



ROUTLEDGE

MARIAM F. AYAD

GOD'S WIFE, GOD'S SERVANT

The God's Wife of Amun (c. 740–525 BC)

GOD'S WIFE, GOD'S SERVANT

Drawing on textual, iconographic and archaeological evidence, this book highlights a historically documented (but often ignored) instance, where five single women were elevated to a position of supreme religious authority. The women were Libyan and Nubian royal princesses who, consecutively, held the title of God's Wife of Amun during the Egyptian Twenty-third to Twenty-sixth dynasties (c.754–525 BC). At a time of weakened royal authority, rulers turned to their daughters to establish and further their authority. Unmarried, the princess would be dispatched from her father's distant political and administrative capital to Thebes, where she would reign supreme as a God's Wife of Amun.

While her title implied a marital union between the supreme solar deity Amun and a mortal woman, the God's Wife was actively involved in temple ritual, where she participated in rituals that asserted the king's territorial authority as well as Amun's universal power. As the head of the Theban theocracy, the God's Wife controlled one of the largest economic centers in Egypt: the vast temple estate at Karnak. Economic independence and religious authority spawned considerable political influence: a God's Wife became instrumental in securing the loyalty of the Theban nobility for her father, the king.

Yet, despite the religious, economic and political authority of the God's Wives during this tumultuous period of Egyptian history, to date, these women have only received cursory attention from scholars of ancient Egypt. Tracing the evolution of the office of God's Wife from its obscure origins in the Middle Kingdom to its demise shortly after the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 BC, this book places these five women within the broader context of the politically volatile, turbulent seventh and eighth centuries BC, and examines how the women, and the religious institution they served, were manipulated to achieve political gain.

Mariam F. Ayad was born in Cairo and studied Egyptology at the American University in Cairo and the University of Toronto before earning her doctorate in Egyptology at Brown University in 2003. She is currently the Assistant Director of the Institute of Egyptian Art & Archaeology in Memphis, Tennessee.

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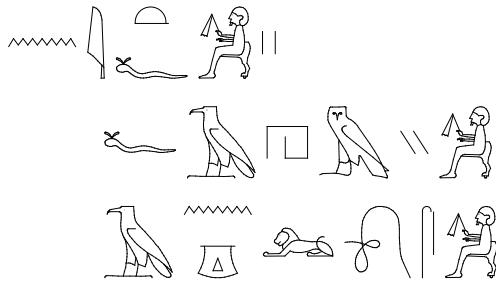
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It has not been possible to prove ... that an Egyptian meant by “god” either the Only – without there being any other god – or the One and Highest of the gods.

Erik Hornung

Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many, 60

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A brief note on the book's title: *God's Wife, God's Servant*. While individuals familiar with the Egyptian language will immediately realize that the Egyptian words for "wife" and "servant" have the same phonetic value, *hemet*, this book's title is not intended as a pun. In fact, it is inspired by the official titles of the last God's Wife of Amun, Ankhnesneferibre, who had the unprecedented distinction of becoming the High Priest of Amun (literally, "First Servant of God"), and as such, officiated on behalf of the king in temple ritual. Ankhnesneferibre's assumption of the High Priesthood of Amun defied culturally prescribed gender roles. The book's title thus closely reflects this study's aims as it attempts to define the role played by the God's Wives in ancient Egyptian temple ritual and contextualize Ankhnesneferibre's phenomenal rise to the High Priesthood.

