

Royal women as *wr.t-hnr* in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasty: continuity in discontinuity

Dana Bělohoubková

ABSTRACT

A very characteristic aspect of the New Kingdom royal family is the involvement and integration of royal women into the royal ideology, as well as their participation in the cult; for example, their presence during rituals such as the Opet festival. One of the foundations of the early New Kingdom state revolves around the concept of the king on the throne and his mother, sister or wife in the role of “god’s wife” (*hm.t-ntr*). This system appears to cease being productive after the reign of Queen Hatshepsut, or perhaps still slightly later, since the last female with this title is dated to the reign of Thutmose IV. It is highly possible that the position of “god’s wife” was at that time replaced by the post of the “great of musical performance” (*wr.t-hnr*); a post usually held by the wife of the high priest. The royal women later reappeared in this position, not only with the title of the “god’s wife”, but from the reign of the Sethi I, several of them also held the title of the “great of performers” (*wr.t-hnr*). This phenomenon could be symptomatic not only of the dynamic nature of both institutions, but also of the power race between the royal and non-royal elite.

KEYWORDS

royal women – god’s wife – great of performers – priestesses – New Kingdom – procession

سيدات من الأسرة الملكية حملن لقب *wr.t-hnr* خلال الأسرتين الثامنة عشرة والتاسعة عشرة: استمرارية خلال الانقطاع
دانا بلوهوبكوفا

المخلص

من السمات المميزة جداً للعائلة الملكية خلال عصر الدولة الحديثة هي مشاركة السيدات من الأسرة الملكية وإدماجهن في الأيديولوجية الملكية، فضلاً عن مشاركتهن في طقوس العبادة، على سبيل المثال، حضورهن أثناء الطقوس والاحتفالات خلال عيد الأوبت. يدور أحد أهم مميزات الدولة الحديثة في بدايتها حول مفهوم الملك على العرش وبجواره سيدة، سواء كانت والدته أو أخته أو زوجته، حيث قمن بدور «زوجة الإله» (*hm.t-ntr*). ويبدو أن هذا النظام لم يعد معمولاً به بعد عهد الملكة حتشبسوت، أو ربما بعد تلك الفترة بقليل، لأن آخر سيدة حملت هذا اللقب ربما عاشت في عهد الملك تحتمس الرابع. حيث من المحتمل أنه تم استبدال منصب «زوجة الإله» في ذلك الوقت بمنصب آخر هو «سيدة/كبيرة المؤديات الموسيقيات» (*wr.t-hnr*)، وهو المنصب الذي كانت تشغله عادة زوجة كبير الكهنة. وحملت سيدات من البيت الملكي في وقت لاحق هذا المنصب، ليس فقط لقب «زوجة الإله»، ولكن منذ عهد الملك سيتي الأول، حملن العديد منهن أيضاً لقب «سيدة/كبيرة المؤديات» (*wr.t-hnr*). يمكن أن تكون هذه الظاهرة من أعراض، ليس فقط الطبيعة الديناميكية لكلتا المؤسستين، ولكن أيضاً لسباق القوة بين النخبة الملكية وغير الملكية.

الكلمات الدالة

سيدات ملكيات – زوجة الإله – كبيرة المؤديات – الكاهنات – الدولة الحديثة – موكب

INTRODUCTION

The position of a royal woman was defined by her relation to the king; something that is clearly reflected by means of several designations, such as “wife of the king” (*hm.t nsw*), “daughter of the king” (*s3.t nsw*), and “sister of the king” (*sn.t nsw*). In rituals in general, these women functioned as opposites to the (male) kings – together the male and female principle (queen) formed a whole (Troy 1986: 1–3). Ideally, rituals should be led by the king as the main officiant, and a representative of the god on earth (having divine kingship), accompanied by a queen who represented the feminine element (in the position of “god’s wife”, “hand of the god”). However, the title of “god’s wife” was lost during the Eighteenth Dynasty and only briefly reappeared in the course of the Nineteenth Dynasty (Sander-Hansen 1940: 5–7). This article explores the dynamics of the position that formed the counterbalance to the male officiant – the king/priest. The aim is to show both the continuity of this pattern even when the post of “god’s wife” was not filled and a different post came to the fore, as well as, on the other hand, its later adaptation to new conditions when the role of the main counterpart came to be filled once again by the queen.

