem of the Egyptian goddess Wadjet as well as a central symbol of kingship and rule. Bronze figures such as this one were used as votive figures; it stands on a hollow base that may have once contained the mummy of a snake.



9

9     *Votive Cow Head (Symbol of the Goddess Hathor)*
      Terracotta
      Fayum, Egypt
      Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
      13.0 cm h., 8.8 cm w.
      Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
      Kelsey Museum 4961
      Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 68 (no. 57)

The Egyptian goddess Hathor, traditionally associated with music, dancing, and women's fertility and sexuality, was frequently represented wearing a headdress of a sun disk between a pair of cow's horns. In general, Hathor was linked to cows and cow imagery, hence votive figures such as the present object (for another example of a Hathor cow, see **78** below).

10    *Cat*
      Painted wood
      Egypt
      Late Period (525–332 BCE)
      11 cm h., 4.3 cm w.
      Source: Cairo Dept. of Antiquities, 1930
      Kelsey Museum 88801
      Bibliography: Unpublished

Egyptians often identified cats with the goddess Bastet—a deity with solar associations and most frequently depicted with a female humanoid body and a cat's head. More generally, the cat embodied protection: from the earthly cats that protected against mice to the cosmic cats that protected the sun god from the attack of snakes. The Kelsey Museum houses many cat images: straightforward depictions such as the present piece and the cat amulet **24**, statues of Bastet as a humanoid goddess with a cat head, hollow cat-shaped coffins, and even the mummy of a cat. All such artifacts are connected to the cult of Bastet, which in some places included the killing and embalming of cats as a votive act—resulting in both the cat coffins and mummies.

11    *Fragmentary Mummy Cartonnage: Collar and Protective Goddess*
      Paint, plaster, cloth
      Egypt
      Ptolemaic Period (Late 2nd century BCE)
      34.6 cm h., 28.1 cm w.
      Source: Loan, University of Michigan Library, Papyrology Collection
      Bibliography: Unpublished

Images such as this formed part of the protective covering for an embalmed human body. The goddess represented here (probably the sky goddess Nut) enfolds the chest of the deceased in her wings. This painting would have been backed by a papier mâché construction made of used papyrus for strength; recently, the used papyri have been detached from this cartonnage backing, yielding a number of interesting documents.

Figure 4. **12**, detail

**12** *Book of the Dead of the Female Musician of Amun,*
*Djed-Mut*
Ink on papyrus
Western Thebes, Egypt
Third Intermediate Period (1070–656 BCE)
4.0 cm h., 24.5 cm w.
Source: Loan, University of Michigan Library,
    Papyrology Collection, P.Mich. Inv. 3524
Bibliography: Unpublished (edition in preparation
    by J. E. Richards and T. G. Wilfong)

This document is the upper half of a
funerary papyrus, containing texts from the com-
pilation known as the *Book of the Dead*. It was made
for a woman named Djed-Mut, who was a female
musician for the god Amun—one of the most
common religious offices occupied by women in
the Third Intermediate Period. The right-hand
portion of the papyrus shows Djed-Mut making an
offering (fig. 4) to the falcon-headed god Re-
Harakhte. The profile and hands of Djed-Mut are
just visible on the broken edges at the right of the
papyrus. The remainder of the papyrus contains
spells 23–26 of the *Book of the Dead*, designed to
revitalize the dead person in the afterlife. Although
this selection from the *Book of the Dead* was
personalized for Djed-Mut through illustration and
the insertion of her name in the text, the titles of
the spells (written in red) "The spell of opening a
man's mouth for him in the cemetery," "The spell
of bringing a man's magic to him in the cemetery,"
etc., use masculine pronouns and referents.

**13** *Coffin Fragment of a Female Musician of Amun*
Painted wood
Western Thebes, Egypt
Third Intermediate Period (1070–656 BCE)
18.5 cm h., 31.5 cm w., 4.5 cm thickness
Source: Samuel A. Goudsmit, 1981
Kelsey Museum 81.4.5
Bibliography: Root 1982: 21; Richards and
    Wilfong 1995: 32

A fragment from the coffin of a female temple
employee, this object illustrates gendered roles both
in Egyptian mythology and in religious ritual and
practice. The coffin's owner is given the title
"female musician of Amun." But the text breaks off
just before the woman's name. The surviving scene
represents the sun god (with a falcon head) in his
solar boat. Before him are the goddesses Isis and
Ma'at, performing protective functions as the sun
goes across the sky in its celestial boat. The yellow
background and style of painting are typical of
coffins of the Third Intermediate Period.



**13**

# 3. Engendered Protection

*Many of the images of divine beings seen in the previous section are protective in some way, helping to insure the safety, status, or afterlife of the person who wore, owned, dedicated, or even saw the image. As in most premodern societies, life in ancient Egypt was a precarious endeavor for everyone: life spans were short, mortality rates in childbirth and infancy were high, and the natural environment bore frequent threats of flood, famine, and dangerous animals. To counteract these dangers, the ancient Egyptians developed strategies involving protective images, amulets, and the use of magic. Many of these strategies involved the invocation of female deities who were known for protective powers; goddesses such as Isis and Hathor were specialists in specific protective functions. Women and their children were especially at risk at certain points of life, and their protection was seen as a particular priority. Given the state of Egyptian medical knowledge, childbirth was a time of special danger for both mother and newborn, while children remained vulnerable to disease and their environment as they grew up. A whole complex of protective strategies involving specialized goddesses and gods developed to ensure the safety of women and children. Protection was a gendered activity in Egyptian thought, specific in terms of both protective deities and protected entities.*

## Mothers, Children, Ferocious Dwarves, and Other Protectors

Having children was one of the most dangerous activities in ancient Egypt. The childbearing mother was at considerable risk of death throughout the process, and the child was likewise very vulnerable before, during, and long after birth. The Egyptians understood much about the physiology of pregnancy and childbirth and had some idea of prenatal care, but given the state of scientific knowledge in ancient Egypt, medical intervention could offer only limited help. Thus, it is not surprising that a complex system of magical practice developed to bridge the gap and provide reassurance against the unknown. Magic was an integral part of the ancient Egyptian worldview and its use an important and acceptable part of religious experience (Ritner 1993; Pinch 1995a).

The protector of mothers and children *par excellence* was the goddess Isis. Isis was renowned for her magical powers overall but had a special reputation when it came to protecting children. In part, this is due to her history with her own son

Figure 5 (left)
*Isis and Horus*
Bronze
Fayum, Egypt
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
11.1 cm h., 3.0 cm w.
Source: Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 3130

Figure 6
*Isis and Harpocrates*
Terracotta
Fayum, Egypt
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
16.9 cm h., 8.0 cm w.
Source: Ruthven, 1935
Kelsey Museum 6531

Horus, whose perils are frequently invoked when asking Isis to protect a child. Isis was a powerful mother figure in Egyptian thought; mother of her own son, she was also a mother to the gods (3) and mother by proxy to any child in danger. The image of Isis and her son together was a durable one in ancient Egypt: traditional Pharaonic period images (fig. 5) gave way to representations in a more Graeco-Roman style (fig. 6), while early Christian images of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus in Egypt often drew on this traditional Isis-Horus imagery. Isis' child Horus was also a potent protector on his own, being especially popular as a safeguard for children in a special form known as Harpocrates (the Greek vocalization of the Egyptian words for "Horus-the-child"). A special class of protective images of the child Horus, known as the Horus cippus (15–16), provided magical protection for young children against threats of the natural world.

Special helpers for mother and children often took on fearsome forms: thus the hippopotamus goddess Taweret (22) was intended to be a terrifying sight to scare off evil from a child. Indeed, the sight of a female hippopotamus standing on

29

her rear legs, baring her teeth and often carrying a knife, must have been a powerful image, for Taweret appears on many amulets and other protective objects. Taweret was not alone in this endeavor; the god Bes (18, 27, 79) also performed similar functions. Represented as an achondroplastic dwarf wearing a feather headdress, baring his teeth and sticking out his tongue, Bes also presented a ferocious appearance to the perils facing children. As a god associated with music and dancing, Bes was also linked with fertility and women's sexuality. The frightening aspect of Bes persisted long after the introduction of Christianity: Coptic texts record the struggle of Christians with a terrifying demon named Bes, who jumps around and makes loud noises while haunting an abandoned pagan temple.

Women's reproductive health was protected in a number of ways in ancient Egypt. Gynecological texts and casebooks survive from the Pharaonic period, while the Greek medical writers' works on women's health were widely known alongside indigenous Egyptian texts on the subject in the later periods. There is limited evidence for the existence in the Pharaonic period of a "place of women" where women went when they were menstruating, which seems to survive in some form into the Late Antique period (Wilfong forthcoming a). Menstrual seclusion now usually has a negative connotation but does not seem to have been so regarded in ancient Egypt. In the Graeco-Roman period, objects known as uterine amulets (19) became common in Egypt. Uterine amulets were carved from stone with schematic representations of a woman's uterus and worn to protect against gender-specific health complaints (Hanson 1990; Ritner 1984).

14    *Isis and Horus*
       Bronze
       Egypt
       Late Period
       13.5 cm h.
       Source: Bay View, 1971
       Kelsey Museum 71.2.143
       Bibliography: Unpublished

A typical representation of Isis, wearing her usual crown of a sun disk and cow horns, holding her son Horus, shown naked with the side-lock of hair normally worn by children, on her lap. Originally, this bronze sculpture would have been attached to a separate throne. The feet of Isis are missing in this representation; although a pair of bronze feet came to the museum with the piece, they do not belong to it (information courtesy of Kelsey Museum Curator of Conservation Geoffrey I. Brown). This piece is similar to Kelsey Museum 3130 (fig. 5 above).



15

15    *Horus Cippus*
       Green schist
       Fayum, Egypt
       Late–Ptolemaic Periods (525–30 BCE)
       6.5 cm h., 5.1 cm w., 2,0 cm thickness
       Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
       Kelsey Museum 3242b
       Bibliography: Allen and Dix 1991: 71–72; Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 35

In this type of artifact, known as a Horus cippus, the young Horus, identified as a child by his side-lock of hair and his nudity, is shown holding scorpions and snakes in his hands, surmounted by a head of the god Bes. Parallels make it certain that this representation, when complete, would have shown Horus standing on crocodiles. This mastery of dangerous reptiles and insects is reinforced by Egyptian texts on the back of the cippus, which include spells designed to protect children from harm. The protection of children from danger, especially from attacks by noxious animals, is a common theme in Egyptian magic throughout its history. This is not surprising, given the undoubtedly high infant and child mortality rates and the real danger posed by the snakes and scorpions common in Egypt.

16    *Horus Cippus*
       Stone
       Fayum Egypt
       Late–Ptolemaic Periods (525–30 BCE)
       4.7 cm h., 4.7 cm w.
       Source: D. L. Askren 1925
       Kelsey Museum 3242c
       Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 35 (no. 15)

This piece preserves what the preceding example lacks: the feet of the young Horus standing on crocodiles. The cippus is inscribed with magical texts on the back and base, designed to protect children from scorpion and snake bite.

**17** *Uraeus Cobra*
Gilded and painted wood
Egypt
Late Period (525–332 BCE)
16.0 cm h., 3.5 cm w.
Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 4653
Bibliography: Richards and Wilfong 1995: 16

An attribute of royalty, the cobra was associated with the goddess Wadjet and appears most frequently on the forehead of a king or queen. The sun disk on the head of the cobra in the present example highlights the solar associations of the uraeus cobra. This representation of a uraeus cobra was probably, judging from the base, attached to the flat top of a shrine or canopy as part of a long row of such images. Massed in groups, cobra images serve as both decorative devices and protection greatly multiplied from a single image.



**18**

**18** *Lamp with Bes and Beset*
Terracotta
Fayum, Egypt
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
7.2 cm h., 4.7 cm w.
Source: Ruthven, 1935
Kelsey Museum 6573
Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 67 (no. 53)

The god Bes, represented in his usual form as a fierce-looking dwarf with a feather headdress (see also **27** and **79** ), appears on this pottery lamp with his female consort Beset, who adopts a similar guise. Bes acted as special guardian of children and their mothers; lighting a lamp such as this would invoke the protection of Bes and Beset.

**19** *Uterine Amulet*
Haematite
Egypt
Roman Period (2nd–4th century CE)
2.0 cm h., 1.9 cm w., 0.3 cm thickness
Source: M. Nahman, 1932
Kelsey Museum 26067
Bibliography: Bonner 1950: 276 (no. 142); Bohak 1996: 19 (no. 20)

On the face of this magical amulet, the symbol for the female uterus is accompanied by an image of a key, designed to open and close the womb for conception and contraception. The ram-headed god Khnum touches the key, in the presence of the dog-headed god Anubis and the goddesses Isis and Nephthys. The scene is surrounded by magical words and enclosed by the oroboros snake. The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and the Taubman Medical Library at the University of Michigan both have numerous examples of such amulets in their collections (see examples published in Bonner 1950: 273–77, nos. 129–47).

*by Melanie D. Grunow*

Amulets: Protection for the Living

Among the most common artifacts found in Egypt, amulets are small and frequently made of inexpensive and durable materials such as faience (a quartz-based ceramic). Amulets were carried on the person and worn like jewelry; all of the pieces in the exhibition (20–28) have suspension loops or holes. Yet they functioned not just as decoration but also as protective charms for members of all social classes. Nearly all Egyptian deities, ranging from the major state gods to humble domestic gods, have been found represented in amulet form. The wearer was then under the protection that the deity depicted could provide and perhaps also partook of some of that deity's characteristics, such as invincibility or fertility. By far the greatest number of amulets were for women and children, for whom the danger of disease and premature death were the greatest.

Amulets provided protection to women and children at the most dangerous periods of life: pregnancy, childbirth, and early childhood. Some amulets, like those of Taweret (22), the fierce protector of pregnant women (see Grunow 1995a), and Bes (27), the ferocious protector of small children, were specifically apotropaic. Other amulets gave the wearer the positive characteristics of the deity. For example, the owner of an amulet of Bastet (24) hoped for the fertility represented by cats. While the majority of amulets exhibited here are miniature representations of specific deities, amulets could also include representations of a wide range of objects with desirable qualities. While some materials were viewed as particularly efficacious, such as anything red for the Tyet knot of Isis (23), amulets made of precious stones and gold are less common.

Amulets were highly personal objects and would be buried with their owners. Unfortunately, the majority of the amulets in the Kelsey Museum were originally uncovered before archaeologists appreciated the importance of excavated context for understanding Egyptian artifacts. The number and range of amulets that would have been worn by a typical woman is unknown. While all the amulets exhibited here are connected with either female deities or reproductive concerns, the extent to which such amulets were restricted to use by women and children is unknown.