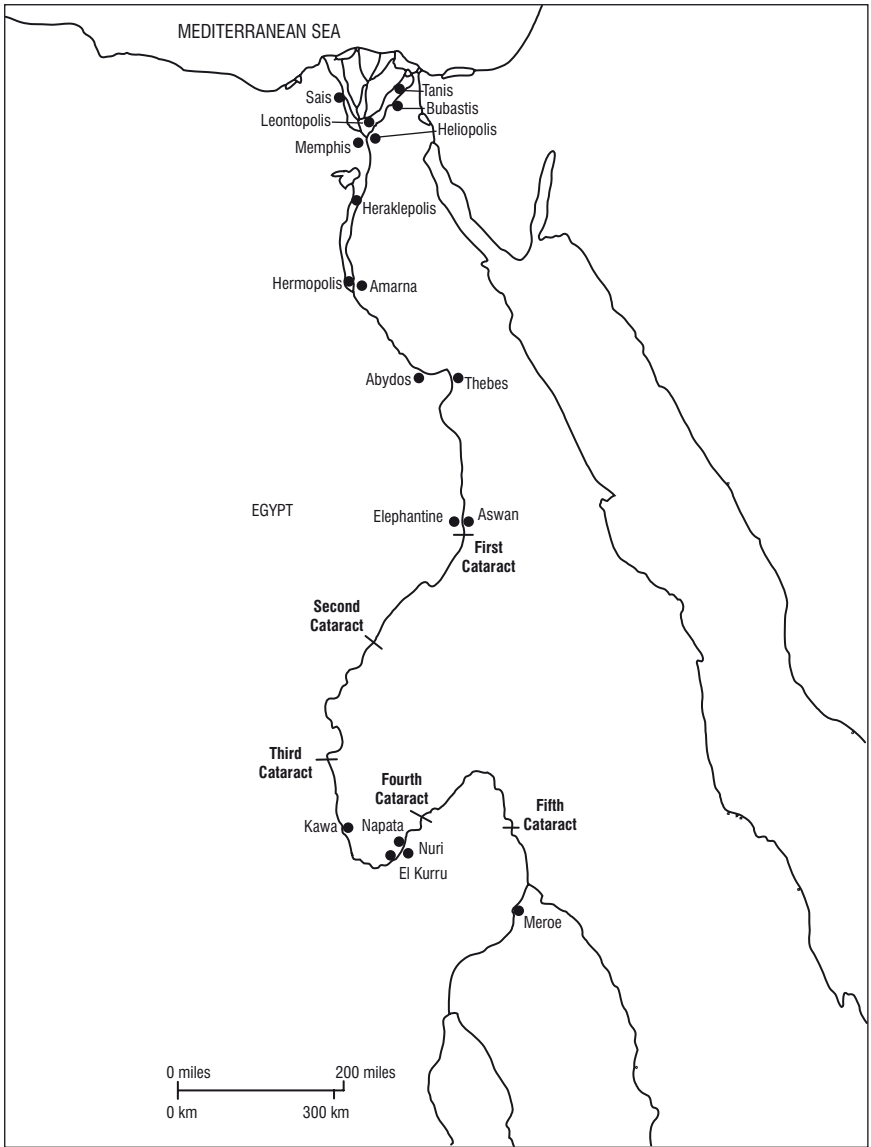
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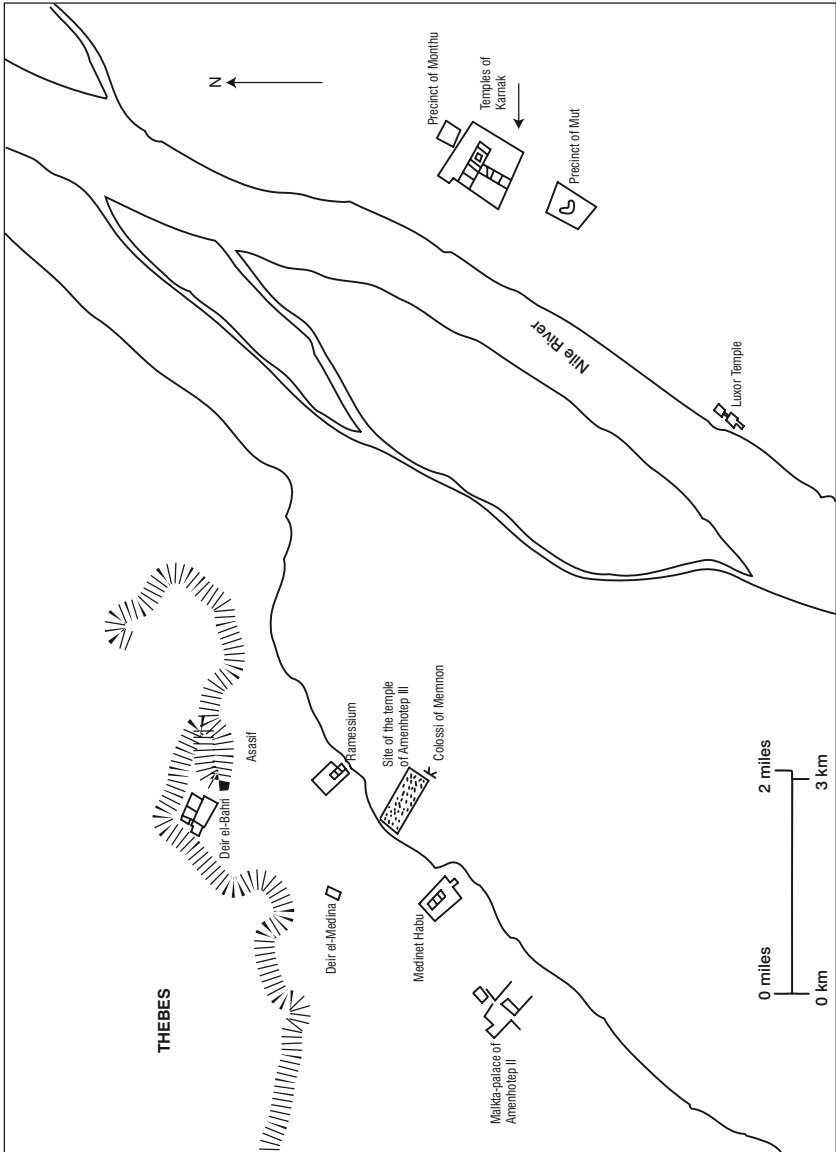
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Map of Egypt and Nubia