Understanding the role of women in the cult (especially the royal ones) is an important piece to the puzzle of how the whole cult worked.¹ Especially during periods of great social change. This article discusses the phenomenon of royal wives, specifically their role in the cult as “god’s wife” (*hm.t-ntr*) and the relationship between that title and the title of “great of performers” (*wr.t-hnr*), held by non-royal individuals. The dynamic between these two titles is interesting and may reveal the role of royal women in rituals (and may even have the potential to refute claims of the waning power of the Nineteenth Dynasty queens). It is also possible to trace the shift of focus from the royal family, who ideally were the main officiants to the deity, to non-royal persons, and to both the high priest and ideally his wife, preferably great of performers of the given cult, *i.e.* the professionalization of the cult. The questions then are by what mechanisms did the whole system cope with a situation where the king, for example, led rituals during important festivals, and were the royal women present in these rituals?

The possibility that ritual matters in the period when the post of “god’s wife” was not occupied were performed by a non-royal woman with the title of “great of performers” appears in the literature (Gosselin 2007: 253). However, this assumption is not supported by any arguments or collected material on women with the title of “great of performers”.² In this paper, an analysis of the dates collected for this research support this assumption. The fact that this title is in several mentions among the royal women of the family of Ramesses II is not explained anywhere.

This paper works with data on three different groups of people. The first are royal women with the title “god’s wife”, the second are non-royal women with the title “great of performers”. The third group is again royal women this time with the title “great of performers”. The

1 This article is based on my forthcoming dissertation, which examines a group of women referred to as musical performers. The dissertation is not yet complete and this article also aims to be a contribution to the discussion, not a definitive study on the topic.

2 This title also continues to appear occasionally in the literature as “great of (royal) harem”.

paper then works with the chronological sequence and succession of each title, depending on what evidence we have. In the case of royal women, all occurrences where they had the title “great of performers” have been considered, and as can be seen below, these documents are few in number.

THE “GOD’S WIFE OF AMUN”

The title of “god’s wife” has in recent years been extensively studied for the Third Intermediate and Late Period.³ The title “god’s wife” is first attested in the First Intermediate Period for a woman named Iymeretnebes in Akhmim. In this early case, and in another example attested from the Middle Kingdom involving a woman named Neferu, it is not yet the title of the “divine wife of Amun” as we know it from the New Kingdom. However, these two cases tend to be associated with ithyphallic deities, and the origin of the title has been linked to sexual connotations and Heliopolitan mythology, where the bearer of the title was supposed to represent the hand of the god within the birth myth (Sander-Hansen 1940: 19; Gitton 1984: 7). In this myth, the god Atum creates the world through masturbation, as described in the Pyramid Texts (PT 1248 a–d). That this is a slightly different function than in the New Kingdom is also reflected by the fact that the two women mentioned were not of royal descent.

One reaches more solid ground regarding the function of this title with the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, when Ahmose Nefertari, and probably posthumously queen Ahhotep, acquire this post (Sander-Hansen 1940: 20; Gitton 1984: 21–23). The so-called Donation stela indicates that this had already taken place at the very beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The text on the stela states that the queen is given the title of the “second prophet of Amun”, but it also implies that she had the title of “god’s wife”. This title, which included possession over a domain as well, also lent stewardship over movable and immovable property as is described in the text itself.⁴ If this institution did not receive any other income besides the commodities mentioned, one can speculate that it was a relatively modest donation.⁵ The ruler allocated a total of 60 aroura of land to this office, which is roughly 1.6 hectares. Such an area is capable of supporting up to 20 people, which is not a very large number. The title of “god’s wife” was hereditary, ideally from mother to daughter (Sander-Hansen 1940: 13), and the creation of this office was certainly a political decision to keep power in the royal family. The “god’s wife” complemented the king during rituals. According to Bryan (2005, 2), several ritual activities associated with the “god’s wife” can be identified from the decoration of the Red Chapel of queen Hatshepsut at Karnak:

3 See, for example, Ayad (2007 and 2009), with further bibliography; or the proceeding from the conference on this topic Becker – Blöbaum – Lohwasser (2016). On the individual holders of this office, again in the Third Intermediate Period and Late Period, for example, Dodson (2002); Pope (2013). There are also studies dealing with certain topics, but again relating to a later period, such as the question of celibacy in the Late Period (Teeter 1999). Or also studies of the monuments of officials who served god’s wives, but again dated after a later period, for example, Graefe (2017 and 2021).