20,
    23,    21,
    26,    24,    25
    27,    22

20    28

**20**  *Sakhmet Amulet*
Faience
Egypt
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
4.9 cm h., 1.1 cm w.
Source: Mrs. John G. Winter, 1965
Kelsey Museum 62.2.4
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: 34

**21**  *Amulet: Isis, Horus, Nephthys*
Faience
Egypt
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
3.0 cm h., 2.2 cm w.
Source: Dennison, 1981
Kelsey Museum 81.5.88
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: back cover

**22**    *Taweret Amulet*
Calcite
Egypt
Late Period (525–332 BCE)
3.8 cm h., 1.5 cm w.
Source: Bay View, 1971
Kelsey Museum 71.2.73
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: 40–41

**23**    *Isis Knot (Tyet) Amulet*
Stone
Egypt
Late–Ptolemaic Periods (525–30 BCE)
1.9 cm h., 0.9 cm w.
Source: A. C. Hoskier, 1925
Kelsey Museum 23900
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: 44–45

**24**    *Cat (Bastet) Amulet*
Faience
Egypt
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
1.6 cm h., 1.0 cm w.
Source: Mrs. John G. Winter, 1965
Kelsey Museum 62.2.1
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: 32–33

**25**    *Sistrum Amulet*
Faience
Egypt
Late Period (525–332 BCE)
2.7 cm h., 0.7 cm w.
Source: Bay View, 1971
Kelsey Museum 71.2.94
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: 81

**26**    *Nehebkau (Snake God) Amulet*
Faience
Fayum, Egypt
Saite–Late Periods (685–332 BCE)
3.5 cm w., 1.7 cm w.
Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 4633
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: 25–26

**27**    *Bes Amulet*
Faience
Egypt
Late Period (525–332 BCE)
2.8 cm h., 1.1 cm w.
Source: Bay View, 1971
Kelsey Museum 71.2.75
Bibliography: Unpublished; see parallels in
    Andrews 1994: 38–40

**28**    *Isis and Horus Amulet*
Faience
Egypt
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
3.0 cm h., 1.4 cm w.
Source: Mrs. John G. Winter, 1965
Kelsey Museum 62.2.2
Bibliography: Unpublished

# 4. Gender and Power

*When studying women and gender in ancient Egypt, scholars fre-
quently ask questions relating to power, beginning with the ruler of
Egypt. Pharaonic Egypt was ruled by a "king," as was Ptolemaic
Egypt, and the Egyptian ideal of succession for the kingship was from
father to son. Even so, the female relatives of the ruling king often
played significant roles in the rule of Egypt, while the ideology of
kingship itself was a careful blend of male and female elements (see
Troy 1986). Women who ruled independently as king were unusual in
Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt, but this did occur, most often in times
of uncertainty over succession; the best-known examples of such rulers
are Hatshepsut (from the 18th Dynasty) and Cleopatra VII (from the
Ptolemaic period). Even after Egypt was no longer governed by a
resident ruler, images of women in power came to Egypt from Rome
through representations, especially those on coins. Below the level of
kingship, women could and did hold office, most often associated with
religious institutions, but were largely excluded from administrative
roles. The title most frequently held by women was "mistress of the
house"; this does not, however, seem to be a courtesy title or expression
for "housewife" but rather a genuine recognition of the administrative
and business abilities necessary to administer a household. Other titles
seem to allude to marital status. Women were frequently identified by
their husband and his occupation but still had considerable theoretical
autonomy in legal and economic situations. This Egyptian tradition
persisted even after the introduction of Greek and Roman attitudes and
legal traditions, which more heavily restricted women's activities and
status. It is not surprising that many women, including perhaps some
of non-Egyptian ethnic origin, chose to follow Egyptian custom.
Indeed, Egyptian traditions about the status and autonomy of women
seem to have persisted into the Late Antique period and beyond. The
status of women in Egypt was clearly different from that in much of the
ancient world. But bear in mind that most sources reflect the experi-
ences of elite women and men. Non-elites are likely to have had
considerably less autonomy in general, and, since many of the observ-
able trends in the autonomy of elite women are tied to ownership and
property, it is likely that the experience of non-elite women was very
different from that of their elite counterparts. Further, it is important to
remember that throughout Egyptian history many positions of power,
such as most administrative offices and military ranks, were exclusively
held by men.*

**29** *Goddess Mut Wearing the Double Crown*
Bronze
Egypt
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
17.6 cm h.
Source: A. C. Hoskier, 1925
Kelsey Museum 4677
Bibliography: Unpublished

The goddess Mut—her name being the Egyptian word for "mother"—had special associations with kingship in ancient Egypt. Mut came to be associated with the Theban god Amun, who came to prominence in the New Kingdom; ultimately she was identified with the mother of the ruling king and, thereby, bestowed aspects of the king's authority on him. She wears the double crown and uraeus cobra

**29**

on her head—both insignia of the ruling king. Mut was identified with the vulture but also with cats and lions.

**30** *Coin: Octodrachm with Portrait of Queen Arsinoe II*
Gold
Egypt
270 BCE
2.7 cm diameter
Source: Easton Kelsey, 1963

Kelsey Museum 63.3.1
Bibliography: Unpublished

Arsinoe II Philadelphus was the daughter of Ptolemy I as well as the sister and wife of Ptolemy II—participating in the first of a long series of full brother-sister marriages among the Ptolemies. Arsinoe II occupied a prominent role in her brother-husband's reign and was granted a special divine status. In her honor, the newly reclaimed Fayum district was renamed the "Arsinoite" nome.

**31** *Coin: Drachma of Cleopatra VII*
Bronze
Egypt
51–30 BCE
2.6 cm diameter
Source: Monks, 1991
Kelsey Museum 91.2.292
Bibliography: Unpublished

Cleopatra VII—the "famous" Cleopatra and the one best known in the present—was the last independent female ruler of Egypt in the ancient tradition. The representations of Cleopatra on her coins differ from those of earlier Ptolemaic queens such as Arsinoe II **(30)** in a number of respects. These images are often cited to show that Cleopatra was not as beautiful as the myths surrounding her would suggest, but such judgments are invariably made on the basis of the taste of modern scholars, rather than any contemporary evidence, and miss the point of

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**30,** **31**

**34,** **35**

numismatic portraiture. Read in the visual vocabulary of their times, these representations of Cleopatra project an image of power and authority. Ironically, Cleopatra VII, the best known of the Ptolemies and the one most associated in the modern mind with wealth and opulence, is represented in the extensive numismatic holdings of the Kelsey Museum only by low-denomination bronze coinage in an indifferent state of preservation.

32    *Coin: Aureus with Portrait of Faustina I*
     Gold
     After 141 CE
     Karanis, Egypt: Locus 26-B11L-A
     1.8 cm diameter
     Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1926
     Kelsey Museum 41025
     Bibliography: Haatvedt and Peterson 1964: 158
        (no. 399)

Annia Galeria Faustina I was the wife of Roman emperor Antoninus Pius, aunt of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, and mother of Faustina II (see **35** below). She was deified on her death in 140 CE, the occasion of the minting of these gold coins. Coins **32–35** were found in a hoard of 60 gold coins at Karanis; they had been left in a cloth bag (since deteriorated) and hidden in the courtyard of a house (see Haatvedt and Peterson 1964: 14-15).

33    *Coin: Aureus with Portrait of Faustina I*
     Gold
     After 141 CE
     Karanis, Egypt: Locus 26-B11L-A
     1.9 cm diameter
     Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1926
     Kelsey Museum 41026
     Bibliography: Haatvedt and Peterson 1964: 158
        (no. 400)

34    *Coin: Aureus with Portrait of Faustina I*
     Gold
     After 141 CE
     Karanis, Egypt: Locus 26-B11L-A
     1.8 cm diameter
     Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1926
     Kelsey Museum 41027
     Bibliography: Haatvedt and Peterson 1964: 158
        (no. 401)

35    *Coin: Aureus with Portrait of Faustina II*
     Gold
     After 145 CE
     Karanis, Egypt: Locus 26-B11L-A
     1.8 cm diameter
     Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1926
     Kelsey Museum 41028
     Bibliography: Haatvedt and Peterson 1964: 158
        (no. 402)

Annia Galeria Faustina II was the daughter of Roman emperor Antoninus Pius and Faustina I. Married to Emperor Marcus Aurelius in 145 CE, Faustina II was much beloved by her husband and, like her mother, deified after her death in 175.

36    *Military Diploma*
     Bronze
     Karanis, Egypt: Surface find
     Roman Period: 157–61 CE
     2 pieces (3.2 cm w., 4.4 c. l. and 2.8 cm w., 3.8
       cm l.)
     Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1933
     Kelsey Museum 21412
     Bibliography: *P.Mich.* VII 441 (Sanders 1947: 47–
       55)

Military diplomas inscribed in Latin, such as the present example found at Karanis, were given to veterans of the Roman Army upon their discharge. When complete, this object was a bronze tablet with two leaves, which were hinged together, recording military divisions present in Egypt in the mid-second century CE.



**36**
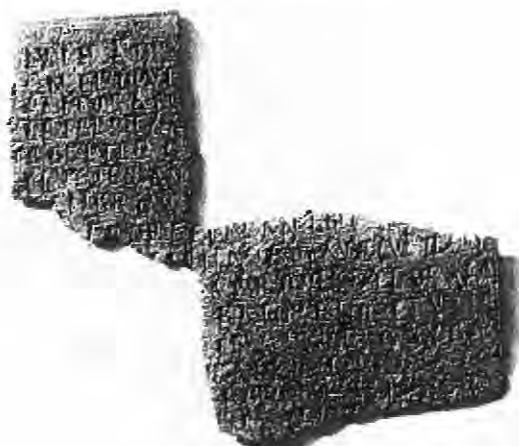
# 5. Gender in the Text

*Much of what we know about gender in ancient Egypt comes from textual evidence, which records the words, names, written ideas, and practical record of gender in Egyptian thought and life. Texts from ancient Egypt come in many media: inscribed on stone walls and monuments, painted on wood, written on papyrus, and on the potsherds and flakes of stone known as ostraca. Egyptian texts survive in many languages—the different phases and scripts of the indigenous Egyptian language, as well as the languages of foreign travelers, settlers, and conquerors in Egypt. Whether written in Egyptian hieroglyphs, hieratic, Demotic, Coptic, Greek, Latin, or any of the other languages and writing systems known from ancient Egypt, textual evidence documents on many levels the conceptions and understandings of gender. Religious and literary sources show ancient ideas about gender, while the documents of daily life show how these ideals fared in the course of daily life.*

*by Traianos Gagos*

Gender in the Documents: A Selection of Greek and Latin Texts from Egypt in the University of Michigan Library Papyrus Collection

*(Note: [ ] means that the text has been supplied by the editor/s because the papyrus is broken. Translations are derived from those in original editions where available.)*

**37** *Tax Roll in Greek with Entries for Women*
Ink on papyrus
Karanis, Egypt (acquired through purchase during the University of Michigan excavations in 1926)
173–74 CE
35.6 cm h., 19.0 cm w.
Source: Loan, University of Michigan Library, Papyrology Collection, P.Mich. inv. 4172, column 104 (=P.Mich. IV 225, lines 1827–53)

Originally, this section belonged to the longest surviving tax roll to come to us from the ancient world. It ran more than 200 columns in length on a papyrus roll that was longer than 100 feet. Upon arrival in Ann Arbor, the roll was cut down, mostly to sections of two columns, more rarely, as with the present section, of one column for storage and preservation purposes. Along with two more similar rolls from Karanis, these daily ledgers for taxes collected by the local tax collectors are the most important sources for calculating the population of Karanis near the end of the second century CE.

It has been estimated that women owned a third of the total cultivated land in Egypt during Roman rule. In most cases, they came to ownership either through inheritance or dowry, and more rarely through actual purchases. They do not feature very often in documents such as the tax roll from Karanis because they were not subject to the capitation tax. They do appear, however, as contributors for taxes on land, if they happen to own land, which is the case in this document.

*Translation of the lines that deal with Ptolema, daughter of Heras, and Gemella Anthestia (note that the former might be of Greek and the latter of Roman origin):*

Ptolema, daughter of Heras, along with the taxes (?) on Tanouris, daughter of Isidoros (of Pudens)

For the portion of the orchard tax of the 13th year, 7 drachmai, 1 obol, 2 chalkoi,

For the tax on olive produce, 1 drachma, 2 chalkoi,

For the dike tax (naubion), 4 $1/2$ obols,

For the surtax, 1 drachma, 5 obols,

For the tax assessment per aroura (eparourion), 8 drachmai, $1/2$ obol, 2 chalkoi,

For the surtax, 4 obols, 2 chalkoi,

For the exchange surtax, 2 obols,

Total, 20 drachmai

Gemella Anthestia (daughter of Pammurikos) (wife of Sarap( ), son of Theagenes)

For the portion of the orchard tax of the 13th year, 7 drachmai, 3 obols,

For the tax on olive produce, 1 drachma, $1/2$ obol

For the dike tax (naubion), 4 $1/2$ obols

For the surtax, 2 drachmai,

For the tax assessment per aroura (eparourion), 7 drachmai, 3 obols,

For the surtax, 4 obols, [there is a scribal correction after this entry]

For the exchange surtax, 2 obols
Total, 19 drachmai, 5 obols

For the tax of catoecic land of the 14th year, 1 drachma, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$
    obols,
For the surtax, 1 obol
For the exchange surtax, 2 chalkoi,
Total, 1 drachma, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ obols, 2 chalkoi

*Bibliography:*
Youtie, Schuman and Pearl 1936: 386–87; Youtie 1974 (with other bibliography cited therein); Boak 1959

**38** *Letter in Greek from Paniskos to His
    Wife Ploutogenia*
Ink on papyrus
Philadelphia, Egypt (Written in
    Coptos)
296 CE
24.7 cm h., 11.0 cm w.
Source: Loan, University of
    Michigan Library, Papyrology
    Collection, P.Mich. Inv. 1367
    (=*P.Mich.* III 214)

*The Archive of Paniskos and Ploutogenia*

This is one of seven letters that date from the very end of the third century CE and form part of a family archive. The texts represent the correspondence of a certain Paniskos with Ploutogenia, his wife, and Aion, his brother, as well as of Ploutogenia with her mother Heliodora. We never hear of Ploutogenia responding to her husband, who keeps writing to her and complains about the fact that the wife never writes back. All the letters from Paniskos were written while he stayed in Coptos. In one of these letters, Paniskos takes particular pains to inform his wife where he is, offers (apparently unconvincing) inducements for her to come, and bids her in greater detail than anywhere else to bring with her an assortment of food, weapons, and clothing.

Scholars have argued that Paniskos was in Coptos during the revolt of Lucius Domitius Domitianus, who was proclaimed emperor and, with the assistance of a deputy named Achilleus, controlled Egypt for almost a year (297/8 CE). Earlier, in 293/4, during another revolt in Coptos the emperor Galerius was present in person to reduce and destroy the town. The senior emperor Diocletian appeared during the time of the Paniskos archive and was present when Alexandria fell after an eight-month siege.

The contents of the following letter suggest it is the first of the letters sent to Ploutogenia from Coptos. Paniskos informs his wife where he is, forestalls her objections to coming, and directs her, as soon as she receives the letter, to bring fleeces, olives, honey, a shield, lances, the fittings for a tent, clothing, and her own jewelry. Paniskos sometimes addresses his wife as "sister"—a common usage in the Egyptian cultural tradition. Often this designation makes it difficult to distinguish siblings from wives.

*Translation:*

Paniskos, to my wife Ploutogenia, mother of my daughter, very many greetings. First of all I pray daily for your good health in the presence of all the gods. I would have you know then, sister, that we have been staying in Coptos near your sister and her children, so that you may not be grieved about coming to Coptos; for your kinsfolk are here. And just as you desire above all to greet her with many greetings, so she prays daily to the gods desiring to greet you along with your mother. So when you have received this letter of mine make your preparations in order that you may come at once if I send

for you. And when you come, bring ten shearings of wool, six jars of olives, four jars of liquid honey, and my shield, the new one only, and my helmet. Bring also my lances. Bring also the fittings of the tent. If you find an opportunity, come here with good men. Let Nonnos come with you. Bring all our clothes when you come. When you come, bring your gold ornaments, but do not wear them on the boat.

(On the back): I salute my lady daughter Heliodora. Hermeias salutes you.

(Address): Deliver to my wife and my daughter, from Paniskos, her father.

*Bibliography.*

Winter 1936: 275–86 (no. 214); Winter 1927; Schwartz 1968; Thomas 1976: 266–67

**39** *A Petition in Greek for Circumcision*
Ink on papyrus
Karanis, Egypt: Locus 30-
  B224B\*-M (5)
Roman Period: Mid-2nd
  century CE
15.0 cm h., 22.5 cm w.
Source: Loan, University of
  Michigan Library, Papyrology
  Collection, P.Mich. Inv. 5794
  (Unpublished)
Provenance: Excavated in Karanis
  in 1930 by the University of
  Michigan

Egyptian priests were both visibly and physically distinct from the rest of Egyptian society: (1) they had to wear linen garments in public (not woolen); (2) they had to keep their heads shaved (the penalty was as high as 1,000 drachmas in the Roman period); and (3) the priests alone of all the non-Jewish population were granted the right of circumcision. At the same time, Egyptian priests were exempt from many taxes (including the capitation tax) and from compulsory public service. In the course of time these privileges were not granted to all priests but only to certain categories. As a result, entry into such a category was considered a major privilege; when such an office became vacant, the state sold it to the highest bidder!

The status of priest was carefully regulated by the government. Males whose parents intended them to enter the ranks began their training in early childhood. The circumcision was performed between the ages of 8 and 10 (rarely later than 12). The first step was to file an application, supported by an affidavit, to the chief administrator of the nome, the strategos. The affidavit confirmed the priestly descent of the candidate. The strategos would confirm that the boy was neither adopted nor a foundling. When satisfied, he would then certify the candidate to the high priest of Egypt (a Roman aide of the governor of Egypt), who would hold or waive a hearing. In some instances the high priest refused the circumcision because the boy had scars and other blemishes on his body.