Map of Luxor


ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> , Baltimore
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i>
<i>ASAE</i>	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i> , Cairo
<i>BdE</i>	<i>Bibliothèque d'études, Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Cairo
<i>BIE</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'institut d'Égypte</i> , Cairo
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Cairo
<i>BSEG</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société d'égyptologie de Genève</i> , Geneva
<i>BSFE</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie</i> , Paris
<i>Cd'É</i>	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i> , Brussels
<i>CG</i>	<i>Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire</i> , Cairo
<i>CRAIBL</i>	<i>Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres</i> , Paris
<i>DE</i>	<i>Discussions in Egyptology</i>
<i>EEF</i>	<i>Egypt Exploration Fund</i> , London
<i>EES</i>	<i>Egypt Exploration Society</i> , London
<i>ET</i>	<i>Études et travaux</i>
<i>FHN</i>	<i>Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD</i> . Vol 1: <i>From the Eighth to the Mid-Fifth Century BC</i> , eds. T. Eide, T. Hägg, R. H. Pierce, and L. Török. Bergen: University of Bergen, Department of Classics, 1994
<i>GM</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i> , Göttingen
<i>IFAO</i>	<i>Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Cairo
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JEOL</i>	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap "Ex Oriente Lux"</i> , Leiden
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i> , Chicago
<i>JSEA</i>	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</i>
<i>LÄ</i>	<i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i> , Wiesbaden
<i>MÄS</i>	<i>Münchener Ägyptologische Studien</i> , Berlin