4 See, Bryan (2005: 3–4) with references to more bibliography.

5 Sander-Hansen (1940, 44) states that this institution was probably not self-sufficient and must have been supplied for by the state.

- She attended liturgies alongside the “god’s father” or high priest.
- She purified herself before the ritual in the sacred lake, as did the rest of the priesthood.
- She was allowed to enter to the intimate parts of the temple, including the main sanctuary.
- She recited offering lists as part of the food offering on a daily basis.
- In the presence of the high priest, she burned wax figurines representing the enemy of the god and thus maintained Maat.
- She rattled the sistrum before Amun.

It is evident from the duties described that the holder of this office was an integral part of the rituals and festivals at Karnak (Sander-Hansen 1940: 24–26). This took place either in person or the queen was represented by a priestess. This inclusion of a member of the royal family in the (ritual) running of Karnak certainly played its part in the king’s motive for giving this hereditary office to members of the royal family. Lana Troy (1986: 97) sees this title as part of the ideology of divine parentage (the myth of the divine birth of the king). The list of female holders of this title in the Eighteenth Dynasty is not entirely clear; it is still being debated whether some royal women ever held this title.⁶ This situation is not helped by a lack of sources, and also by the fact that royal women often had the same name. In this article, I base myself on the research of Gitton (1984), who has thoroughly evaluated the sources and identified six holders of this title, namely Ahmose Nefertari, Merytamon, Hatshepsut, Nefrure, Hatshepsut II Merytre, and Tiaa (tab. 1).⁷ This with the understanding that the last holder of the title, Tiaa, was not necessarily the queen and mother of Thutmose IV. However, she was probably a royal woman from the court of Thutmose IV (Gitton 1984: 90–91).

None of the royal wives at the court of Amenhotep III is attested with this title. The fact that the Donation stela was found broken into three parts in the third pylon of Karnak (Bryan 2005: 6–7), which was constructed precisely by Amenhotep III, also seems to be symptomatic, and might indicate a break in the tradition. We can speculate regarding the motives behind the destruction of such an important document. Was it, for example, no longer relevant as the post was not occupied? This also raises the question why the office would remain unoccupied for many years. It seems that following the queen’s daughter Nefrure holding the office, it passed on to a female of non-royal origin who later became a royal wife, Hatshepsut II Merytre (Gitton 1984: 82–83). This development might have happened due to the absence of a suitable candidate from within the royal family. On the other hand, one can assume that royal families were rather large; hence to find at least a nominal holder for such a title/position should have

6 Michel Gitton (1984), for example, includes fewer female holders of the title during the Eighteenth Dynasty than Sander-Hansen (1940). Gitton gives a thorough argument for why some women, in his view, did not hold the title. In this article, then, I draw on his argument.

7 Sander-Hansen (1940: 7) also gives this title for some princesses, such as Sitamun and Sat Kamose. He also sees Mutemwia, the wife of Thutmose IV, as the last holder of the title of “god’s wife” in the Eighteenth Dynasty, but this claim does not stand on firm foundations (Gitton 1984: 92–93); the torso from Denderah, which was identified as queen Mutemwia, is probably not from the Eighteenth Dynasty at all (Gosselin 2007: 8–24).

Royal female	Status (relation to the king)
Eighteenth Dynasty	
Ahmose Nefertari	wife of Ahmose
Merytamon	daughter of Ahmose, wife of Amenhotep I
Hatshepsut	daughter of Thutmose I, wife of Thutmose II
Nefrure	daughter of Thutmose II and Hatshepsut
Hatshepsut II Merytre	wife of Thutmose III, mother of the Amenhotep II
Tiaa	Unknown
Nineteenth Dynasty	
Sitre	wife of Ramesse I
Tuy	wife of Sethi I
Twentieth Dynasty	
Isis	daughter of Ramesse IV
Tity	wife of Ramesse X

Tab. 1 The holders of the title “god’s wife”

been possible. The reason why this post remained unoccupied might still be another; as will be discussed further on.

After the reign of Thutmose IV there are only a few holders of the title *hm.t ntr* (Gosselin 2007: 25–128) known, namely the wife of Ramesse I, Sitre, the wife of Sethi I, Tuy, and Queen Tausret during the Nineteenth Dynasty. Later on, the title still occurs with the daughter of Ramesse VI, Isis, and the wife of Ramesse X, Tity (Gosselin 2007: 129–211; Yoyotte 2008: 174–177). As is visible from the list of holders of this title, overall, the post was very rarely occupied (tab. 1). This was probably due to the need to reorganize the post-Amarna cult, as well as the new dynasty’s efforts to legitimize itself through the revival of this prestigious institution (Gosselin 2007: 252).