In the case of the present papyrus, the high priest has given his permission, and the paternal uncle is requesting the local administrator to initiate the final phase of the procedure: the actual circumcision. As is obvious from the text, the father of the boy was the priest in charge of measuring the rise and fall of the Nile. Although the original application was submitted by the father to the strategos of the Memphite nome, whose capital was Memphis, it seems that by the time the procedure reached the final phase, the father, Anoubis, son of Petechon, had died. It is now up to the next of kin, the paternal uncle, to complete the procedure, as women were not allowed to be involved in such procedures.

The document comes from a structure that was excavated by the University of Michigan in 1930 and sheds new light on the

public and private life of an Egyptian priestly family in the middle of the second century. The structure itself, built on top of a preexisting street, was not probably meant to be part of living quarters but rather to form a shrine. Several other texts, documentary and literary, in Greek and one in Demotic show that the milieu of Egyptian priesthood was overwhelmingly hellenized by the middle of the second century CE.

*Translation:*

[The beginning of the text is lost] paternal uncle, who has requested that [his nephew, Petechon?] be circumcised, because the proofs (of lineage) about him have been submitted to the strategos, according to the orders, and the letter of Apollonios, strategos of the Memphite, having been read *verbatim* as follows: "Apollonios, strategos of the Memphite to Flavidius Melas, the most noble, greetings. Anoubis, son of Petechon, nilometer priest of the Nilometreion at Memphis, has submitted to me, sir, an application, desiring to circumcise in a priestly manner his son Petechon, who was born to him by Aperous, daughter of Harthotes, depositing from the local office of public records a copy of the house-to-house census of the sixteenth year of Divus Hadrianus . . ." [remainder of text lost, except for beginning of lines of another column on the right side]

*Bibliography:*

Parassoglou 1974; Stead 1981

**40** *Canceled Contract in Greek*
Ink on papyrus
Oxyrhynchos, Egypt
27 Dec. 73 CE–25 Jan. 74 CE
22.5 cm h., 16.0 cm w.
Source: Loan, University of
    Michigan Library, Papyrology
    Collection, P.Mich. Inv. 92

This is one of 22 documents from a first-century archive from the city of Oxyrhynchos. The archive consists mostly of loans granted by women to their husbands and their repayments. The surviving papyri range in time from 49 CE to about 74 CE and document the bicultural aspect of one of the oldest social institutions, i.e., marriage. The granting of such loans to husbands is a sort of investment in the marriage on the part of the woman and comes from the Egyptian tradition. All the loans, however, are written in Greek and are negotiated through a bank located in the Sarapeum of Oxyrhynchos. Banks are also Greek institutions. Such marriages are not common after the arrival of the Greeks in Egypt. When they occur in the papyri, they are described as "unwritten marriages" because they are not based on a written instrument, i.e., a marriage contract, which was part and parcel of the Greek and Roman legal traditions.

The last owner of the archive was Pausiris, son of Pausiris, a weaver like all the other male members of his family—two brothers and their father.

This papyrus is the only one yielding first-hand evidence that the couple is married and that the wife might already be pregnant. None of the other loans contains provisions for pregnancy.

*Translation:*

Pausiris, son of Pausiris, grandson of Ammonios, his mother being Thaesis, daughter of Dioskous, of the city of Oxyrhynchos, a Persian of the Epigone, to Tauris, her mother being Tauris, daughter of Annibas, of the same city, who is acting with her guardian, her maternal uncle Thoonis, son of Annibas. I acknowledge that I have

received from you at the Sarapeum in the city of Oxyrhynchos through the bank of Ammonios, Sarapion, and Co., [the capital sum of] three hundred [drachmai] of Augustan silver coinage, [that is, 300 drachmai of silver], which includes one pair of gold earrings, forty drachmai in value, a chain of a weight of thirty drachmai of uncoined silver, [(something lost)], one hundred and sixty drachmai in value, and [(something lost)], worth eighty drachmai. I shall repay the aforesaid capital to you within thirty days of request. I further acknowledge that if there is a separation while you are pregnant, I shall pay you, aside from the aforesaid capital, another 100 drachmai of silver for the expense of childbirth. If I do not make repayment [as written, I shall pay] you the aforesaid capital with a penalty of one-half, [and you have the right of exaction upon me and everything] I own. [This document is enforceable wherever it is pro]duced [and for everybody producing it .]

The rest of the document is lost.

*Bibliography:*
Gagos, Koenen, and McNellen 1992; Pestman 1961.

**41** *Birth Certificate of a Girl in Latin*
Wood, ink, wax
Egypt
11 March 128 CE
Two pieces, each 17.0 cm h.,
    13.5 cm w., 0.31 cm thickness
Source: Loan, University of
    Michigan Library, Papyrology
    Collection, P.Mich. Inv. 766
    (=*P.Mich.* III 166)

Fewer than a dozen surviving birth certificates are written on the model of this Michigan example: it is written in the form of a diptych, that is, two separate planks of wood that were tied together in order to protect the writing on the wax inside. Since its original publication in 1923 by Francis W. Kelsey, the text has been discussed several times, and it has become the "model" certificate for the interpretation and restoration of others that have survived in fragmentary form. The text was first written on the inside (the wax part) and was then also copied on the outside for fear that the wax might melt and the text be destroyed. The copy on the wood begins on the outside of the second tablet, with lines running at right angles to and below the names of the seven witnesses. It is completed on the outside of the first tablet, with the ends of the tablet reversed for the writing.

The father of the girl who has made the declaration is a Roman soldier, which is why the tablet was written in Latin. According to Roman law (Aelian-Sentian and Papian-Poppaean laws of Augustus), the father (or his lawful representative) of every child born of a lawful marriage had to submit a declaration within 30 days of the birth. These declarations (of which the Michigan text is a classic example) were recorded in a public register. Subsequently, official notices were posted in central locations in either Rome or the provincial capitals (in Egypt that city was Alexandria) from which the families could have certified copies made. Illegitimate children were registered until the reign of Marcus Aurelius. As a result, parents of children born during the father's military service drew up unofficial certificates of birth, which were signed by witnesses in order to establish the civic status of the children after the father's discharge.

In general, no class of soldiers of any grade was permitted to marry during service; in most cases the marriage was consummated after the soldier's discharge. Marriages that were contracted before the service were dissolved upon entry into service. Despite the ban, most soldiers were "married" and had children during the period of

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their service. Such marriages were not based, however, on a marriage contract. This practice was so common by the second century that, without altering the illegitimate status of such "wives," the emperors allowed soldiers to draw up wills providing for their families in case of their death during service. The ban on soldier marriage came to an end in 197 CE, under the emperor Septimius Severus.

*Translation:*

When Lucius Nonius Torquatus Asprenas was consul for the second time, with Marcus Annius Libo as colleague (128 CE), on April 13th, in the twelfth year of the emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, on the 18th day of the month Pharmouthi, at Alexandria on the coast of Egypt, a copy was made and verified from a record of declarations of births of children, which record had been posted in the Forum of Augustus; wherein is written that which is written hereinunder:

"In the consulship of Marcus Claudius Squilla Gallicanus and Titus Atilius Rufus Titianus" (127 CE), "in the twelfth year of the emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, when Titus Flavius Titianus was prefect of Egypt, acknowledgments of the births of children were received for record without judicial cognizance;

"Wherein there was written on tablet 8, page 2, in large letters, when Lucius Nonius Torquatus Asprenas was consul for the second time with Marcus Annius Libo, and after other entries on page 9, under the date of March 27th:

"Gaius Herennius Geminianus, whose census rating is 375 sesterces, [declared] that a daughter, Herennia Gemella, was born to him on March 11th, the mother being Diogenis Thermutharion, daughter of Marcus."

*Bibliography:*

Winter 1936: 149–50; Kelsey 1923; Alston 1995

**42** *Census Declaration in Greek*
Ink on papyrus
Bacchias, Egypt
5 May 119 CE
22.0 cm h., 9.5 cm w.
Source: Loan, University of
    Michigan Library, Papyrology
    Collection, P.Mich. Inv. 106
    (=P.Mich. III 178)

Among the thousands of documentary and literary papyri that have survived from Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period is a body of approximately 300 house-to-house census returns. The census was run by the central administration every 14 years in cooperation with administrators of smaller subdivisions down to the village level. This practice of census declarations was introduced in Egypt during the period of Roman rule: the earliest known census dates to 12 CE and the latest to 259 CE. These documents constitute a unique source for demographic studies on household forms, mortality, marriage, fertility, and migration. The census reports typically record not only nuclear families (husband, wife, and children) but often also extended families as well as lodgers and slaves if they were sharing the same quarters with the head of the household responsible for filing the report. Women of all ages and in all sorts of kinship relations (grandmother, mother, daughter, sister, and wife) feature prominently in these reports. Recent studies suggest that Egyptian females (1) tended overwhelmingly to marry at an early age (as early as 12!); (2) had their peak fertility period between the ages of 17 and 20; and (3) were subject to high mortality rates.

The following papyrus belongs to a group of three census returns submitted for three successive census cycles by a family

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resident at Bacchias (a village southwest of modern Cairo). The returns were filed on 10 April 91 CE, 1 December 104 CE, and 5 April 119 CE (present text). In 91 CE Peteuris, son of Horos, declares himself, his wife, and two younger brothers named Horos and Horion. In 104 Peteuris again declares his two brothers, but his wife does not appear any longer as a member of the family: she was either deceased or divorced. But one of the brothers, Horion, has married, and his wife, Thenatumis, makes her first appearance as a member of the family. In the present document the declaration is submitted by Horos, who has also married between 104 and 119. Horos declares his wife Tapekusis and their son, as well as his brother Horion and his wife, along with their children. It seems that Peteuris has died.

*Translation:*

To Eudemos, strategos, and Hermaios, also called Druton, royal secretary of the division of Herakleides of the Arsinoite nome, and Ptolemaios, village secretary, and Aunes, son of Aunes, and Orsenouphis, son of Orsenouphis, registration officers of the village of Bacchias of the same division.

From Horos, the son of Horos, grandson of Horos, his mother being Herieus, daughter of Menches, of the aforesaid village of Bacchias.

There belongs to me and my brother Horion in the village a fourth part of a house and courtyard in which we live, and I register myself and those of my household for the house-by-house census of the past second year of Hadrian Caesar our lord.

I am Horos, the aforesaid, a cultivator of state land, 48 years old, with a scar on my left eyebrow, and (I register):

  my wife Tapekusis, daughter of Horos, 45 years old, and
  our own child, Horos, a son [age lost], without identification marks, and
  Horion, another son, 1(?) year old, without identification marks, and
  my aforesaid brother Horion, 35 years old, with a scar in the middle of his forehead, and
  his wife Thenatumis, daughter of Chariton, about 39 (?) years old, without identification marks, to whom belongs a half share of a house and courtyard in which we live,
  their own son Horos, 1 year old, without identification marks.
  I, Heras, nomographos of Bacchias, wrote it.

(2nd hand) I, Orsenouphis, registration officer, have recorded it through Melanas, secretary.

(3rd hand) I, Aunes, son of Aunes, registration officer, have recorded it through Epimachos, secretary. The third year of Hadrian our lord, Pachon 10 (=May 5).

(4th hand) I, the village secretary, have recorded it. Pachon 10.

*Bibliography:*

Winter 1936: 185–87 (no. 178); Bagnall and Frier 1994: 200.

# Reading Gender in Coptic

Texts in Coptic, the latest stage of the Egyptian language, contain much of interest for the study of gender in Late Antique Egypt. Coptic literary texts include unique material on gender definition, transitional gender categories, gendered constructions of the human body, and alternative sexualities (Wilfong forthcoming c and d). Coptic texts of daily life show trends in gender roles and the status of women that are only beginning to be studied in detail (Wilfong forthcoming c). Coptic documentary texts—contracts, letters, accounts, lists—show the concerns of the Egyptian-literate (or at least Egyptian-speaking) population in a way not seen in Greek or Latin texts from Egypt in the same period. Although many Coptic documentary texts are found on papyrus or even parchment, the majority are written on potsherds or flakes of stone known as ostraca. The Kelsey Museum has approximately 300 Coptic ostraca in its collection. Some of these Coptic ostraca have been published (Worrell 1942), but many remain unpublished; a catalogue of these texts is currently in progress.

**43** *Coptic Ostracon*
Ink on ceramic
Egypt
Late Antique Period (6th–7th
  century CE)
12.2 cm h., 8.1 cm w.
Source: Worrell, 1936
Kelsey Museum 25054
Bibliography: Worrell 1942: 230–
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This ostracon contains a complaint addressed by a woman named Talcho to her "father," probably a spiritual advisor. The text is somewhat obscure; Talcho complains about people camped in her house who steal from her and have had her arrested for some complaint concerning weaving, an activity she could have been performing in her home. Somewhat more dramatically, the original editor of the text thought Talcho was complaining that her "children" had been taken from her, but the word probably means "cakes." Talcho threatens to go stay with her children later in the text, so we get the impression that they are, in fact, independent and probably grown.

*Translation (lines 1–7):*
I, Talcho, greet my father. Look, they remain with me still in my house! They have taken my cakes and they have taken my copper pans. They cheated me of the cloth when they arrested me for it on account of the weaving. . . .

**44** *Coptic Ostracon*
Ink on ceramic
Egypt
Late Antique Period (6th–7th
  century CE)
6.1 cm h., 8.0 cm l.
Source: Schmidt, 1936
Kelsey Museum 25156
Bibliography: Worrell 1942: 226–
  28

In this text, a man writes to his "father" Apa Moses (the religious title "Apa" almost certainly indicates a spiritual "father") concerning the testimony of a woman about various quantities of food items. The lower portion of the text is lost, so we have neither the man's name nor the reason for the questioning. Presumably, the woman has sworn that she has or has not done something with these items—bought, sold, delivered, taken, etc.

*Translation:*
Accordingly, I questioned the woman and she invoked God as witness to me that eleven artaba-measures of wheat, an artaba-measure of dates, and two [. . .]. (Reverse) Give it to the God-loving holy father, Apa Moses, from Apa [. . .

# 6. Gender, Mortality, and Demographics

*The great majority of evidence from ancient Egypt comes from a funerary context: tombs, graves, and associated mortuary space. This source of evidence skews our picture of Egypt and its population to a certain extent but also provides a thorough record of Egyptian practices relating to death. From the earliest periods, the Egyptians commemorated their dead on memorial tablets known as stelae; the dead, their possessions and monuments were also carefully preserved and thoroughly labeled. For the purposes of studying gender in ancient Egypt, such evidence can reveal much about gendered life spans and expectations of an afterlife; this evidence also sheds light on family structure and the gender roles therein. Such material, however, is not adequate for a thorough study of the demographics of gender in ancient Egypt; fortunately, the Roman practice of the census and the survival of many Egyptian returns for the census from this period have provided the raw material for a thorough analysis of the demographics of the Egyptian population in the first and second centuries CE.*

## From Birth to Death and Beyond: Gender, Life Span, Family, and the Afterlife

From the Early Dynastic Period onwards, Pharaonic Egyptians felt the need to record information about the dead—their names, their titles, and their family affiliations. These records are useful for the study of gender in ancient Egypt. At a very basic level, they provide information about the deceased—both men and women are commemorated in funerary stelae from their earliest appearances. More detailed inscriptions can give information about family structure—husband and wife often have joint monuments, sometimes quite elaborate ones recording all the members of a household or extended family. Other such monuments provide details about family relations and economics. The Middle Kingdom stela of Shemsu (**45**), for example, notes his titles and provides the information that his sister was responsible for the monument. Longer and more elaborate funerary stelae and tomb reliefs often give more information, sometimes even autobiographies or biographies of the deceased.

In the Graeco-Roman period, dates and ages at death are frequently recorded (in addition to names, titles, and family

Figure 7 (top)
*Funerary Stela: Reclining Woman*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou),
    Egypt
Roman Period (3rd–4th centuries CE)
16.7 cm h., 41.0 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan
    excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21170
Hooper 1962: no. 155

Figure 8
*Funerary Stela: Reclining Men and
    Woman*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou),
    Egypt
Roman Period (2nd–3rd centuries CE)
26.5 cm h., 35.5 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan
    excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21182
Hooper 1962: no. 136

affiliations) on funerary monuments and equipment; this provides additional information about life span that may be relevant to gendered differences in the population, although in general such samples are neither big enough nor representative enough to permit generalizations about the larger population. A corpus such as the nearly 200 funerary stelae from the University of Michigan excavation at Terenouthis (figs. 7 and 8, and **46–52**) does provide useful information about gender in family structure, especially in the stelae recording the death of more than one family member. Similar information is also recorded on mummy labels, small tags of wood or stone attached to embalmed dead bodies that record the name of the deceased and sometimes information about family, age, and date. The Kelsey Museum mummy label of a woman named Eusebeia (**53**) is typical of such artifacts.