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>MDAIK</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i>
<i>MIFAO</i>	Mémoires Publiés par les membres de l'institute francais d'archéologie orientale du Caire
<i>MMA</i>	<i>Metropolitan Museum of Art</i> , New York
<i>MMAF</i>	<i>Mémoires publiés par les membres de la mission archéologique française au Caire</i> , Paris
<i>OIP</i>	<i>Oriental Institute Publications, The University of Chicago</i> , Chicago
<i>PÄ</i>	<i>Probleme der Ägyptologie</i> , Leiden
<i>PM</i>	Porter and Moss, <i>Topographical Bibliography</i>
<i>PN</i>	H. Ranke, <i>Die ägyptischen Personennamen</i> . 3 vols. Glückstadt: J.J. Augustin, 1935, 1949, 1977.
<i>Rd'É</i>	<i>Revue d'Égyptologie</i> , Cairo
<i>RT</i>	<i>Recueil de travaux relatif à la philology et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes</i> , Paris
<i>SAK</i>	<i>Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur</i> , Hamburg
<i>SAOC</i>	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago
<i>WB</i>	<i>Wörterbuch</i>
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i> , Leipzig, Berlin

INTRODUCTION

This book revolves around a short Egyptian phrase, composed of just three hieroglyphic signs: . The signs spell the title *hemet netjer*, or “God’s Wife.” The Egyptians typically referred to a specific deity by name, only rarely using the generic, more general word for “god”, *netjer*.¹ This book deals specifically with five royal women who bore the title *hemet netjet en imen*, or the “God’s Wife of Amun,” between 754 and 525 BC, a period when the title, and the institution, of God’s Wife reached its zenith.

In the period spanning 754–525 BC, one Libyan, two Nubian, and two Saite women held the title of the God’s Wife of Amun. Yet, despite their different ethnic backgrounds, all five women shared certain common features. Each was the daughter of a king. Almost invariably, each of the God’s Wives placed the title *sat-nesou*, or “King’s daughter,” before the royal circle (“cartouche”) enclosing her name, often using this, their most explicit link to the royal house, as their sole identifying title. Long after the title ceased to be held by queens, each of these royal princesses assumed queenly attire: the vulture headdress, surmounted by a rearing cobra (*uraeus*), or (in the case of the Nubian God’s Wives), a double *uraeus*. But just like a king, a God’s Wife assumed a *prenomen*, or “throne name,” upon ascension to office and adopted feminine versions of several kingly titles. Thus, a God’s Wife could also be a “(female) Horus,” a “Mistress of the Two Lands,” or a “Mistress of Diadems/ Appearances.” Additionally, the Libyan, Nubian, and Saite God’s Wives were often depicted presenting *Maat* to the gods, who, in return were regularly shown crowning, suckling, or protectively embracing a God’s Wife. These were all aspects of temple ritual that had previously been the prerogative of the king only. Yet despite their obvious importance, outside a small circle of specialized academics, these women remain unknown. And even within academic circles, scholars who have previously dealt with this title have tended to view the office, particularly during the Third Intermediate and Saite periods, as a monolithic whole. In this study, I intend to show that this view is far from accurate. Indeed, the ever-expanding repertoire of the titles borne by the God’s Wife and her increasingly sacred iconography indicate that the office of the God’s Wife continued to change and evolve even within the relatively short span of this 200 year period.

Although it has long been recognized that the God’s Wives of Amun of the Twenty-third to Twenty-sixth dynasties (c. 754–525 BC) assumed several aspects of



Figure 0.1 Chapels of the God's Wife of Amun, Karnak (Photo © M. Ayad)

the royal iconography and royal titulary, to date, a comprehensive study of the God's Wives of Amun is still lacking. This study attempts to define as accurately, and as comprehensively, as possible the duties of the God's Wife, both in the temple and beyond. Although this book primarily focuses on the Libyan, Nubian, and Saite God's Wives, their titles and roles must be seen, not only within the framework of the historical and social milieu in which they lived, but also as a product, if not a direct extension, of the title's Eighteenth dynasty origins.

Much of the evidence presented in this study derives from the iconographic scenes found on the walls of a few, small, little known, and poorly preserved chapels (Figure 0.1). The chapels, which lie to the east and north of the main temple of Amun-Re at Karnak, were constructed by the God's Wives of Amun. Compared to the plethora of texts and monuments documenting other individuals and other periods of Egyptian history, the evidence for these women is scanty, rather random, and understudied. The dearth and relatively poor state of preservation of the scenes showing these woman is nowhere more evident than at Karnak, where, just a hundred yards away from the chapels they erected for Osiris, lie the grand monuments of the New Kingdom Thutmocide and Ramesside rulers.