According to Constantin Sander-Hansen (1940: 27), the service of “god’s wife” was daily and therefore it was a fictitious title, which was held by the queen, but the actual rituals were performed by some other priestess, whose title, however, he does not specify. According to him, then the royal wife herself would perform the rituals associated with her function only on important occasions. Thus, there would not have been so much going on in the absence of that office. The rituals would still be performed by the priestess who normally performed them for the queen.

However, if the practice was different and the “god’s wife” was responsible for some part of the ritual, who would perform it when the post was not filled?

I believe we need to look outside the royal family for an answer to this question, namely to the title of the “great of the performers”. This solution is also accepted by Luc Gosselin (2007: 253), who sees the non-occupation of the post of “god’s wife” as a disruption of the matrilineal inheritance of this title.

Name	Title	Source
Huya	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	statue BM EA 1280
Meryt	<i>wr.t-hnr n sbk šd.ty</i>	TT 63
Tuya	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn/ wr.t-hnr n mn</i>	KV 46
Ipny	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	stela Lyon 88
Takhat	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	TT 50
Maya	<i>wr.t-hnr</i>	Bubasteion I.20
Taemwadjisy	<i>wr.t-hnr n nb-hpr.w-r^c</i>	temple Faras
Iuy	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn-htp</i>	TT 19
Mutneferet	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn nb t3 jw-rd</i>	tomb Zawiyet Meitin
Renenut	<i>wr.t-hnr n hwt-hrnb.t mdd.t</i>	statue Asyut MMA 15.2.1
Merytre	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn(r^c)</i>	TT 106
Majanuy	<i>wr.t-hnr n wsjr</i>	statue from Abydos 35257
Tuy	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	statue from Medinet Habu
Nebettawy	<i>wr.t-hnr n mw.t</i>	TT 255
Buy	<i>wr.t-hnr n mw.t</i>	TT 255
Tiy	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	TT 106
Maiay	<i>wr.t-hnr n mntw nb iwn</i>	TT 331
Wadjetrenpet	<i>wr.t-hnr.wt</i>	stela from Abydos 1137
Khatnisu	<i>wr.t-hnr n jn-hr</i>	statue from Abydos 35257
Tiye	<i>wr.t-hnr n wsjr</i>	statue from Abydos 35257
Tiye	<i>wr.t-hnr n mntw</i>	TT 382
Takhat	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn/ wr.t-hnr n hwt-hr</i>	TT 157
Isis	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	Naples 1069
Nefertari	<i>wr.t-hnr n hr nb ḥ</i>	Luxor temple
Merytamon	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn-r^c</i>	statue from Akhmin
Neferetmut	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	TT 194
Tia	<i>wr.t-hnr n p3-r^c</i>	Saqqara tomb
Hunuray (Heli)	<i>wr.t-hnr n hry-šf</i>	Sedment 201
Tausret	<i>wr.t-hnr n hns.w</i>	TT 25
Meretseger	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn (m.jp.t-sw.t)</i>	TT 35
Neferetmut	<i>wr.t-hnr n jmn</i>	Stela W.es Sebuia 15
Nashuy	<i>wr.t-hnr n dhwtj</i>	tomb B2; Tuna el Gebel

Tab. 2 The holders of the title “great of performers”