The most detailed, accurate, and extensive information for the population of Roman Egypt comes from records for the living—census returns on papyrus. Over 300 such returns on papyrus survive, most from the second to early third centuries CE; they provide records of individuals in households and their ages (see **42**). R. S. Bagnall and B. W. Frier (1994)

have published an exhaustive study of this material; supplemented by the work of W. Scheidel (1995; 1996a–b), the census returns tell much about life expectancy, family life, and household structure. Much of the information is expected: high mortality among infants and women in childbearing years, earlier ages at marriage for women, and an average life expectancy at birth of 22–25. Some trends in this evidence are peculiar to Egypt, most notably the high incidence of full brother-sister marriage—a phenomenon unusual in human history, let alone the ancient world. Less predictable trends observable in the census returns include differences in sex ratio between village and city and the frequency of multiple-family households. The census returns also tell us much about the idiosyncrasies of reportage of demographic information in Roman Egypt: certain ages are avoided because of the unluckiness of particular numbers, certain ages (most often those ending in 0 or 5) are overreported, and various other trends also affect interpretation of the census returns (Scheidel 1996b). The census returns provide much specific information about the impact of gender and the structure of gender relations in the lives of Egyptians in the Roman period.

**45** *Stela of Shemsu, Made by His Sister Ny*
Limestone
Egypt
Middle Kingdom (1991–1783 BCE)
26 cm h., 21.75 cm w., 5.0 cm thickness
Source: Bay View, 1971
Kelsey Museum 71.2.190
Bibliography: McCleary 1987: 7; Richards and
Wilfong 1995: 23.

This stela represents the man Shemsu,
described as a royal official, seated before an
offering table, smelling a lotus. The texts below
give Shemsu's name and titles, preceded by a
standard offering formula. The inscriptions
conclude with a note of the person who apparently
commissioned the stela: his sister (in this case,
"sister" probably means just that and not "wife").
Such an object shows that a woman could
command the resources and authority necessary to
commission such an object for a male relative,
while being able to commemorate herself in the
process. As noted above in chapter 1, this stela had
been previously identified as that of a woman.

*Translation:*
An offering that the king gives (to) Osiris,
Lord of Abydos, that he may give invocation-

offerings of bread, beer, oxen, fowl, and every
good and pure thing upon which a god lives to the
spirit of the follower of the Lord of the Two Lands
Shemsu. It is his sister who makes his name live:
Ny.

**46** *Funerary Stela: Standing Woman*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou), Egypt
Roman Period (3rd–4th centuries CE)
34.5 cm h., 16.1 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21027
Bibliography: Hooper 1962: no. 16

This stela shows the dead woman standing,
her arms raised in an attitude of prayer.

*Translation of Greek text:*
Artemis, dead before her time, aged 10(+?)

**47** *Funerary Stela: Standing Woman*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou), Egypt: Locus 10-
A87
Roman Period (3rd–4th centuries CE)
25.7 cm h., 17.6 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21026
Bibliography: Hooper 1962: no. 27

Similar to **46**, this stela shows the dead
woman standing, arms raised, beneath a painted
black band, resembling the Egyptian hieroglyphic
symbol for "heaven."

*Translation of Greek text:*
Thaatres, aged 17

**48** *Funerary Stela: Standing Woman in Shrine*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou), Egypt
Roman Period (2nd–3rd centuries CE)
37.2 cm h., 32.6 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21055
Bibliography: Hooper 1962: no. 73

This depiction of the dead woman standing
is more elaborate than the previous examples: she
stands in a shrine between a falcon and a dog,
symbols of the Egyptian gods Horus and Anubis.
The date of the stela on or after day 10 of the

month of Athyr suggests a possible relation to the several stelae from Athyr 11 of year 20 (see **52** below and fig. 8 above).

*Translation of Greek text:*
. . .] aged 20, (in the month) Athyr 10 (+?)



**49**

**49** *Funerary Stela: Reclining Women and Man*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou), Egypt
Roman Period (2nd–3rd centuries CE)
40.0 cm diameter, 7.6 cm thickness
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21145
Bibliography: Allen and Dix 1991: 118–19 (no. 135)

The relief shows two women and a man reclining, all of whom look roughly the same age. From the inscription, though, we see that the piece was inscribed for a middle-aged man and two young girls, presumably his daughters. This may have been a "generic" relief, chosen because of the appropriateness of the grouping of two females and one male. But it may have also been deliberately carved in this manner, showing the two girls at an ideal age for eternity. Epitaphs and inscriptions (including **46**, **50**, and **52** in this exhibition) often refer to a woman as someone who "died before her time"; representing such women as adults on funerary monuments may have been intended to insure maturity in the afterlife.

*Translation of Greek text:*
Ermeias, aged 6, Thermoutis, aged 1, Ammonis, aged 42

**50** *Funerary Stela: Reclining Woman*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou), Egypt
Roman Period (3rd–4th centuries CE)
20.6 cm h., 21.2 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21160
Bibliography: Hooper 1962: no. 172

In this stela, the dead woman is shown holding a jar of wine while reclining on a couch, under which are shown funerary offerings. To the left is a dog, representing the Egyptian funerary god Anubis.

*Translation of Greek text:*
Aged 16, Isa[. . .], who loved her children and has died before her time (in) year 7

**51** *Funerary Stela: Reclining Woman, Standing Man*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou), Egypt
Roman Period (3rd–4th centuries CE)
39.4 cm h., 27.6 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21179
Bibliography: Hooper 1962: no. 139; McCleary 1987: 10, fig. 22; Allen and Dix 1991: 119 (no. 136); Thomas 1995: 234–35

In this stela, the dead woman reclines on a funerary couch, while the dead man stands near her (drawn to a much smaller scale), and between them sits the dog, symbol of the funerary god Anubis. Single dates on stelae for more than one person raise the possibility that they commemorate people who died at the same time.

*Translation:*
Heraklea, aged 60, Ares, aged 52. Year 5, (in the month of) Mechir, (day) 1

populations in northern or southern Egypt in the late second century CE, may well be responsible for many of the deaths recorded in the Terenouthis stelae (see Bagnall and Frier 1994: 174–77 for discussion of the demographic impact of the plague and references).

*Translation:*
Artemis, aged 47. Isadora, dead before her time, aged 8. Karpime, who loved her children, aged 50. (In) year 20, (month of) Athyr, (day) 11.



**52**

**52** *Funerary Stela: Reclining and Standing Women*
Painted limestone
Terenouthis (Kom Abu Billou), Egypt
Roman Period (2nd century CE)
28.7 cm h., 42.2 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 21180
Bibliography: Hooper 1962: no. 171, Haeckl and
    Spelman 1977: 94 (no. 92); McCleary 1987: 9.

A funerary stela for two women (shown reclining) and a girl (shown standing). The family relationship depicted here is unclear; most likely this represents two sisters and the daughter of one of them. Such groups with a single date (like **51**) suggest the commemoration of people who died at the same time. The number of stelae from Terenouthis dated to the 11th of Athyr, year 20 of an unnamed ruler, has led some scholars to the conclusion that there was some sort of disaster on that date near Terenouthis, resulting in multiple deaths within families (McCleary 1987: 9). The "Antonine Plague" in Egypt, which affected

**53**

**53** *Mummy Label*
Incised wood
Egypt
Roman Period (2nd century CE)
4.3 cm h., 13.0 cm w.
Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 23454
Bibliography: Allen and Dix 1991: 105–6 (no. 107)

In Graeco-Roman Egypt, the custom of labeling embalmed dead bodies with stone or wooden tags became common. Such mummy labels served to identify bodies through the embalming process, in transit, and even in the afterlife. Minimally, these labels give the name of the deceased, but many give details of family, place of origin, age at death, and occasionally date of death. The present label is made of wood and bears a Greek inscription: "Eusebeia, (daughter of) Hierax. She lived 18 years."

# 7. Faces of Gender

*In human images from ancient Egypt, attention was centered, first and foremost, on the face. The face of any representation of a human contained important information about identity. In general, however, Egyptian faces are not portraits as we would understand them; rather than a literal representation of the face of an actual person, the Egyptians usually showed faces as ideal images, even composites of ideal features and attributes. These ideal images of faces often encode complex information about status and, not surprisingly, gender. Color, shape, indications of facial hair, gender-specific jewelry, hairstyles, and headdresses are all clues to gender identity that can often be found in faces in Egyptian art. When such signs of gender are absent from Egyptian faces, we must consider whether they have been lost or were never originally present.*

## Revealing Masks

The use of face masks of some sort on the dead body is a tradition that goes back far into Egyptian history. Great care was taken with these masks, which were not intended as portraits as much as idealized images—faces to serve a person in the afterlife. The use of face masks on dead bodies, whether placed directly onto the mummy itself or attached to an outer covering or coffin, persisted well into the Graeco-Roman period. Such face masks sometimes reflected ancient Egyptian iconographical traditions but often showed the influence of Graeco-Roman artistic styles and conventions. In addition to cartonnage masks of traditional Egyptian style and the panel portraits (**62–63**) discussed below, the Kelsey Museum has a number of Graeco-Roman plaster mummy masks, which were featured in a 1979 Kelsey exhibition "Masks of Immortality" (Root 1979). Masks from this group are included in the present exhibition to illustrate how the artists indicated (or did not indicate) gender. Gender could be signaled in a number of ways in these face masks. Color could be used as a gender marker: male faces were often painted pink (**57**) or reddish brown (**56, 61**), while the faces of women were most often a light color (**54**). Color was most vulnerable to deterioration (e.g., **55, 58, 60**), but other indicators of gender are usually present. The depiction of facial hair (**56–57**) was not only an

obvious sign of a male face but could also (depending on the style and extent of facial hair) show signs of age and status (Montserrat 1993). Hairstyles could indicate something about gender—the short, curly hair of a young man (57), the short straight hair of boys (55, 61), or the hairstyles typical of a woman in the Roman period (54, 58, 59). Earrings were used only in masks of some women (54, 59) and often provide important clues as to age, date, and status of the women depicted. Sometimes, a face mask has either lost all signs of gender or never had them to begin with (60). If intentional, such ungendered masks could be a convenience to the family of the deceased and may simply reflect the image of a dead person safely in the afterlife, without reference to gender.



**54**

**55**

54 *Mummy Mask: Woman*
Painted plaster
Egypt
Roman Period (late 1st–early 2nd centuries CE)
29.0 cm h., 15.0 cm w.
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88232
Bibliography: Root 1979: 45 (no. 24)

55 *Mummy Mask: Beardless Boy*
Plaster, glass
Egypt
Roman Period (early 2nd century CE)
13.7 cm h., 13.0 cm w., 10.5 cm thickness
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88242
Bibliography: Root 1979: 40 (no. 20)

56



58

**56**    *Mummy Mask: Bearded Man*
Painted plaster
Egypt
Roman Period (early 2nd century CE)
19.2 cm h., 16.0 cm w.
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88237
Bibliography: Root 1979: 36 (no. 16)

**57**    *Mummy Mask: Bearded Man*
Painted plaster
Egypt
Roman Period (early–mid 2nd century CE)
20.2 cm h., 17.7 cm w.
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88236
Bibliography: Root 1979: 34 (no. 15)

**58**    *Mummy Mask: Woman*
Plaster, glass
Egypt
Roman Period (late 2nd century CE)
17.2 cm h., 17.0 cm w.
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88235
Bibliography: Root 1979: 48 (no. 27)

**59**    *Mummy Mask: Woman*
Painted plaster
Egypt
Roman Period (1st–early 2nd centuries CE)
15.5 cm h., 14.2 cm w.
Source: Ruthven, 1965
Kelsey Museum 65.3.14
Bibliography: Root 1979: 42 (no. 22)

60



61

**60**   *Mummy Mask of Indeterminate Gender*
Plaster, glass
Egypt
Roman Period (2nd century CE)
20.5 cm h., 17.3 cm w., 13.1 cm thickness
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88239
Bibliography: Root 1979: 38 (no. 18)

**61**   *Mummy Mask: Beardless Boy*
Painted plaster
Egypt
Roman Period (early 2nd century CE)
15.0 cm h., 14.0 cm w., 10.3 cm thickness
Source: N. Tano, 1952
Kelsey Museum 88243
Bibliography: Root 1979: 41 (no. 21)

*by Jennifer Trimble*

Fayum Portraits in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology:
Representing Gender and Status in Roman Egypt

   The two funerary portraits from Roman Egypt repro-
duced here clearly depict a woman and a man. But what
elements of the paintings permit so confident a statement? This
essay will be concerned with the representation of gender in
these two portraits. Such an analysis in turn raises a second
question: to what end is gender represented in specific ways in
these visual documents? This inquiry can provide insight into
the world in which these images were commissioned and seen.
   These two portraits are part of a corpus of paintings from
Egypt commonly known as "Fayum portraits," so called after
the area in which many have been found (Parlasca 1969).
Fayum portraits date to the period of Roman rule in Egypt;
most are from Lower Egypt, although they have been found in
Upper Egypt as well. Unfortunately, the two examples dis-
cussed here were not obtained by excavation (Root 1979: 52,
54); priceless information about the images and their subjects is
accordingly lost. Still, the examination of the portraits in
conjunction with information gained from the excavation of

62                                        63



62 *Portrait of a Woman*
   Encaustic and gold leaf on wood
       panel
   Egypt
   Roman Period (1st–2nd
       centuries CE)
   39.5 cm h., 17.0 cm w., 1.0 cm
       thickness
   Source: N. Tano, 1935
   Kelsey Museum 26801
   Bibliography: Parlasca 1969: 66
       (no. 142); Root 1979: 52 (no.
       29)

63 *Portrait of a Man*
   Encaustic on wood panel
   Minya (?), Egypt
   Roman Period (2nd century CE)
   33.5 cm h., 14.0 cm w., 1.6 cm
       thickness
   Source: Ruthven, 1935
   Kelsey Museum 26574
   Bibliography: Root 1979: 54 (no.
       31)

58

others provides some sense of their original meanings and significance.

Fayum portraits are mummy portraits and as such are an integral part of Egyptian traditions and beliefs concerning death. Both of the Kelsey portraits have traces of linen mummy wrappings and bitumen fixative on the back. They, like all excavated examples—with a single exception discussed below (Petrie 1889: 10, pl. xii)—were once a part of the elaborate wrappings of the dead, an element of the religious procedures intended to achieve immortality for the deceased. The individuality and beauty of the Fayum portraits can be understood within the same religious framework.

From the Old Kingdom on, the representation of the facial features was an important part of preserving the individual after death (Root 1979: 3-5). Traditionally, this representation was not veristic but idealized in a highly intellectualized conception of human likeness (Root 1979: 5). Some of this tradition is visible in Fayum portraits, even though they were painted in a veristic manner familiar from Graeco-Roman art (see below). The Kelsey portrait of the woman (62) compellingly represents an individual; her image is also somewhat idealized, in that she is depicted as youthful, healthy, and lovely. Although we know nothing of the age or appearance of this woman when she died, other mummies are known in which the age of the deceased bears little relation to that depicted on the portrait (Corcoran 1995; Doxiadis 1995 *passim*). This idealization, in the Roman period as in Pharaonic Egypt, was intended to help the deceased achieve immortality (Corcoran 1995: 4–5).

Yet the relative youth depicted on the portraits had other meanings as well. Fayum portraits clearly had a role before death. Portraits found on mummies were all cut down from a larger, rectangular shape, presumably to fit well onto the mummy. The top edge of the Kelsey portrait of a woman is original and shows a distinct boundary to the painting just inside the edge of the wood. The bottom edge is rougher and may have been cut down at the time of mummification; the two sides of the portrait, in contrast, are modern breaks. The portrait of a man retains original edges along the bottom and side; the diagonal cuts at each corner were made at some point after the portrait was painted, perhaps upon mummification.

Fayum portraits sometimes show signs of wear underneath the bandages, indicating lengthy display before mummification (Corcoran 1995: 75). In a tomb at Hawara, a rectangular portrait was found in a frame; the frame had a groove for a sliding cover and had hung on a wall before being placed in the tomb (Petrie 1889: 10, pl. xii). A portrait displayed during its subject's lifetime may have commemorated an individual's

cultic initiation and hence, like mummification, can be under-
stood in light of Egyptian religious traditions (Corcoran 1992,
now included in Corcoran 1995: 75–76). But not all aspects of
the portraits can be explained in this way.