Regardless of the quality of its preservation, this kind of pictorial evidence is especially important when dealing with almost any aspect of the Libyan, Nubian, and Saite dynasties, a period from which no "historic documents survive" as Redford recently put it.² Much reliance will be placed on the evidence provided by the adoption decrees of the Saite princesses Nitocris and Ankhnesneferibre, and what little historic information that may be gleaned from the textual and iconographic evidence preserved in the tombs of their officials and the funerary and cultic chapels they erected at Medinet Habu and Karnak.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

The God's Wife: historical development and associated titles

Three hieroglyphic signs spell the Egyptian title *hemet netjer* $\overline{\text{H}}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$, a title commonly translated into English as “God’s Wife.” The short, straightforward phrase hides Egyptologists’ vague understanding of the nature and role that the bearers of this title played in temple ritual. In modern scholarship, two other titles have been used interchangeably to refer to the women who bore this enigmatic title. These titles are $\overline{\text{D}}\overline{\text{W}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ *dowwat netjer* (often translated as “Divine Adorer,” “Divine Worshipper,” “Divine Adoratrix,” or “Divine Adoratrice”) and $\overline{\text{D}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ *djeret netjer* (or, “God’s Hand”).

Placed at the beginning of each of the titles, in “honorific” transposition of the hieroglyphic signs, is the logographic sign $\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ (Gardiner sign list # R 8), which has the phonetic value of *netjer*. The sign represents a “cloth wound on a pole.”¹ The “clothing” of this staff signifies its status as a sacred object, or fetish, “charged with (divine) power.”² A secondary, derived interpretation of this sign is that it represented a cult flag. Entrances to Egyptian temples (Greek: *pylons*) were typically decorated with tall flagpoles.³ Considered a fetish, or “an emblem of divinity,”⁴ this sign may be viewed as an attribute of divinity, placed at the entrance of temples to mark them as places of divine residence. Whatever its origin may be, this sign became the “commonest Egyptian hieroglyph for ‘god’.”⁵ The second part of the title *hemet netjer* $\overline{\text{H}}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ spells the word for “wife” in Egyptian. The sign on top: $\overline{\text{W}}$ (Gardiner sign list # N 41), represents a “well full of water,” but came to represent a female’s organ, or a vagina.⁶

Next to the staff symbolizing “god” in the title $\overline{\text{D}}\overline{\text{W}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ *dowwat netjer*, or “Divine Adorer,” is a star (Gardiner sign list # N14).⁷ This sign occurs in the Egyptian words for “morning,” “rise early,” “dawn,” and “morning star,” but also in the verbs “to praise, worship” and “to adore’ (in the morning).”⁸ The hand in the title $\overline{\text{D}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ *djeret netjer* (“God’s Hand”) is a hieroglyphic ideogram, i.e. it literally conveys the idea of a hand, which here has the phonetic value of *djeret*. Each of the three titles ends with a short, flat hieroglyphic sign: $\overline{\text{F}}$. Representing a cross-section of a rounded loaf of bread, this sign has the phonetic value “*t*,” and was added at the end of Egyptian words to render them grammatically feminine.

While the title $\overline{\text{D}}\overline{\text{W}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ *dowwat netjer*, or “Divine Adorer,” clearly relates to the God’s Wife’s role as the chief worshipper of Amun, the title $\overline{\text{D}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{J}}\overline{\text{R}}$ *djeret netjer*, or

“God’s Hand,” seems to emphasize her sexual role in relation to the creator god, who, according to the Heliopolitan creation myth, used his hand to masturbate and thus set creation in motion⁹. Indeed, the title *djeret netjer* (“God’s Hand”) seems to emphasize its bearer’s sexual role in relation to the creator god. How such a sexual role was enacted in temple ritual remains unknown. Although one or both of these titles were occasionally borne by the God’s Wife, in ancient times, the three titles were not used interchangeably, and were, for the most part, held by different women. Indeed, during the reign of Hatshepsut, who was herself a God’s Wife of Amun, the daughter of the high priest of Amun Hapuseneb, whose name was Seniseneb held the title of Divine Adorer.¹⁰