	Husband	Title	Reign of the king
			Thutmose III
	Sobekhotep	<i>jmy-r3 ḥtm.w-ntr n sbk šd.ty</i>	Thutmose IV /Amenhotep II
	Yuya	<i>ḥm-ntr n mn</i>	Amenhotep III
	Ptahmose	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n jmn</i>	Amenhotep III
	Ameneinet	<i>jt ntr n jmn</i>	Amenhotep III/ Akhnaton?
			Tutankhamun
	or brother Huy	<i>z3 nsw n Kš</i>	Tutankhamun
	Amenmosi	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n jmn-ḥtp (n p3 wb3)</i>	Ramesse I/Sethi I
	Nefersekeru	<i>jmy-r3 pr-wr n nb t3-wj</i>	Sethi I?
	Iuny	<i>jmy-r3 sw.t-nsw</i>	Sethi I
	Nebnetjeru called Turi	<i>ḥm-ntr tpj n jmn</i>	Sethi I
	Mery	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n wsjr</i>	Sethi I
	Sethi I	<i>nsw-bjtj</i>	Sethi I
	Roy	<i>jmy-r3 pr ḥr-m-ḥb</i>	Sethi I?
	Anonymous	<i>ḥm-ntr tpy n T^ch-ms nfrt3ry</i>	
			Sethi I /Ramesse II
	Paenniut	<i>ḥm-ntr tpj n mntw</i>	Ramesse II (first half of his reign)
			Ramesse II
	Menmesu	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n jn-ḥr</i>	Ramesse II
	Wennefer	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n wsjr</i>	Ramesse II
	Usermontu	<i>ḥm-ntr tpj n mntw nb w3s.t</i>	Ramesse II
	Nebwenenef	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n jmn/ḥm-ntr tp.j n ḥw.t-ḥr</i>	Ramesse II
	Wennefer	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n jmn</i>	Ramesse II
	Ramesse II	<i>nsw-bjtj</i>	Ramesse II
	Djehutiemhab?	<i>jmy-r3 šḥtj.w n pr jmn</i>	Ramesse II
	Tia	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n jmn n r^c-ms.sw</i>	Ramesse II
	Rahotep	<i>jmy-r3 njw.t Ḑtj</i>	Ramesse II
	Amenemhab	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n ḥnsw</i>	Ramesse II
	Bakenkhonsu	<i>ḥm-ntr tp.j n jmn</i>	Ramesse II
	Setau	<i>s3-nsw n Kš</i>	Ramesse II
			Ramesse II

INSTITUTION *pr-hnr*

The institution of *hnr* itself existed already at the time of the Old Kingdom.⁸ The iconographical depictions and written sources indicate that already in the Old Kingdom the *hnr* served on different occasions. It is depicted as a procession of people, during rituals, who are usually followed by captions for singing (e.g. *hs.t*) and lamenting (e.g. *h3t*) (Nord 1975: 142–144). The iconography helps to clarify the participation of these performers on different occasions, for instance, as part of a funerary procession. In the Sixth Dynasty, it was also associated with the cult of the goddess Hathor. This can be, for example, observed in scenes from private tombs dealing with the topic of invoking Hathor, “The Golden One”; an expression that was also linked with the concept of the divine king (Nord 1981: 141). The connection between the king and *hnr* is also supported by the title *jmy-r3 hnr n nsw*, suggesting that *hnr* also featured in royal ceremonies. The main occasions where *hnr* participated during rituals can be summarised as follows (Teeter 1993: 77):

- a) Cult of goddesses and gods
- b) Funerary rituals, where they formed a part of the funerary estates
- c) Royal ceremonies.

In the New Kingdom, the *hnr* was led by a female representative with the title *wr.t-hnr* (“great of performers”).⁹ Holders of this title have been preserved for a variety of cults, next to the cult of Amun, such as Min, Sobek, Mut, or one even encounters *hnr* representatives of the cult of the deified ruler, e.g. Amenhotep I (see tab 2). Females with this title are documented from the reign of Thutmose III. The first documented holder is Huya, the mother of the “god’s wife” of Amun, Hatshepsut II Merytre, starting a long, unbroken line of women identified as “great of performers” during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasty. *Wr.t-hnr* were most often wives of a high priest (see tab. 2); following a similar pattern as in the case of the king as chief officiant and the queen as “god’s wife”. The combination of high priest and “great of performers” (*wr.t-hnr*) probably worked in the same way, representing two complementary roles. From documented sources, it seems that every major religious centre had a “great of performers” in addition to the high priest of the cult, and this includes the temples of deified rulers as well (see tab. 2). Therefore, the title *wr.t-hnr* is also encountered in burial sites outside Thebes. Moreover, it seems that in the Nineteenth Dynasty, as a reaction to an increase in personnel, a redistribution and extension of the *wr.t-hnr* post occurred for the Theban triad and other Theban deities. Indeed, we have from the Theban area, at one time, instead of only one *wr.t-hnr n jmn*, also the “great of performers” of Mut, Khonsu, and Montu. Furthermore, prosopographical data show that families of high priests of different cults were often united by marriages.¹⁰

8 For *hnr* in the Old Kingdom, see Nord (1981); Bryan (1982), Guegan (2020). I am aware that Izold Guegan has written a doctoral thesis on this subject, but I do not have access to it.