After death, mummies with portraits were not immedi-
ately buried. Extensive signs of wear on excavated portrait
mummies suggest lengthy exposure to people, birds, and the
elements over a long period of time, although nothing is
known of what kind of space might have housed them (Petrie
1889 and 1911). This space was not in cemeteries; when
portrait mummies did eventually arrive at a cemetery, it was to
be buried hastily and unceremoniously, in striking contrast to
the care, time, and money spent on mummification. The
display of portrait mummies among the living represented a
change in Egyptian religious traditions, a significant change
considering that portrait mummies represented only one of
several available funerary practices in Roman Egypt (Petrie
1889: 15; Grimm 1974). With this contextual information in
mind, how may we account for gendered aspects of the
portraits' creation and display?

Let us return to an examination of the two Kelsey
portraits and to the genders they depict. The fragmentary
portrait (63) depicts an individual with a beard and a receding
hairline, wearing white clothing with a vertical purple stripe at
the right shoulder. The relatively flat, uniform beige tones
around the hairline and mouth appear to have been added after
the face itself was painted with varied tones of red and pink in
the cheek. The other portrait (62) represents a person with
long hair bound up in a complicated hairdo, elaborate jewelry,
and no facial hair. This individual's clothing is purple and has a
gilt-edged vertical stripe at the right shoulder.

In traditional Egyptian painting, skin color distinguishes
men from women, perhaps founded on the conception that
red was a masculine color and yellow feminine (Corcoran
1995: 56). Yet comparison of the Kelsey's portraits with others
from Roman Egypt suggests that neither skin color nor bone
structure distinguished men from women. Rather, in the
Fayum portraits, gender is a matter of conventional details,
easily added to a human face. The added paint at the hairline of
the Kelsey portrait of a man (63) suggests a change made after
the face had been painted, either because the portrait of this
individual was made to look older or because the portrait had
once portrayed someone else, or, most probably, because the
individuality of this portrait was built up from a generic image.
It is clear that gendered details could be added to mummy
masks made from a unisex mold (Grimm 1974: 103). Portraits
may have been made the same way. Without jewelry and with
short, curly hair and a beard, the Kelsey portrait of a woman

would become an image of a man. Similarly, if the portrait of a man had an elaborate hairdo, jewelry, and no facial hair, the image would become that of a woman.

In Fayum portraits, gender is represented through instantly recognizable, conventional details. It could be argued that this is simply a matter of artistic technique or efficiency in producing portraits for sale. Yet both the conventional nature of this kind of representation and the particular details that marked different genders were important elements in communicating the social and religious identity of the individuals portrayed (Montserrat 1993: 79). For men, facial hair indicated not only masculinity but also adulthood; children and adolescent males each had their own distinct visual signifiers (Montserrat 1993). Likewise, adult females were visually distinguished from girls. In contrast to men, women in the portraits invariably wear their hair up in complicated arrangements. In Egyptian tradition, women's hair told much about age and social role. Different wigs and hairdos were appropriate to childhood, adulthood, pregnancy, childbirth, or lactation; hair was also charged with erotic meaning (Robins 1993: 83, 90–91, 183–85). Although these portraits do not replicate hairstyles from traditional Egyptian iconography (see below), women's hair is clearly a marker of adult female identity. As we shall see, it may have indicated status as well.

The significance of jewelry in representing gender is clear. Carefully depicted jewelry is almost always included in Fayum portraits of women but not of men. In the Kelsey portrait of a woman (62), the earrings and necklaces are as much the object of detailed portraiture as is the woman herself. Her earrings are not unusual in the corpus of portraits; they consist of a golden bar from which three gold pendants with pearls at the end dangle, with a fourth pearl at the earlobe attachment. Her two gold necklaces, however, appear to be unique; the closest parallel known to me is the somewhat similar jewelry represented on a three-dimensional Severan mummy mask in the Louvre (Grimm 1974: 88, pl. 95.1). The Kelsey woman's upper necklace has a central golden plate from which hang three large pendant gems, two brown stones flanking a blue-black stone. A second necklace lies below the first, consisting of a gold chain with gold pendants ending in alternating pearls and square green gems. The jewelry was added onto the portrait in actual gilt, although whether this occurred just after the initial creation of the portrait or later cannot be determined.

The detail with which the jewelry is depicted is striking; it is also the rule in mummy portraits. This means that both the presence of jewelry and its precise depiction were important. Recent x-ray and computer scanning of intact portrait mummies

indicates that actual jewelry was not included in portrait mummies (Corcoran 1995: 76). This makes sense in light of Egyptian funerary traditions. From dynastic times onward, the dead were buried with images and figures of servants, food, and materials intended to reproduce the dead person's status and lifestyle on earth and assure their continuity in the afterworld; representation was considered to be as effective as actual people and objects. The representation of jewelry on Fayum portraits stood in for a woman's actual jewelry and ensured that she would continue into the afterlife with it. Gold was particularly desirable in a funerary context, for it was associated with the sun god and hence life (Corcoran 1995: 57).

How then to explain the restriction of representations of jewelry to females in Fayum portraits? The individualized depiction of jewelry may be connected to a woman's dowry. Jewelry as a portable and measurable form of wealth in Roman Egypt is mentioned as part of women's dowries and is described there in terms of its specific weight and value (Lewis 1983: 55 and 73). Providing a daughter with an especially rich dowry of jewelry, clothing, and money could be a form of status display for a wealthy family. A woman's dowry also played a role in contracts guaranteeing proper relations between husband and wife (Lewis 1983: 55 and 73). The jewelry represented with such prominence and detail on Fayum portraits may accordingly be seen to display a woman's status and membership in the social order. The portrayal of a woman's jewelry, like the portrayal of her idealized facial features, played an essential role in representing her optimal social identity and status in life and in ensuring its continuation into the afterlife.

Thus far, much about the constructions of gender in these portraits can be explained in terms of the continuity of Egyptian social and religious tradition. But certain aspects of these images reflect changes particular to Egypt during the early Roman Empire, from the first to the early third centuries CE. As noted above, portrait mummies were displayed among the living during this period, in a break with Egyptian religious traditions and in contrast to other forms of funerary ritual available in Egypt at the time. The portraits themselves date to this period and are most frequent during the second century CE, according to the most recent assessment of the chronological evidence (Borg 1995). Significantly, this chronological range can be determined with some confidence because the depiction of hair and beard styles on the portraits follows the well-known and frequently changing styles seen on Roman portrait sculpture around the Mediterranean. It is this characteristic that permits the Kelsey portrait of a woman (62)

to be dated to the late Trajanic period and the portrait of a man (63) to be identified as Severan in date. Fayum portraits do not represent traditional Egyptian hair and beard styles; rather, the portraits were clearly painted in awareness of larger cultural trends in the Mediterranean world.

During this period, veristic portraiture played a significant role in the social and cultural world of the early Roman Empire. This was the period when Roman domination in the eastern Mediterranean was consolidated under a series of emperors and the political stability they were able to impose. Hellenism played an increasingly important role in the cultural and social cohesion of the empire's upper classes—especially in the second century CE; classicizing portraiture became a significant form of self-representation and status display in many areas of the empire. The patrons of the Fayum portraits in Egypt, like the man and woman depicted here, were clearly wealthy and hellenized (Montserrat 1996b). Their ethnic affiliation—whether they were "Egyptians," "Greeks," or "Romans"—is probably not the key to understanding the religious and cultural choices they made (Montserrat 1996b; Corcoran 1995: 68; Ritner 1992). Rather, it perhaps makes better sense to think in terms of people living within a culturally complex society, actively responding to social and cultural developments.

The patrons of the Fayum portraits participated in large cultural trends but adapted them in their own social and religious interests. The Fayum portraits are hellenizing in style but were integrated into Egyptian religious practices as part of mummification and its attendant rituals. The portraits were displayed before and after death but arguably with (at least) twofold meaning: they filled a religious role while establishing status with reference to empirewide elite cultural forms. Individual women's faces were depicted with hairstyles reproduced from imperial sculpture; however, they also took care to include the portrayal of pieces of jewelry, adding the significance of gold ornamentation and dowry items particular to society in Roman Egypt.

Lorelei Corcoran has suggested that the wealthy class that commissioned Fayum portraits and included them in their funerary outfits were representing their own cultural and political importance as guardians of the traditional order (Corcoran 1995: 78). But their self-representation as adherents of the empire is equally important. Such a strategy is consistent with what we know of local elite behavior elsewhere in the early Roman Empire, where local elites sought to maintain their own position by identifying and representing themselves in terms of both regional traditions and the ruling power (Price 1984; Rives 1995). The careful replication of imperial

hairstyles in Fayum portraits laid claim to status that had as its basis the legitimacy of the ruling order.

Visual conventions in representing gender—hairstyles, facial hair, jewelry—were embedded in the social and religious organization of people's lives. In their portraiture, the patrons of the Fayum portraits selected from among available cultural and religious forms with their own religious and social interests in mind. As elements of funerary ritual, the portraits helped ensure the eternal life of the deceased. They were equally successful in representing the response of one group of Egyptians to life in the Roman Empire.

# 8. Gender in the Archaeological Record

*As seen in the preceding sections, much of our knowledge of the definitions and understandings of gender in ancient Egypt comes from textual and representational evidence. Another important category of sources for women and gender in ancient Egypt is archaeological materials. Looking at gender-related evidence has become increasingly common among archaeologists (see the different approaches in Gero and Conkey 1991) for a number of reasons. On a very basic level, human remains preserve the bodies of the ancient people themselves. In well-preserved remains, biological sex is usually obvious, but the determination of sex in human skeletal remains is a complex endeavor surveyed in the article below. Once identified as male or female, human remains can be used to help understand gendered differences in life expectancy, diet, disease, physical activity, and postmortem treatment. Indeed, such remains are often the only direct evidence for the lives of non-elite women and men, who left behind little or nothing in the written record, and the only direct evidence for preliterate periods. Beyond the study of the remains of the ancient Egyptians themselves, the artifacts they left behind, when found in the course of a controlled archaeological excavation, can afford valuable evidence for gender in terms of their context. What objects are found in the graves of only men or only women? Is there significant difference in the context of representations of males and females? In domestic contexts, does the artifactual evidence suggest gendered space? Is it possible to identify gender-specific occupations from the archaeological record? These are just some of the questions that archaeologists are beginning to examine from the point of view of the ancient Egyptian evidence.*

## The Gurob Grave Group

The problems faced by archaeologists who look for gender in artifactual remains are illustrated by a group of artifacts from a single grave at the site of Gurob. These objects come from a human burial of the First Dynasty (3100–2900 BCE) and were part of an assemblage of pottery and other objects that were standard grave goods for a burial in this period and region. The positioning of objects in relation to the dead body is seen in the plan of the grave, a typical pit burial of the era, numbered 103 by the excavators. (See Burns 1995 for an in-depth discussion of this find.)

The original excavators of this burial identified it as the grave of a woman but did not publish their reasons for doing so. There were no texts associated with the burial (indeed, texts would be very unusual in a nonroyal burial of this period), so the excavators would have made their identification based on nontextual evidence. The grave goods could have been examined for what they might tell about the sex of the deceased; in the descriptions of the objects that follow, the possibilities for using them for this purpose are discussed. Another possibility is the examination of the skeletal remains in the grave for biological sex of the deceased. In the article that follows, the criteria used by the physical anthropologist for sexing skeletons are examined. We can assume that the excavators used both kinds of evidence in their identification of this burial as that of a woman. But we cannot be certain how modern excavators would have interpreted the same evidence if found today.

The case of the Gurob grave group highlights the importance of archaeological context for understanding the relation of artifacts to the study of gender. Had any of the objects from this group appeared individually on the antiquities market, we would not have seen how they relate to each other or to the rest of the burial as a whole; their relevance to the question of the sex of the person buried in Gurob grave 103 would have been completely lost.

Figure 9. Gurob grave 103, with locations of objects 64–67

These 13 pieces of raw galena—lead sulfite—were found in the calcite bowl **64** in Gurob grave 103. They would have been ground up and used as an ingredient in eye paint; galena was commonly used for this purpose, and there is much later documentation of the procedures by which galena was obtained. In ancient Egypt both men and women wore eye paint; it served not only to adorn the eyes but also to help protect from blowing sand and the sun's glare. These fragments were only recently identified as galena by Kelsey Museum Curator of Conservation Geoffrey I. Brown during the course of conservation work for this exhibition.

64
65
66
67

**64** *Bowl*
Calcite
Gurob, Egypt: Tomb 103
Early Dynastic Period (3100–2900 BCE)
6 cm h.
Source: W. M. Flinders Petrie, 1921
Kelsey Museum 1899
Bibliography: Brunton and Englebach 1927: 6
and pls. 3–4; Burns 1995

A stone vessel of elegant simplicity, this bowl represents the kind of fine stonework found in the Early Dynastic period. The maker of this bowl has taken advantage of the veining in the stone to produce a banding effect. This is the only stone vessel from Gurob grave 103, although several pottery jars and bowls were found there as well.

**65** *Fragments of Raw Minerals for Eye Paint*
Galena
Gurob, Egypt: Tomb 103
Early Dynastic Period (3100–2900 BCE)
Largest fragment 1.5 cm l.
Source: W. M. Flinders Petrie, 1921
Kelsey Museum 1901
Bibliography: Brunton and Englebach 1927: 6
and pls. 3–4; Burns 1995

**66** *Hairpin*
Bone
Gurob, Egypt: Tomb 103
Early Dynastic Period (3100–2900 BCE)
11 cm l.
Source: W. M. Flinders Petrie, 1921
Kelsey Museum 1900
Bibliography: Brunton and Englebach 1927: 6
and pls. 3–4; Burns 1995

This simple, undecorated bone hairpin, one of four from grave 103, is a common style for such artifacts in the Early Dynastic period. This is a relatively certain example of a "gendered" artifact, in that there is no evidence that men used such objects; its presence makes it likely that the burial in Gurob grave 103 was that of a woman.

**67** *Bead Necklace*
Limestone, modern string
Gurob, Egypt: Tomb 103
Early Dynastic Period (3100–2900 BCE)
Entire string 29 cm l.
Source: W. M. Flinders Petrie, 1921
Kelsey Museum 1904
Bibliography: Brunton and Englebach 1927: 6
and pls. 3–4; Burns 1995

A necklace of 78 small beads and a single slightly larger bead in the center, found around the neck of the skeleton in Gurob grave 103. Both men and women wore jewelry in ancient Egypt. A necklace like this would have more likely been worn by a woman in later periods, but the evidence for earlier periods is less definite. These ancient beads have been remounted on a modern string.

*by Geoffrey F. Compton*

Determination of Biological Sex
from Human Skeletal Remains

When confronted with human remains from an archaeo-
logical site, the physical anthropologist's first task is to deter-
mine the age, biological sex, race, and stature of the
individual(s) present in the material evidence. This task is
simplified in cases of unusual preservation such as mummified
remains or bog-bodies, which retain soft tissues and organs,
allowing for secure assignation of biological sex and stature and
fairly secure estimation of age and race. Yet such cases of
unusual preservation are rare. More frequently, the physical
anthropologist must examine the often-fragmentary skeletal
remains alone. Both natural and cultural processes affect the
state of preservation of skeletal remains, often by displacing
portions of the skeleton, by changing the shape of the bone
itself, or by inflicting postmortem markings on the bone,
which may be mistaken for ante- or peri-mortem trauma.
These processes must be taken into account by the physical
anthropologist: simply stated, the skeletal remains can never be
divorced from their archaeological context. Nor can the
remains be studied separate from their wider biocultural
context, as human groups can vary significantly from one
another in their skeletal forms. Skeletal traits that are character-
istically male in one group may not appear as such in a second
group, and the interaction of humans with different environ-
ments will also produce specific skeletal variations. Moreover,
there is potential for variation in individual skeletons even
within groups. For all these reasons, physical anthropologists
can rarely be absolutely certain of the age, biological sex, race,
or stature of individuals as represented by their skeletons alone.
Instead, they can offer statistically probable determinations
based upon general observations and measurements, the
archaeological context, and seriation within the wider
biocultural context.