The God’s Wife prior to the New Kingdom

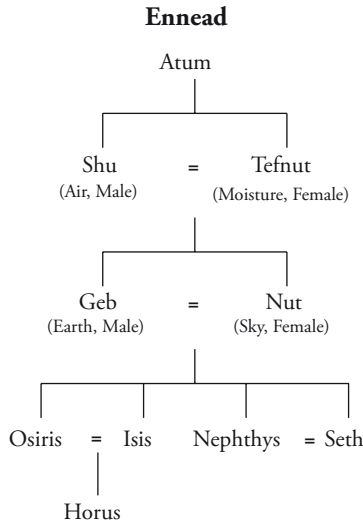
Prior to the Eighteenth dynasty, the title of “God’s Wife” is attested only in an abbreviated form, $\overline{\text{H}} \overline{\text{M}}$ *hemet netjer*, without a reference to any particular deity. During the Middle Kingdom, two women, both non-royal, held this abbreviated form of the title. Their names were Iy-meret-nebes and Neferu, and it is possible that both were priestesses.¹³ The absence of the name of a deity does not necessarily mean that these women did not have a particular god in mind. Hornung remarked that, for the most part, the Egyptians confined their interactions to a particular god of the pantheon, who then acted more or less as a patron deity. So that when ancient Egyptians referred to “a god,” without specifying a particular deity, it was this personal patron deity that they had in mind.¹⁴

When a god was first mentioned as having a “wife,” it is the ithyphallic god, Min.¹⁵ This “Wife of Min” had a name that incorporated her divine consort’s: Wenou-Min, and had a tomb hewn in the cliffs near the Middle Egyptian town of Akhmim. Although the exact date of the tomb’s construction cannot be precisely known, Wenou-Min’s tomb probably dates to the same time period as similar nearby tombs: the First Intermediate Period (c. 2181–2040 BC).¹⁶ The fact that Wenou-Min owned her own tomb indicates that she was a woman of means. Indeed, her other two titles link her to the king. Wenou-Min was both a “Sole Lady-in-Waiting” (Egyptian: *khekeret nesout watet* literally: “the King’s sole ornament”) and a “King’s noblewoman” (Egyptian: *Shepset-nesout*).¹⁷ The latter title was an archaizing title, common in the Old Kingdom, but one that did not survive into the Middle Kingdom.¹⁸ Both titles, but especially the former, place her securely within the ranks of the Egyptian “Aristocracy.”¹⁹

The God’s Wife during the New Kingdom

The earliest known association of a God’s Wife with Amun occurs at the beginning of the New Kingdom, when the fuller, more complete form of this title *hemet netjer en imen*, or “God’s Wife of Amun,” appears on the Donation Stela of Ahmose-Nefertari.²⁰ Although the name of Queen Ahhotep, Ahmose-Nefertari’s mother, occurs next to the title of God’s Wife of Amun, the title was probably given to Ahhotep posthumously.²¹ Shortly after expelling the Hyksos from Egypt, Ahmose (c. 1552–1527 BC) conferred

The mythic conception 1: Atum and the Heliopolitan creation myth



The Ancient Egyptians constructed several myths to account for the genesis of their world. It seems that each major cultic center developed its own account of creation. Sometimes, these myths converged. But when they did not, the multiplicity of approaches did not seem to bother the Egyptians. It is almost impossible to know whether these myths were propagated, and held in belief, simultaneously or in succession. But we know that some developed before others.