9 The translation of the title is still under discussion, see Bělohoubková (2022) with further bibliography. The English translation of the title used here is based on Nord (1981) and Bryan (1982). Whenever the term “great of performers” is used in this article, it always means the title *wr.t-hnr*.

10 This topic will be discussed more deeply in my dissertation thesis (*The Institution of hnr in the New Kingdom*, Charles University).

Due to the fact that we also have their family tombs among the sources, it is often possible to construct the family tree of several of the holders of the title (see, for example, Bělohoubková 2021). From an iconographical point of view, it furthermore can be stated that the iconography of the *wr.t-ḥnr* is very similar to that of the “god’s wife”. Both groups of women are depicted elaborately dressed with a tripartite wig and a sistrum in hand. As the “god’s wife” had the function of a sistrum before the god, her task was to shake this sistrum in order to please the god (Sander-Hansen 1940: 24). In the case of *wr.t-ḥnr*, we do not know of this function from written sources, but her iconography would suggest so. The fact is, however, that depictions of a woman holding a sistrum are also found for other women of higher status. It is therefore possible that this iconography merely refers to the fact that this is a high-ranking individual.

During the Nineteenth Dynasty, the line of *wr.t-ḥnr* from among the wives of the high priest of Amun continued unabated. This includes personalities such as Merytre, the wife of the high priest of Amun Nebnetjeru called Turi during the reign of Sethi I, or Takhat (see Bělohoubková 2021), the wife of the high priest of Amun Nebwenenef during the reign of Ramesse II. However, from this period onward holders of the title of “god’s wife” suddenly also reappear on the scene.

ROYAL FEMALES WITH THE TITLE *wr.t-ḥnr*

At the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty, there is one interesting phenomenon that should be taken into consideration: several sources exist where royal women are marked with the title *wr.t-ḥnr* (tab. 3).

Name	Title	Family relation
Tuy	<i>wr.t-ḥnr n jmn</i>	wife of Sethi I, mother of Ramesse II
Nefertari	<i>wr.t-ḥnr n ḥr nb ʿḥ</i>	wife of Ramesse II
Tia	<i>wr.t-ḥnr n p3 rʿ</i>	sister of Ramesse II, daughter of Sethi I
Merytamon	<i>wr.t-ḥnr n jmn-rʿ</i>	daughter of Ramesse II

Tab. 3 Royal women with the title *wr.t-ḥnr*

This title is first attested for the wife of king Sethi I, Tuy, who was also holder of the titles, “mother of the king” (*mw.t-nsw*), “god’s wife” (*ḥm.t-ntr*), “great one of the *ḥts* sceptre” (*wr.t-ḥts*), “singer of Mut” (*jhy.t [n mwt]*) and finally “great of performers of Amun” (*wr.t-ḥnr n jmn*). In this case, it is unique that Queen Tuy held not only the title exclusively reserved for members of the royal family, i.e. “god’s wife”, but she represents also the first documented case where the title *wr.t-ḥnr* was held by a royal person; clearly combining these two functions in a single person. These titles are documented on the badly damaged statue of the queen found at the temple of Medinet Habu; probably originally placed at the Ramesseum (see Habachi 1979: 49). The monument certainly originates in the Theban area, which may also be one reason why the queen was titled the “great of performer of Amun”.

Her daughter, the sister of the future King Ramesse II, Tia, was also a “great of the performers”, this time of the god Re (*wr.t-ḥnr n p3 rʿ*). She was holder of the titles “great of performers of Re” (*wr.t wr.t-ḥnr n p3 rʿ*), “chantress of Amun in Anekhetu” (*šmʿ.yt n jmn n ʿ3-nḥtw*), “lady of house” (*nb.t-pr*), and “chantress of Amun” (*šmʿ.yt n jmn*). Tia was married to treasurer (*jmy-r3 ḥd*) and high priest of Re of Ramesse Meryamon (*ḥm-ntr tpy n jmn n rʿ-ms-sw mry-jmn*) also called Tia. Monuments associated with this woman have been found in the Memphite area, where her tomb was located (for the tomb, see Martin 1997). The title of *wr.t-ḥnr* was documented on a stela of a non-royal man, called Amenemhab (Málek 1974), from the same area. Since this is a find from Lower Egypt, it is interesting that the princess was somehow involved in the cult of the god Re and not, for example, Ptah.