With these caveats in mind, let us now address specifically
the question of how physical anthropologists determine the
biological sex of human adult skeletal remains. At the most
basic level of visual observation, adult male skeletal compo-
nents can be described as larger and longer, with more marked
sites for muscle attachments than their female counterparts
(robust *versus* gracile). Yet given the potential for variability as
noted above, this visual level of identification is insufficient.
Based on their own training and experience, physical anthro-
pologists may disagree with regard to the biological sex of an
individual, especially an individual from an archaeological
population for which comparative skeletal material is limited.
Furthermore, the inherent subjectivity of visual attempts to
describe sexual dimorphism limits its usefulness, as multiple

observers may not "see" the remains in the same manner. Quantifying these observations in the form of standardized measurements of specific points on the skeleton (osteometry) is, however, quite useful and does limit the subjectivity of the single observer. Osteometry also allows for the construction of databases for human skeletal remains, which speed access to comparative materials and allow for more precise demographic determinations in osteological analysis.

The most important area of the adult human skeleton for the estimation of biological sex is the pelvis (fig. 10). The pelvic girdle, comprised by the sacrum and the fused bones of the paired innominates, forms the inferior opening of the pelvis known in females as the birth canal. The traditional "rule of thumb" for determining biological sex from the pelvis has been that if one could imagine a baby's head passing through this canal, then the individual was most likely a female and that the wider and more spacious the cavity of the pelvis itself, the greater the probability that the remains are female. While this visual method is reasonably accurate, it does not account for variation within either the human species or the specific study population, nor does it take into account the natural changes in the shape of the pelvis within the lifetime of the individual. Applying osteometric techniques to objectify these visual observations has been very successful, particularly with respect to samples that traditionally would have been labeled "of indeterminate sex." Important indices for measuring the pelvic girdle are the breadth of the sacrum (fig. 10, A), the diameter of the transverse inlet, the length of the pubis (fig. 10, D), the breadth of the posterior inferior spine of the ilium (fig. 10, B), and the maximum breadth of the ischium (fig. 10, C) (Schultz 1930; Washburn 1948).

In addition, other components of pelvic morphology can be measured in order to estimate an individual's biological sex, especially in cases where the pelvic remains are fragmentary. The acetabulum, into which the head of the femur articulates, is typically larger in males and tends to be directed laterally, while in females it tends to be directed anterolaterally, reflecting the overall widening of the pelvic girdle for reproductive purposes (fig. 10, E). Second, the subpubic angle is typically V-shaped and sharp in males, while in females it is U-shaped and

Figure 10
Anterior view of the adult male (left) and adult female (right) pelvis. Major features: (A) sacrum, (B) ilium, (C) ischium, (D) pubis, (E) acetabulum, (F) pubic symphysis, (G) subpubic angle, (H) ischiopubic ramus.
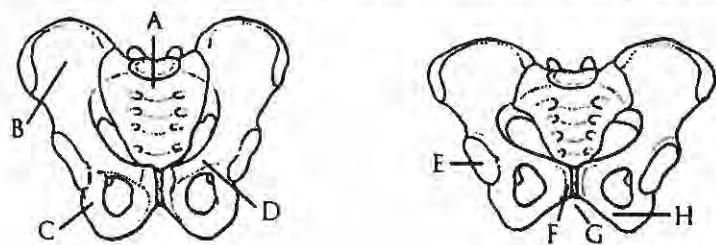
Figure 11

Lateral view of the adult male (left) and adult female (right) skull. Major features: (A) supraorbital ridges, (B) mastoid process, (C) ascending ramus of the mandible, (D) forehead, (E) zygomatic bone, (F) chin, (G) gonial angle of the mandible.
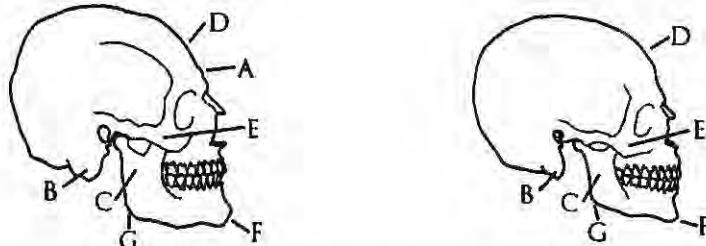


rounded (fig. 10, G). A third index is the angle of the greater sciatic notch, which in males is smaller in overall dimensions with an acute angle and in females is large, wide, and has an angle approaching 90°. Fourth, and particularly useful with fragmentary remains, is the shape and angle of the ischiopubic ramus: slightly everted and quite thick in males, it is very strongly everted and thin in females, again reflecting the overall widening of the pelvic girdle (fig. 10, H). Two other elements of pelvic morphology—the pubic symphysis (fig. 10, F) and the ventral arc—are useful diagnostics for establishing the biological sex of an individual, but owing to their fragility, these rarely survive undamaged in archaeological specimens (Phenice 1969). One note of caution: independently, none of these observations can absolutely identify an individual's biological sex, but several measurements used together in the form of a multivariate discriminant function substantially increase the accuracy of the identification.

If enough of the pelvis is lacking to perform the necessary observations and measurements, the second-best area of the human adult skeleton for determining biological sex is the skull (fig. 11). As is the case with the pelvis, the adult male skull is often larger, with more defined muscle markings. The supraorbital ridges (fig. 11, A), the mastoid processes (fig. 11, B), the mandible, and the occipital condyles—where the skull attaches to the vertebral column—are typically larger and more rugged in males than females. The general shape of the skull differs in males and females as well, as females tend to have larger frontal and parietal eminences, which contribute to an almost vertical forehead, while male foreheads tend to be sloping and less rounded (fig. 11, D). Also, female zygomatics (cheek bones) are usually lighter and more compressed than their male counterparts, resulting in a narrower, more gracile skull (fig. 11, E). Even by itself, the mandible is useful for the estimation of biological sex. The ascending ramus of the mandible is very broad in males, and the mandibular symphysis is larger and higher (fig. 11, C); male mandibles are U-shaped at the chin, while female mandibles are V-shaped (fig. 11, F); and the gonial angle of the mandible is more angled in males

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than in females, where it approaches vertical (fig. 11, G). Yet, as with the pelvis, several morphological traits of the skull must be combined together in a discriminant function to ensure the accuracy of the identification (Giles and Elliott 1963; Acsádi and Nemeskéri 1970).

In other instances, the physical anthropologist may be confronted with either a badly fragmented skeleton for which the pelvis and skull are beyond reconstruction or even a single bone. In these cases, it is possible to estimate the sex of the individual, although with much less accuracy. Indices have been developed for the determination of biological sex based on dimensions of the clavicle (Thieme 1957), the scapula (Krogman 1962), the sternum (Stewart and McCormick 1983), the humerus (France 1983), the radius (Garn et al. 1966), the femur (Krogman 1962), and the tibia (Symes and Jantz 1983) when preserved in their entirety, and for the humerus, the femur, and the tibia in fragmentary condition (Dittrick and Suchey 1986; Black 1978).

Finally, owing to soil conditions or other natural transformation processes, it is possible to identify a grave archaeologically even when the skeleton has entirely disappeared. While not really within the purview of the physical anthropologist, the biological sex of the individual(s) can be tentatively identified by characteristic sex-specific grave architecture, grave goods, or preparation of the body, an approach used recently with moderate success in the analysis of Iron Age Greek burials around Athens (Strömberg 1993).

Bearing in mind—for all the reasons mentioned above—that the assignation of biological sex to a human skeleton is a matter of probability rather than certainty, let us consider briefly the bright future of this exercise. Research into the extraction of DNA from ancient samples has progressed at an astonishing rate, and one of the simplest tests is that for biological sex. While the time and costs involved in extractions remain prohibitive at this time, DNA analysis can determine with absolute certainty the biological sex of an individual. It also offers the first opportunity to determine accurately the biological sex of infants and subadults, whose skeletons are too young to exhibit sexually dimorphic traits. These analyses hold the potential to revise substantially our hypotheses concerning ancient demographies.

# 9. Gender, Fertility, Sexuality

*From its beginnings, gender studies as an academic discipline has been closely tied to the study of human sexuality. Ancient Egypt, both Pharaonic and Graeco-Roman, has yielded much representational and artistic evidence for gender and sexuality. Ignored and even censored out of existence by scholars of the past, such material from the ancient world has excited much scholarly interest in the past few decades. Sexual imagery in the Pharaonic period has been surveyed by Lise Manniche in her* Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt *(Manniche 1987), while Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period has very recently been the subject of Dominic Montserrat's important study* Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt *(Montserrat 1996a), and a wealth of published research on sexuality in the Greek and Roman worlds is relevant to Egypt in the later periods (for example, Johns 1980; Halperin 1990). With this interest has come a trend in interpretation and understanding of ancient sexual imagery. Much recent scholarship treats such images as symbols of fertility rather than literal evidence for sexual behavior or attitudes. Certainly, in an agrarian society like ancient Egypt with a high rate of childbirth mortality, fertility is a matter of great concern. But the evidence is not restricted to representations of reproductive sexual activity or images that can realistically be tied to fertility. Images of and allusions to homoerotic activity and nonreproductive sex between men and women (as well as humans and animals) are often explained as humorous or satirical, but very often the intent seems to be more descriptive or even erotic, even to an ancient audience. The question is summed up in the title of the classic work on erotic images of the Greek and Roman world:* Sex or Symbol *(Johns 1980)—are ancient representations of sexual activity literal or symbolic? In truth, the reality of both Pharaonic and Graeco-Roman Egypt cannot be summed up in so simple a manner; ancient Egyptian images of men and women emphasizing sexual characteristics probably spoke to their ancient audiences on a number of levels: reproductive, erotic, comical, satirical, mystical. It is up to the modern scholars studying this material to look for the full range of meanings of these images.*

## Female Figures: Health, Fertility, and Sexuality

Images of women are ubiquitous in Egyptian art of all periods; in the foregoing pages, we have seen women represented in a number of contexts and in a variety of styles and

situations. Images of women that emphasize sexual characteristics are not universal but are nonetheless frequently encountered. The interpretation of such images is always complex—the intellectual, cultural, iconographical, and archaeological contexts must be taken into full consideration, or we risk oversimplifying or projecting modern attitudes back onto these ancient artifacts. This point is illustrated by a Late Period figure of a nude woman reclining on a bed, with the woman's hips, breasts, and belly emphasized, her eyes and wig painted (**68**). Comparable images were seen by an earlier generation of scholars as predominantly sexual images, "concubines for the dead" intended to titillate and satisfy their owners (in the past, assumed to be male) in the afterlife, whereas a more recent interpretation might see such a figure exclusively in terms of fertility, without considering the possibility of at least some erotic intent behind its imagery. Full consideration of the iconography of this object, the context in which similar artifacts have been found, and the complex intellectual milieu that produced it provides a much fuller understanding of the object as having multiple layers of meaning involving fertility, sexuality, and religion (Trimble 1995).

In the Pharaonic period, nudity seems to be an important marker of representations of women associated with sexuality and/or fertility; nudity is also a marker of class in representations of women, with elite women rarely being shown without clothing. Pharaonic images of nude women have been divided into two main categories: the fertility figure and the nude adolescent (Robins 1996). Pharaonic "fertility" images in the exhibition include the reclining woman figure described above (**68**) and the so-called "paddle doll" below (**69**); these emphasize the figures' breasts, hips, bellies, and genitalia, sometimes to the exclusion of other features (such as the legs omitted from the paddle dolls, which terminate in a pubic triangle). Pharaonic images of nude adolescent women are not represented in the exhibition but are quite common; such representations are usually associated with a complex of symbols linked to both fertility and sexual pleasure—they wear jewelry, carry flowers or other items, and are seen in contexts associated with the goddess Hathor and related deities. Both female and male deities are associated with women's fertility and, by extension, women's sexuality; images of Hathor, Bes, and related deities are common in such contexts. Symbols from the animal world, such as the frog, also get associated with human fertility, often through the deities associated with these animals.

When they arrived in Egypt, Greek and Roman culture and ideas did not replace the earlier traditions altogether but brought new images and conventions. Representations of nude women emphasizing sexual characteristics continue to be associated with fertility and develop in new ways. Female

figures with their arms upraised in prayer, known as "orants,"
become common; many of these images seem to have specific
connotations for fertility (such as the seated nude orant 73).
Eventually, these orant figures become quite abstract, such as
the standing female orants (fig. 12 and 74), which are
schematized representations of women reduced to a combina-
tion of select parts—hair/headdress, eyes, breasts, arms. As in
earlier periods, specific deities are associated with women's
fertility and sexuality, the goddess Aphrodite chief among
them. As in Pharaonic period imagery, nudity is again an
important signifier, but its use seems to be more complex and
nuanced. In an image such as the standing Isis-Aphrodite figure
72, a clothed female figure who raises her robe to expose her
genitals, both the partial nudity and the act of exposure are
significant. Aphrodite is also seen in this exhibition in a
terracotta depicting her standing next to the phallic god
Priapus (80). She is shown exposing her nude body, on which
breasts, hips, and stomach are emphasized, while her compan-
ion Priapus raises his cloak to expose his (now missing) erect
penis. Such an image was probably seen by an ancient audience
in many different ways at once, containing elements of reli-
gion, fertility, eroticism, and even humor.

Figure 12
*Standing Female Figure*
Painted terracotta
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 25-228A-K
Late Roman Period (4th–5th
    centuries CE)
13.3 cm h., 8.0 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan
    excavation, 1925
Kelsey Museum 3768

68



**68**    *Statuette of Reclining Woman*
Painted limestone
Egypt
Late–Ptolemaic Periods (525–30 BCE)
8.25 cm h., 18.5 cm l.
Source: Bay View, 1971
Kelsey Museum 71.2.174
Bibliography: Trimble 1995

Such figures as this representation of a
woman lying on a bed were common in the
Pharaonic period. In the past, these objects have
been described as "concubines of the dead" and
elaborately interpreted based on the few examples
found in men's tombs. But such figures also come
from domestic contexts, as well as the burials of
women and children, so a more complex
interpretation is in order (Trimble 1995).

**69**    *Paddle Doll*
Painted wood
Egypt
Middle Kingdom (1991-1783 BCE)
21.0 cm h., 4.75 cm w.
Source: Bay View, 1971
Kelsey Museum 71.2.237
Bibliography: None

**69**

This type of artifact is conventionally known
as a "paddle doll" in reference to its shape and
assumed function. Yet many objects from ancient
Egypt traditionally categorized as "dolls" may have
also served other functions or indeed may not have
been dolls at all. The painted detailing on the front
of the figure emphasizes sexual characteristics:
breasts and a greatly enlarged pubic area at the
bottom. When complete, this object would have
had another arm and some sort of hair; see parallel
in Hayes 1990: I:219, fig. 135. The back of the
body of the doll is covered with large, irregularly
placed black dots.

**70**

**71**

**70**  *Steatopygous Woman Figure*
Terracotta
Karanis, Egypt: Locus 30-C65M2-A
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
14.5 cm h., 8.6 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1930
Kelsey Museum 6483
Bibliography: Gazda 1978: 67 (no. 68); Allen
    1985: II:412–13 (no. 81)

Images of steatopygous women—women
with emphasized hips, buttocks, breasts, and
bellies—are found in Egyptian art from prehistoric
times. The most famous of these from the Phara-
onic period is the image (from the mortuary temple
of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahri) of the queen
of the foreign land of Punt. The present figure,
although much later, resembles earlier represen-
tations. Its nudity, its abundance, and the emphasis
on sexual characteristics suggest a fertility image of
some sort. This is seemingly confirmed by the arch-
aeological context of the figure, which was found
in the large granary C65 at Karanis. But the actual
function and use of such figures remains uncertain;
for terracotta figurines from Roman Egypt in
general, see e.g. Allen 1985 and Nachtergael 1995.

**71**  *Potsherd with Female Figure*
Ink on ceramic
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 24-5006A-Ad
Roman Period (3rd–4th centuries CE)
15.4 cm h., 9.9 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1925
Kelsey Museum 92999
Bibliography: None

Figured ostraca—potsherds or flakes of stone
with drawings rather than inscriptions—are com-
mon from the Pharaonic period. They often contain
examples of some of the freest known expressions
of Egyptian art—vivid depictions of coworkers,
nature, and fantastic scenes. Examples of figured
ostraca from the Graeco-Roman period and later
are less common, or perhaps only less well known
to scholars. Numerous figured ostraca were found
during the University of Michigan's Karanis
excavations; the present example, found in the first
season in structure 5006, is one of the few with
human figures—in this case, a nude woman. The
drawing is somewhat abstract, emphasizing eyes,
breasts, and genitals.