Known by its Greek name of Heliopolis, the ancient city of *Iounou* produced one of the oldest and most enduring Egyptian accounts of creation. According to the Heliopolitan creation myth, the creator god Atum, whose name means “the Complete One,” “the Undifferentiated One,” “Lord of all,” or “the All,” having no partner and existing all alone, set creation in motion by masturbating.¹¹ From his issuance came the first divine pair: Shu and Tefnut, the personifications of “air” (male) and “moisture” (female), respectively. In turn, this divine pair coupled and gave birth to Geb, the male personification of earth, and Tefnut, the female personification of the sky. Four children were produced from the union of Earth and Sky: two brothers (Osiris and Seth) and two sisters (Isis and Nephthys). Two brother-sister marriages ensued. Horus, “King of the Living,” was born to Osiris and Isis, while the union of Seth and Nephthys remained childless. The group of nine gods preceding Horus became known as the “Ennead” (Chart above). Venerated as primeval gods, the Ennead, in a sense, formed a sort of a royal genealogy.¹² The king was the living image, the incarnation, of Horus on earth.

the title of God's Wife on Ahmose-Nefertari, his half sister and Chief Royal Wife. The Hyksos, a group of semi-nomadic western Asiatic herdsmen, had occupied part of the Egyptian Delta during the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1720–c. 1550 BC). The Donation Stela records Ahmose's decision to appoint his wife to two prominent religious positions: Ahmose-Nefertari was to become a Second Priest attached to the priesthood of Amun, as well as a God's Wife of Amun.²² In creating the office of God's Wife of Amun, Ahmose took an obscure Middle Kingdom title and gave it national importance. Bolstering the cult of Amun served to establish his control over his newly unified country. Investing loyal members of his immediate family with power could only secure his own position. Ahmose's decree was monumentalized on a stela and publicly displayed near the third pylon at the temple of Amun at Karnak. The stela, whose three fragments were recovered over a period of twenty years, also recorded the establishment of a generously endowed estate of the God's Wife. Besty Bryan pointed out that the language of this decree was not particularly ecclesiastical, but contained distinct economic and administrative details, including the price paid by Ahmose to purchase the priesthood for his wife. The decree established the perpetual rights of the God's Wife and her successors to this newly-endowed estate, and specifically stated that the God's Wife's right to the estate's income was "independent of any kings who should arise in future generations."²³ From the time of Ahmose-Nefertari onward, the title, *and office*, of God's Wife of Amun became closely connected with the Egyptian ruling house. With Ahmose-Nefertari, the title of God's Wife became a royal prerogative held exclusively by a king's Chief Wife, or a king's daughter. Ahmose-Nefertari, Hatshepsut, and her daughter Neferure, all frequently used the title of God's Wife as their sole identifying title, which probably indicates that it was their favorite title.²⁴

In the latter half of the Eighteenth dynasty, however, and for much of the rest of the New Kingdom, the title of God's Wife occurred only sporadically. This relative obscurity of the title has caused speculation that the title, once used to bolster Hatshepsut's claim to the Egyptian throne, was intentionally given less prominence as a reaction to her rule.²⁵ Indeed, linking the stela's condition ("broken in three sections"), to the place of its discovery, ("placed as fill" within the Third Pylon), suggested to Bryan a somewhat intentional demolition of this monument by Thutmose III and his successors – possibly as part of a larger state-sponsored attempt to overhaul the conditions set forth in the Donation Stela. Certainly, hiding this decree from public view signaled an official reversal of its stipulations – particularly as these stipulations pertained to the God's Wife's right to, freely and independently, control the wealth of the second priesthood and her own estate.²⁶

Remarkably, though, in the Nineteenth dynasty, Tausret, widow of Seti II, who ruled on her own as a queen regnant (c. 1209–1200 BC) after her husband's death, was also a God's Wife.²⁷ But it is the fact that the Chief Royal wives of the first three rulers of the Nineteenth dynasty were God's Wives that gives us an impression of the political importance attached to the title of God's Wife even at the beginning of the Nineteenth dynasty. In appointing their Chief Wives – Sat-re, Tuya, and Nefertari-Merymut – Ramses I, Seti I, and Ramses II were merely following the precedent set by Ahmose, founder of the Eighteenth dynasty and the New Kingdom.