Another holder of the title *wr.t-ḥnr* was the wife of Ramesse II, Nefertari. Her titles were “great royal wife” (*ḥm.t-nsu wr.t*), “lady of both lands” (*nb.t-t3wy*) and “great of performers of Horus, lord of the palace” (*wr.t-ḥnr n ḥr nb ʿḥ*). The last title occurred on the southern interior wall of the forecourt of the Luxor Temple, which depicted a procession of royal children led by Nefertari. Her title is probably related to this specific function within the celebrations of the Opet festival.

The last lady with the title was the daughter of Ramesse II, Merytamon. On her colossal statue from Akhmin one finds the titles “great of performers of Amun-Re” (*wr.t-ḥnr n jmn-rʿ*), “singer of Mut” (*jhy.t n mwt*), “menat of Hathor” (*mnj.t n ḥwt-ḥr*) and “chantress of Atum” (*šmʿ.yt n jtm*) (Kuhlman 1983: 17).

As this overview indicates, these are three generations of royal women at the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty. Interestingly, royal women occupied the post of *wr.t-ḥnr* in various cults; not just the state cult of Amun(re). In the case of Tia, the title might be connected with a specific ceremony in Lower Egypt in which she participated. In a similar vein, this might also be speculated in relation to Nefertari, with her title probably connected to her participation in the Opet festival. The question remains whether royal women had these titles in general, or whether they were put in these positions when they were supposed to participate in a ritual alongside the ruler (as an officiant). The fact that we have documented non-royal holders of these titles from this period would suggest this practice. The same could also be supported by the fact that more monuments do not bear this title of royal women. These are isolated documents, associated with specific events. It is therefore possible to imagine a system in which, in a normal operation, the high priest and his wife were responsible for the performance of the rituals in the position of “great of performers”. When a ritual was, however, exceptionally performed by the king, he was accompanied by a royal woman who carried the title “great of performers” to represent the necessary female component in the ritual.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, the ideal persons according to the mythology and ideology for performing any ritual was the king accompanied by the queen, who represented the female element within the overall concept. However, the ruler could not be everywhere, and the high priest, as his representative, performed the rituals, accompanied by his wife representing the female aspect. Therefore, one can recognise two distinct levels. The first one relates to how the ritual should ideally be performed according to the mythology and ideology (the king and queen).

The second level, on a more practical base, relates to who in reality carried out the actual ritual act (the high priest and “great of performers”).¹¹

Since we have no documented holder of the title “great of performers” from the first half of the Eighteenth Dynasty, it seems that the role, at least in the Theban area and at least on important occasions, was performed by a member of the royal family with the title “god’s wife”. A female member of the royal family could have various sorts of relationships to the king; she could be a mother, wife, sister or daughter. Whichever variant happened to be chosen, she is continuously represented in the role of the goddess Hathor in the ritual (Troy 1986: 53–54).

A major change occurs roughly around the reign of Thutmose IV, because after his reign, we have no documented woman with the title “god’s wife” for the Eighteenth Dynasty. Nevertheless, on the non-royal level, one starts to encounter women with the title “great of performers”. It is, therefore, possible that the female (royal) role in ritual became delegated to (non-royal) holders of this specific title. In the same manner that the high priest represented the king in cultic acts, so his wife with the title “great of performers” (*wr.t-hnr*) represented the female component in the ritual, the queen. This would also follow from the time continuity of the evidence of both titles. So, at a time when we do not have the title “god’s wife” we have the title “great of performers”.

Another indicator that the duties of “god’s wife” could have been done by a woman with the title of “great of performers”, if that title was not occupied, is the title of Queen Ahmose Nefertari. In the sources that date from her lifetime, she bears the title “god’s wife” (compare with Gitton 1981: 6–24). However, the title “great of performers” is also attested for her, but only on the younger monuments that were created after her death (see Gitton 1981: 69). This means that she never had this title during her lifetime. Why it is attributed to her on the younger monuments is a question. However, we can assume that at that time, the acts with which she was associated were performed by the woman with the title “great of performers”. Thus, there was a kind of “updating” of her titulature so that the titles would agree with the reality that existed at the time the younger monument was created.