**72** *Isis-Aphrodite with Basket on Head*
Terracotta
Fayum, Egypt
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
21.0 cm h., 6.4 cm w., 4.3 cm thickness
Source: Ruthven, 1935
Kelsey Museum 6532
Bibliography: Unpublished

A representation of the goddess Isis-Aphrodite carrying a basket full of produce on her head and raising her dress to expose her genitals, this figure suggests abundance and fertility. The figurine is conical in shape, tapering from the top of the basket to the feet; because of this configuration, it cannot stand upright on its own.

**73** *Seated Nude Female Figure*
Terracotta
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 25-280A-B
Roman Period (3rd century CE)
11.3 cm h., 8.4 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1925
Kelsey Museum 6471
Bibliography: Gazda 1978: 66 (no. 66); Allen
    1985: II:431–33 (no. 88)

Female figures with arms outstretched are often described as "orant" figures; the position was an attitude of prayer from very early in Egyptian tradition, and both standing and sitting orant figures are frequently encountered in terracottas from Graeco-Roman Egypt. The figure's spread legs and fleshy emphasis on sexual characteristics make fertility associations inevitable, but its precise meaning and purpose remain obscure. Like most of the terracottas from Karanis, this object comes from a domestic context, perhaps suggesting use as a promoter of fertility in the home?

**74** *Standing Female Figure*
Painted terracotta
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 25-308B-F
Late Roman Period (4th–5th centuries CE)
14.6 cm h., 6.8 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1925
Kelsey Museum 3432
Bibliography: Gazda 1978: 66 (no. 67); Allen
    1985: II:448–49 (no. 96)

Standing female figures like this are also known as "orants," again because of the position of the arms and hands. This figure is typical of later

**73**



**74**

orants—vividly painted and highly stylized (see fig. 12 above for another example). The body and face are only sketchily modeled, but certain details like the eyes and breasts are heavily accentuated with paint. Like many such figures, it is pierced on either side of the head; although this has been thought to be for suspension, it is more likely to have been for insertion of some sort of ornament—jewelry or flowers, perhaps.



75

75 *Reclining Woman Figure*
Faience
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 30-C198K1-C
Roman Period (1st–3rd century CE)
8.0 cm h., 3.6 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1930
Kelsey Museum 25986
Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 82 (no. 78)

This figurine is similar in form and style to the faience hermaphrodite 96 discussed below; like 96, this figure comes from a larger vessel. Its pose and the emphasis on its sexual characteristics suggest that it symbolized elements of both sexuality and fertility. This figure might depict Aphrodite or a related goddess; just as easily it might have no specific divine associations.



76

78

**76** *Panel Painting: Isis-Aphrodite*
Paint and plaster on wood
Karanis, Egypt, Locus: 24-5054A-A
Roman Period (2nd–4th centuries CE)
8.0 cm w., 30.0 cm l.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1924
Kelsey Museum 28807
Bibliography: Dymkowski 1995

This fragmentary panel preserves a now very faint image of the goddess Isis-Aphrodite, wearing a necklace and standing with her nude body visible through transparent drapery. The Greek goddess Aphrodite was a popular deity in Roman Egypt, associated with love and sexuality; she was often identified with the Egyptian Isis, making it difficult to determine which goddess or combination of goddesses is intended in these representations. This panel painting was originally enclosed in a wooden frame and hung on a wall; it came from a domestic context, as did a number of other examples of framed panel paintings from Roman Egypt.



**77**

**77** *Frog Lamp*
Terracotta
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 33-B507B-K
Roman Period (2nd-4th centuries CE)
5.4 cm h., 8.7 cm w., 11.3 cm l.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1933
Kelsey Museum 22393
Bibliography: Shier 1978: 103 (no. 252); see also
　　　Shier 1973

Lamps bearing designs of frogs, often very stylized and abstract, are common in Roman period Egypt, especially from domestic contexts, where they were used for lighting the home.

Though sometimes interpreted as a Christian symbol, such artifacts more likely draw on much earlier Egyptian use of the frog as a symbol of fertility. As such, the frog is associated with the goddess Heqet, who is often represented with a frog's head and embodies the fertility of the female frog who lays hundreds of eggs at once. Likewise, the Egyptian hieroglyph for the number 100,000 is an immature frog or tadpole.



**78**

**78** *Fragment of Necklace Counterpoise with Hathor Cow*
Faience
Egypt
New Kingdom (1570–1070 BCE)
4.5 cm h., 3.75 cm w.
Source: Bay View, 1971
Kelsey Museum 71.2.134
Bibliography: Richards and Wilfong 1995: 42

The goddess Hathor as symbolized by a cow has already been seen in a Roman period terracotta (9 above). In addition to her associations with childbirth, Hathor was identified with music, dancing, and sexual pleasure; in certain myths, this daughter of the sun god also had a wrathful aspect. The present piece is a fragment of a larger object, known as a *menat*—a counterweight for a necklace that was particularly associated with Hathor.

79



80

**79** *Standing Bes Figure on a Capital*
Terracotta
Fayum, Egypt
Roman Period (1st–2nd centuries CE)
22.5 cm h., 7.5 cm w.
Source: D. L. Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 4960
Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 66 (no.
   51)

The iconography of the god Bes (already
encountered in the Horus cippus **15**, lamp **18**, and
amulet **27** above), was extremely durable in Egypt,
surviving from the Pharaonic through Roman
periods with relatively little change. His associations
with music and dancing, his frequent representation
on beds, and his traditional protection of women in
childbirth relate him to women's fertility and
sexuality in ancient Egypt.

**80** *Aphrodite and Priapus*
Terracotta
Fayum, Egypt
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
13.4 cm h., 7.9 cm w.
Source: Kelsey/Askren, 1925
Kelsey Museum 4979
Bibliography: Unpublished

The Kelsey Museum has a number of similar
figures, all with a hole where one would expect
Priapus' phallus. Presumably, this detail was
supplied in a material that was more perishable
than the durable terracotta of the remainder of the
figurine.

In contrast with the female figures examined above, male representations associated with sexuality and fertility focus on a single element: the erect penis or phallus. Though sometimes lacking the subtlety and complexity of the female fertility images, the profusion and range of phallic imagery in ancient art shows great variety and creativity. Representations of gods and mortals with erect penis and isolated phallus images and amulets were common in the ancient world, having connotations of fertility, sexuality, and even comedy.

Phallic representations from the Pharaonic period are most frequently associated with ideas of fertility and male sexual potency (Robins 1996). The archetype of the phallic god in Pharaonic Egypt was Min (**86**), who was, almost without exception, represented with an erect penis. Min had associations with the god Amun and a special association with the reigning king, who is often represented performing ceremonies before Min to ensure sexual potency. Other Egyptian gods are represented in phallic form, albeit less frequently; Osiris, the god of the dead, is sometimes represented with erect penis in scenes relating to regeneration and insuring the potency of the dead. Mortals are shown much less frequently in a phallic form; these are almost always in representations of sexual intercourse, and the intent often seems to be satiric or humorous (examples in Manniche 1987). Isolated representations of the erect penis itself are found in the Pharaonic period as cult objects, especially associated with the cult of the goddess Hathor and almost certainly used to promote fertility (Pinch 1993: pl. 53).

Greek and Roman influence brought new phallic images and associations to Egypt. Divinities such as Priapus (**85**) and Pan come into Egypt, while new phallic images are associated with existing Egyptian gods, such as the child form of Horus known as Harpocrates (**81–82**). There is also a wider range of sexually explicit art, much of which seems to be more connected to fertility than satire. Isolated phallic representations are found in the Graeco-Roman period (**87–88**) and probably played cultic roles similar to their Pharaonic predecessors. Phallus amulets become especially common in the Graeco-Roman period—used undoubtedly to promote fertility and as a good luck charm but also with the more specialized function of averting the evil eye (Johns 1980: 62–67). The University of Michigan excavations at Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Terenouthis uncovered many phallus amulets, some of which are described and illustrated below (**89–95**). A comparison of

Figure 13
*Phallus Amulet*
Faience, rope
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 30-C178*-A
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
7.6 cm h., 4.8 cm w. (amulet)
Source: University of Michigan
    excavation, 1930
Kelsey Museum 24155

these amulets to the example shown in figure 13 indicates that effective phallus amulets were not confined to one specific form.

As with the female figures discussed above, the precise meaning and interpretation of these phallic figures is elusive. Does taking them purely as fertility symbols or lucky amulets rob them of a dimension of their symbolism? Does seeing them as symbolic of male sexuality or images of satire impose modern preconceptions on them? Like so much material from the ancient world, the ultimate answer is probably not an either/or dichotomy; it is likely that the ancient audience for this material saw many aspects to it and that even the simplest of these phallus amulets can be read on many different levels.

**81**

Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 41 (no.
27); Gazda 1978: 74 (no. 78); Allen 1985:
II:366–67 (no. 56)

Like the preceding figure, this image shows
the child-god Harpocrates in phallic form. In this
example, the phallic nature of the figure is subtler
since Harpocrates is partly clothed: only the end of
the phallus is visible between the boy's feet.



**83**

**81**   *Seated Phallic Harpocrates with Jug*
    Terracotta
    Fayum, Egypt
    Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
    9.7 cm h., 6.9 cm w., 5.8 cm thickness
    Source: Ruthven, 1935
    Kelsey Museum 6517
    Bibliography: None

Figurines of the child-god Harpocrates with
special emphasis on his genitals are not uncommon
in Graeco-Roman Egyptian terracottas. Such
representations may serve, like so many phallic
images, as protection from the evil eye, perhaps
specifically for children. They may also have some
implications for the future fertility of male
children.

**82**   *Standing Phallic Harpocrates with Jug*
    Terracotta
    Karanis, Egypt, Locus 29-E44A-B
    Roman Period (2nd–3rd centuries CE)
    21.5 cm h., 7.3 cm w., 4.1 cm thickness
    Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1929
    Kelsey Museum 6452

**83**   *Boy with Swan*
    Painted terracotta
    Fayum, Egypt
    Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
    7.0 cm h., 7.8 cm w., 2.4 cm thickness
    Source: Ruthven, 1935
    Kelsey Museum 6578
    Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 85 (no.
    84)

This figure has usually been taken as a
representation of the Greek child-god Eros, but an
ancient audience may well have seen in it echoes of
the story of Ganymede and Zeus. In certain Greek
myths, the god Zeus in the form of an eagle
abducts the boy Ganymede as his lover. In another
story, Zeus takes on the form of a swan to seduce
the woman Leda (a common theme in Late
Antique art in Egypt); this figure of a boy carried
off by a swan may represent a conflation of these
stories.

**84**    *Phallic Grotesque*
Painted terracotta
Karanis Locus 29 T7B*-B
Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
13.6 cm h., 5.4 cm w., 3.6 cm thickness
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1929
Kelsey Museum 6983
Bibliography: Gazda 1978: 75 (no. 100); Allen
    1985: II:462–63 (no. 105)

This terracotta figurine from structures
associated with one of the temples at Karanis is of a
figure with a grotesque mask and a large erect
phallus. It is possibly a representation of an actor in
a Greek comic play, who would have worn both a
mask and an outsized phallus as part of his costume
(see Johns 1980: 86–91). Examples of such plays
survive from Roman Egypt and abound in satire
and sexual situations.

**85**    *Priapus (?)*
Terracotta
Fayum, Egypt
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
16.8 cm h., 6.1 cm w., 4.3 cm thickness
Source: Ruthven, 1935
Kelsey Museum 6527
Bibliography: Allen 1990: 60 (no. 28)

This Egyptian terracotta is most probably a
representation of Priapus: like other images of this
god, he raises the bottom of his garment to reveal
his genitals. Priapus was originally a Greek fertility
god, images of whom appear throughout the
Mediterranean world (including the image of the
god with Aphrodite above—**80**).

**85**

**86**    *Figurine of Min*
Bronze
Egypt
Late Period (525–332 BCE)
7.1 cm h.
Source: A. C. Hoskier, 1925
Kelsey Museum 3136
Bibliography: None

In this highly typical representation of the
god Min from the Pharaonic period, the god holds
his traditional emblem of the flail in one raised
hand and holds his erect penis in the other. The
god Min is often shown in conjunction with the
king and is an important part of royal ideology and
iconography. Min is generally associated with male
sexual potency and fertility.

**87, 88**

**87**   *Phallus*
Limestone
Karanis, Egypt: Surface find
Roman Period (1st–4th century CE)
13.2 cm l., 5.7 cm max. diameter
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1930
Kelsey Museum 8215
Bibliography: Gazda 1978: 71

This white limestone phallus is a very
simplified, abstract representation, with little
detailing. The shape is nearly conical, with only a
carved line near the top to indicate the glans.
Although coming from the University of Michigan
Karanis excavations, this piece has no specific
context, having been found on the surface,
presumably in areas disturbed by earlier digging at
the site. Another stone phallus is said to have been
found at Karanis during the course of the British
survey of the site in 1895–96; see Montserrat
1996c: 152.

**88**   *Phallus*
Wood, plaster, paint
Soknopaiou Nesos, Egypt: Locus 103L-D
Roman Period (1st–3rd century CE)
12.5 cm h., outside diameter 4.4 cm, inside
      diameter 3.5 cm
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1931
Kelsey Museum 23942
Bibliography: None

From the University of Michigan excavations
at Soknopaiou Nesos, this object is a realistic
representation of an erect penis in wood, with
some use of plaster and paint for detailing. It is
hollow, with a small opening in the tip to indicate
the urethra. The purpose of this object is uncertain.

**89**   *Phallus Amulet*
Bone
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 28-C87K-C
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
8.2 cm h., 1.5 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1928
Kelsey Museum 24147
Bibliography: None

This amulet is one of several similar pieces
from the Karanis excavations of domestic contexts.
Made of bone, they are more or less schematic
representations of an erect penis, viewed from the
side and pierced for wearing.

**90**   *Phallus Amulet*
Bone
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 29-235*-S
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
3.0 cm h., 1.2 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1929
Kelsey Museum 24148
Bibliography: None

**91**   *Phallus Amulet*
Bone
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 30-C194D-A
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
2.3 cm h., 0.6 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1930
Kelsey Museum 24149
Bibliography: None
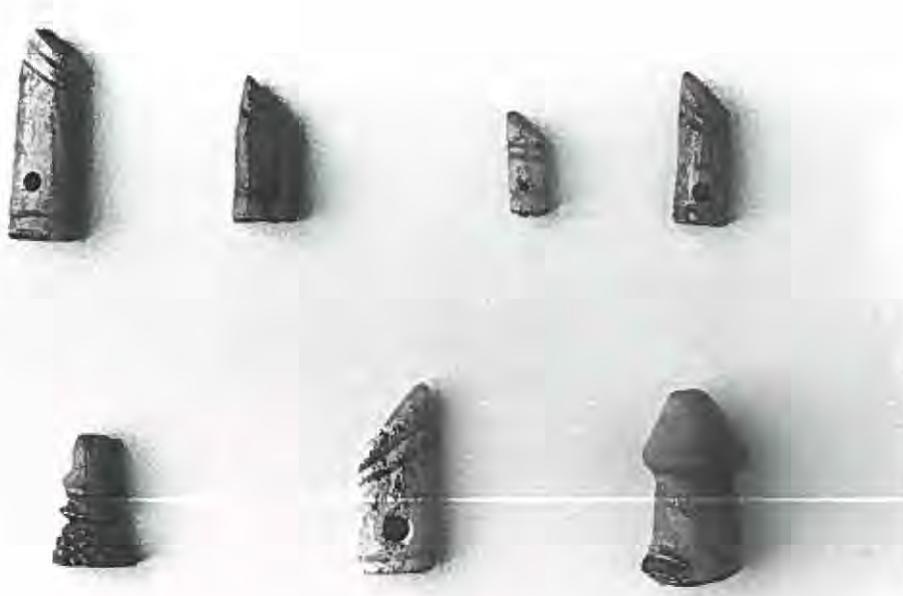
**92** *Phallus Amulet*
Bone
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 32-CA20*-V
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
3.2 cm h., 1.2 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1932
Kelsey Museum 24150
Bibliography: None

**93** *Phallus Amulet*
Bone
Karanis, Egypt, Locus 33-BS550-C
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
2.7 cm h., 1.8 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1933
Kelsey Museum 24151
Bibliography: None

**94** *Phallus Amulet*
Bone
Karanis, Egypt: Surface find
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
4.1 cm h., 1.4 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 24152
Bibliography: None

Somewhat different from the preceding five
(**89–93**), this bone phallus is more realistic in detail
and shows part of the pubic area in addition. The
phallus is represented as viewed from above and is
pierced transversely.

**95** *Phallus*
Faience
Soknopaiou Nesos, Egypt: Locus 31-II202F-MI
Roman Period (1st–3rd centuries CE)
4.0 cm h., 1.8 cm diameter
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1931
Kelsey Museum 24156
Bibliography: None

In its present condition, this piece preserves
only the upper end of what was once a faience
representation of an erect penis, including a
realistically modeled glans and urethral opening.
This object was found in an apparently domestic
context with a fragmentary faience column base;
although of roughly the same diameter, material,
and color, the two pieces do not join (information
courtesy of Kelsey Museum Curator of
Conservation Geoffrey I. Brown).

# 10. Other Genders

*The customary male and female genders were not the only ones known in ancient Egypt; indeed, most premodern, non-Western cultures have "third genders" of some sort (Herdt 1994). Other genders were recognized and described in the ancient Mediterranean world, often using categories based on mythological precedents. Hermaphrodites, eunuchs, androgynous and asexual beings were all examples of the kinds of permanent gender categories understood by ancient peoples. Gender categories could also be less permanent or innate: Late Antique Christian writers from Egypt warned of the dangers of male transvestism while ambivalently approving women who disguised themselves as male monks and, through ascetic practice, defeminized their bodies into a transitional gender category between male and female. Constructions of "other" gender categories developed over time in ancient Egypt. Evidence for these in the Pharaonic period is predominantly textual and mostly ambiguous or debatable. The coming of Greek and Roman culture to Egypt brought with it new gender categories and ways of representing, and the arrival of Christianity brought still more. To fully understand the nature and construction of gender in ancient Egypt, we must also examine the evidence for these other gender categories.*

## Excavated Hermaphrodite Figures from Karanis and Terenouthis

The University of Michigan excavations at Roman period Egyptian sites have uncovered a number of figurines that have been identified, at least provisionally, as representations of hermaphrodites. Biologically, hermaphrodites are the rare human beings born with both male and female sexual characteristics and anomalous sex chromosome configurations; more common are pseudo-hermaphrodites, who are biologically categorized as either male or female but have secondary characteristics of the opposite biological sex. In the ancient world, the birth of biological hermaphrodites and pseudo-hermaphrodites was, like that of other genetic anomalies, considered unlucky. The term "hermaphrodite" comes from the Greek mythological being, half man and half woman, who was variously described as the offspring of Hermes and Aphrodite or a youth and a nymph who became melded

together through excessive love. The hermaphrodite became a frequent subject in Graeco-Roman art, represented with a female face, full breasts and hips, and male genitals (Johns 1980: 104). Hermaphrodites were often depicted reclining or turning to one side, so that the male genitals of the figure would not be immediately apparent to the viewer, who would first see the feminine breasts and hips. Representations of hermaphrodites are found in both comic and erotic contexts and were frequently used as decorative devices (Johns 1980: 105). The iconography of hermaphrodites in Egypt appears to be a Greek import; there seems to be no comparable figure in indigenous artistic traditions.

The excavated figures from the University of Michigan come from Karanis and Terenouthis. Of these, only **96** can be identified as a hermaphrodite with some certainty; the others (**97–98**) resemble hermaphrodites seen in Graeco-Roman art but could also represent other beings. The figure from Karanis (**96**) comes from a domestic context and was probably part of an elaborately decorated faience vessel. The other two (**97–98**) come from a funerary context at Terenouthis; both, however, probably also came from similar faience vessels. Thus all three of these pieces are decorative elements from larger objects and not intended as individual works of art.

**96**

**96** *Reclining Hermaphrodite Figure*
Faience
Karanis, Egypt, 26-B17F-KII
Roman Period (3rd century CE)
7.5 cm h., 3.1 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1926
Kelsey Museum 25987
Bibliography: Haeckl and Spelman 1977: 83 (no. 79)

This brilliant blue faience figure is a reclining nude with male genitalia and feminine breasts: a classic representation of a hermaphrodite in the Graeco-Roman style. The piece apparently comes from a larger faience vessel. Its bright color and general style make it very similar to the reclining woman figure described above (**75**), also a fragment from a larger object, but these pieces were found in very different contexts and are unlikely to be from the same vessel.

**97** *Figure from a Vessel: Hermaphrodite?*
Faience
Terenouthis, Egypt, Locus: TX
Roman Period (2nd–4th centuries CE)
3.3 cm w., 7.9 cm l.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 93415
Bibliography: Unpublished

Like **96** above, this figure is broken from a larger faience vessel. Its identity is more ambiguous. Viewed from one vantage point, it could easily be a hermaphrodite like **96**: a nude human form with male genitalia and emphasized breasts that could be reclining. The detailing of the hair and the position are also similar to **96**. Yet, if the figure is viewed as a representation of a standing person, this identification becomes much less secure: the emphasized breasts could simply be a simplified representation of a muscular chest, and the figure could be a Hercules or similar heroic character.

**98** *Figurine: Hermaphrodite?*
Faience
Terenouthis, Egypt, Locus KB-X
Roman Period (2nd–4th centuries CE)
6.5 cm h., 3.3 cm w.
Source: University of Michigan excavation, 1935
Kelsey Museum 92695
Bibliography: Unpublished

This figure is so badly damaged that its identity is uncertain. Only the trunk of the body and the lower part of the legs are preserved, showing an apparently reclining nude human figure with male genitalia and what look to be indications of female breasts. Thus this piece could be a hermaphrodite figure; however, it could also be the nude child-god Harpocrates, Eros, or a similar deity. Only a more complete parallel would make the identification certain.

*by Janet E. Richards*

# 11. Gender in the Kelsey Museum Egyptian and Near Eastern Installation

Parallel to the preparation of the exhibition "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt," the Kelsey Museum has embarked on a reinstallation of its permanent Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern Gallery. The purpose of this reinstallation is to offer a new look at the museum's collections in these areas, through the exploration of cross-cultural themes in the cultures and societies of Egypt and the ancient Near East. Although the primary focus of this installation will not be on gender, it will include a wide range of material relevant to the study of gender. Any museum exhibition on the ancient world can be "read" for gender, in part because if one looks for it, almost any kind of artifact connected to human society can yield information about gender in the culture that produced it.

We have seen one example already of an object that will be in the permanent installation—the Mnevis bull stela of Hedy and Wiy (fig. 1 in chapter 2). This artifact will be featured in the section of the installation devoted to temple and domestic religion: it illustrates private participation in the veneration of a sacred animal in the context of temple worship. As we have seen already, the representations and texts on the stela illustrate gender-based status and religious roles, as well as terminology for gender relations. The stela of Hedy and Wiy was intended to commemorate religious devotion but also provides a specific set of insights into the roles and designations of men and women in New Kingdom Egypt.

Another good example of an artifact that yields a gendered reading is the coffin of Djheutymose—a priestly official of the Saite Period (see Richards and Wilfong 1995: 50–55). This coffin is a finely painted example of an anthropoid wooden coffin, made to imitate the shape and form of the mummy it was to contain. Djheutymose is represented with a green face—symbolic of resurrection and rebirth—and a false beard, which identified him with Osiris, Egyptian god of the dead. Covering Djheutymose's coffin, inside and outside, are texts and images designed to facilitate his voyage to the afterlife and insure his safety en route. Helping him in his transition are numerous gods and goddesses pictured on the coffin; prominent among these are a group of goddesses whose specialized function in this context is to protect the dead. Thus, on the inside of the coffin, Djheutymose's mummy rests on the image

of the protective goddess of the funerary realm Imentet, while it faces the sky goddess Nut, who is stretched out above the body. Nut reappears on the outside of the coffin, this time with wings that are stretched out over the chest of the coffin lid, while a winged image of Isis spreads her wings over the feet of the mummy. Djheutymose is frequently identified by his name and titles in the texts on the coffin; he is often further identified by the name and title of his mother, "mistress of the house, Taro." Identification by the mother's name was important in a religious or magical context in Egyptian thought, since the mother is the only parent whose identity will always be without question. Thus, the coffin of a man can also reveal much about the roles of women and feminine deities.

One of the programs behind the reinstallation of the permanent Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern Gallery is to highlight materials excavated by the University of Michigan now in the Kelsey Museum collections. Objects from a controlled excavation have the great advantage of context over unprovenanced materials. We have already seen, from the Gurob grave group discussed in chapter 8, something of the value of archaeological context in understanding artifacts and how they relate to gender. The permanent installation will include objects from temple and domestic contexts of the University of Michigan's excavations of Karanis in Egypt and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in modern Iraq; among these are objects that relate to gendered aspects of daily life, as well as gendered domestic and sacred spaces.

Thus the reinstallation of the Kelsey Museum permanent Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern Gallery offers much to complement "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt." The challenge to museum visitors is to look for gender in each of the museums they visit. Gender systems are such a basic part of human experience that one should be able to detect aspects of these systems in nearly every exhibition of human material culture.

# Epilogue: Gender in Archaeology

*Before concluding any study of gender in the ancient world, it is certainly pertinent to examine the impact that gender roles have had on the academic disciplines that study antiquity. For the study of ancient civilizations does not exist in a vacuum of "pure" scholarship but is instead as much a product of its environment as the ancient cultures that are the object of study. Egyptology and the archaeology of ancient Egypt, without question, have been profoundly affected by societal norms concerning gender; although women involved in Egyptological research have been numerous and have made valuable contributions, they rarely received the kind of recognition or professional advancement that their male colleagues did. Only in the mid-to-late twentieth century are there a substantial number of women in senior academic positions relating to the study of ancient Egypt. Even today, however, the image of the archaeologist as a macho Indiana Jones character can have an insidiously negative impact on the careers of women who work as archaeologists. Similarly, the study of women and gender in ancient Egypt has, traditionally, been relegated (as a scholar on ancient Roman studies has put it) to "the 'obligatory' last chapter on hairstyles and dress" (Setälä 1989: 61). The past twenty years or so have seen an extraordinary explosion of research on women and gender in ancient Egypt, but this scholarship has yet to address in a systematic way the theoretical issues of concern in current women's and gender studies. Prevailing attitudes toward gender and sexuality have a profound impact on scholarship in the modern academic environment, in conjunction with both how these subjects are studied and how they affect the lives of the scholars who do the research.*

## Women and the University of Michigan Expeditions to Egypt, 1924–35

The University of Michigan has a special history with respect to the involvement of women in archaeology and the study of ancient Egypt, a history closely connected with its ambitious excavation of the Egyptian site of Karanis. This eleven-year endeavor (1924–35), with study seasons at Soknopaiou Nesos and Terenouthis, called on a wide range of expertise among the University of Michigan community and beyond. Women were active both in the field and back in Ann Arbor. Involved in the actual excavations themselves were Mrs.

L. Amundsen, Joy Fletcher-Allen, Mrs. J. L. Starkey, Mrs. S. Yeivin. The manner in which some of the women are known to us is a clue to the way in which most women came to participate in the excavation: they were wives of the male staff members. Indeed, in this period it was unusual for unmarried women or even unaccompanied married women to participate in fieldwork through American institutions in Egypt. Given these attitudes, it is not surprising that the women who worked at Karanis were often given administrative duties more connected with the running of the field house than with archaeology. In spite of this, the women connected with the Karanis excavation managed to make essential contributions on a number of levels.

Once the material from the excavation of Karanis and related sites came back to Ann Arbor, it had to be catalogued and published, a truly enormous task given the thousands of objects and archival photographs brought back from Egypt. An early catalogue of textiles from the Karanis excavation was published by Lilian Wilson (Wilson 1933), but it was Louise A. Shier and Elinor Mullett Husselman who came to play crucial roles in the publication of material from Karanis. Both Shier and Husselman were curators at the Museum of Archaeology (later renamed after Francis W. Kelsey); Husselman was also a curator at the University of Michigan Library in charge of papyri from the excavation. Louise Shier provided general assistance in cataloguing material from the Karanis excavation, while preparing an extensive catalogue and analysis of the ceramic lamps from Karanis (Shier 1973, 1978). Elinor Husselman worked extensively with the textual material from Karanis, eventually publishing a volume of Greek papyri from Karanis (Husselman 1971), along with a series of important articles synthesizing textual and archaeological material relating to types of structures at the site. Husselman also devoted much effort to the publication of the research of others: she edited the corpus of coins from Karanis (Haatvedt and Peterson 1964) and reworked excavator Enoch Peterson's massive (and still unpublished) report on the topography and architecture of Karanis from the 1928–35 seasons into a concise and manageable volume (Husselman 1979). Husselman's career at the University of Michigan was not unusual in that, although she received a Ph.D., she never had a faculty appointment (Wilfong forthcoming b).

In more recent years, new generations of women have continued to make substantial contributions to the study of the material from Karanis, both in the context of museum exhibitions (Gazda 1978, 1983b) and in the cataloguing and analysis of specific corpora of material from the excavations (Allen 1985; Higashi 1990; Johnson 1981). At present, women are

involved in ongoing research on Karanis and related sites at Michigan, including the efforts to make materials from the University of Michigan excavations available on the World Wide Web. Indeed, at present, the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology is predominantly staffed by women, who, by contributing to the mission of the Kelsey Museum to preserve, interpret, exhibit, and publish its collections in a variety of ways, are following in the footsteps of the first generation of women involved in the study of ancient Egypt at the University of Michigan.

Figure 14
Archival phototgraph: The University of Michigan Karanis camp staff during Professor Francis Kelsey's visit to the site. Left to right: Enoch E. Peterson, H. Dunscombe Colt, Valeri Fausto, Harold Falconer, Joy Fletcher-Allen, Francis W. Kelsey, Byron Khun de Prorok, Edgar Fletcher-Allen, Edwin L. Swain. (Negative 5.2373)



Figure 15
Left to right: Elinor Mullett Husselman, George Forsythe (then Director of the Kelsey Museum), Enoch E. Peterson, and Louise A. Shier at a Kelsey Museum exhibition opening in the late 1960s.

# Sources of Artifacts in the Exhibition

The Egyptian artifacts in the exhibition "Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt" were acquired from a variety of sources. With the exception of the papyri generously loaned by the Papyrology Collection of the University of Michigan Library, all of the pieces described in this catalogue form part of the collection of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan. The Egyptian artifacts in the Kelsey Museum come from a variety of sources, which tell something of the history of the museum itself and of the University of Michigan's activities in Egypt. The history of the collection has been previously described in some detail (Gazda 1983a), and what follows is a summary of the most significant sources.

Objects from the Pharaonic periods have come to the Kelsey Museum from donations and purchases. An extensive gift of Pharaonic material from Sir W. M. Flinders Petrie in 1921, including the grave group from the Gurob excavations, provided a useful addition to the collection's holdings of excavated Pharaonic material. After the Petrie gift various purchases of Egyptian material were made from different sources, including the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, the Cairo-based dealers N. Tano and M. Nahman, and D. L. Askren. The Pharaonic Egyptian holdings were substantially increased in 1971, with the purchase of the Egyptian collection of the Bay View Association, an organization that had previously acquired the material in the late 1890s from Camden McCormack Cobern. Many donations of Egyptian material have come from former University of Michigan faculty or alumni and their heirs, such as A. C. Hoskier, Easton Kelsey, A. G. Ruthven (President of the University of Michigan 1929–51; see Allen 1990), and Mrs. John G. Winter. An important acquisition of Pharaonic Egyptian artifacts was made with the donations of material from the collection of the late Dr. Samuel A. Goudsmit, a professor of physics at the University of Michigan from 1927 to 1940 (see Root 1982).

The Kelsey Museum's holdings from Graeco-Roman Egypt are unusual in that the great majority come from controlled archaeological excavations. From 1924 through 1935, the University of Michigan excavated the Graeco-Roman site of Karanis (modern Kom Aushim), an extraordinarily well-preserved town containing hundreds of mud-brick

and stone structures that yielded thousands of artifacts (see Gazda 1983b). Nearly 50,000 objects from the eleven-year excavation were ceded to the University of Michigan by the Egyptian Antiquities Service; they are currently divided between the Kelsey Museum and the Papyrology collection of the University of Michigan Library. Supplementary seasons at the sites of Soknopaiou Nesos (1931) and Terenouthis (1935) yielded a number of important pieces for the collection, including the extensive series of funerary stelae from Terenouthis. In 1936, the Kelsey Museum acquired an important group of Late Antique Coptic ostraca from Coptic scholars Carl C. Schmidt and William H. Worrell. Other Graeco-Roman and Late Antique artifacts come from the donations and purchases described above.

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