The question remains, however, whether we are witnessing with this change in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty indications of the ongoing power-race between the ruler and the elite, in this case the growing power of the priesthood of Amun, which is interpreted as one of the main reasons for the so-called Amarna period.¹² The reason behind this development might, on the other hand, also imply a delegation of duties, caused by changing circumstances, coupled with an increase in the complexity and frequency of rituals, making it necessary to adapt to the changing situation and to entrust this function to a specialist. The absence of the position of “god’s wife” would then only imply the demise of a no longer functioning office. In this case, this development should not be considered proof of a power-race, but rather an

11 This topic is addressed in my Ph.D. thesis, which I am still writing, so these are preliminary conclusions.

12 This view of the king in opposition to Amun’s priesthood was already mentioned in the 1877 by Heinrich Brugsch (Hornung 1999: 8) and this narrative is often mentioned in Egyptological literature.

(administrative) operation and a manner of agreement between the ruler and his subjects, as Haring indicates for a later period.¹³

The beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty is, in this perspective, very interesting for this particular study. On the one hand, we have evidence that some queens held the title of “god’s wife”, on the other hand we also have a large number of women with the title “great of performers”. Moreover, some royal wives also carried the title “great of performers” (*wr:t-hnr*). We may assume, therefore, that the practice of earlier periods continued to operate in a certain fashion, *i.e.*, that the king and queen were represented in temple rituals on a routine basis by the high priest and the “great of performers”. However, since there was a large increase in priestly personnel, one observes a larger number of *wr:t-hnr* for various cults in this period, related to Amun, Mut, Khonsu and many other deities.

In addition, in certain cases the ritual itself was officiated by the ruler, such as the procession during the Opet festival, and in these exceptional cases, the ruler was not accompanied by the high priest’s wife, but by a queen or princess as his female counterpart, who was probably given the title of *wr:t-hnr* only for such a specific occasion. Both for, one specific event and also for the possibility that the title of “great of performers” could have been held by the queen, for example, on each Opet feast which was led by the king. Since in that ritual they represent the earthly incarnations of the divine couple – therefore, the king cannot be here only with the wife of the high priest, but is accompanied by a queen or a woman from the royal family who represents the goddess (Mut, Hathor, *etc.*). It seems that the title of “god’s wife” alone was no longer sufficient to cover all necessary aspects at this time. This title probably already had a different meaning when compared with the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, as may be evidenced by the “update” of the titulature in the case of the sources mentioning Ahmose Nefetari, which were written generations after her death. In light of this, the queen/princess needed to be bestowed with a title more suited to these religious acts. The question remains whether the ruler intended to reverse the *status quo* by the renewed bestowal of the title “god’s wife” to the queen in the early Nineteenth Dynasty. Should this be the case, for what reason did he need to bequeath to the queen also the title of “great of performers”? Could it be that the title “god’s wife” was at this time so distant and empty that it proved insufficient to cover all aspects of the (ritual) tasks involved? The fact that the title continued to be systematically unfilled could be seen as a factor in favour of this conclusion. Hence, are we witnessing in this overall development an adaptation of the title “great of performers” to the original duties of the “god’s wife”? And thus, continuity in discontinuity?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was written within the framework of the Czech Science Foundation – Grant GA ČR 19-07268S: Continuity, Discontinuity, and Change. Adaptation Strategies of Individuals and Communities in Egypt at Times of Internal and External Transformations.

13 Ben Haring (2007) shows with the example of the Mansions of the million years and Sethi I’s decrees how the interests between the king and the temple were combined. Rather than a power-race between these institutions one should consider it in the light of two cooperating sides.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AYAD, MARIAM, F.

- 2007 “On the identity and role of the god’s wife of Amun in rites of royal and divine dominion”, *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 34, pp. 1–13.
- 2009 *God’s wife, God’s servant: the God’s wife of Amun (c.740–525 BC)*, London: Routledge.

BECKER, MEIKE – BLÖBAUM ANKE, I. – LOHWASSER, ANGELIKA (EDS.)

- 2016 “Prayer and Power”: *Proceedings of the conference on the God’s Wives of Amun in Egypt during the First Millennium Bc.*, Münster: Ugarit [Ägypten und Altes Testament 84].

BĚLOHOUBKOVÁ, DANA

- 2021 “The Riddle of the Tachat Family”, *Journal of Egyptian History* 14, pp. 1–17.
- 2022 “Musical Performers of an Ancient Egyptian Harem? Aspects of Continuity, Discontinuity, and Change in Relation of the Word *hnr*”, *Archiv orientální* 90, pp. 1–23.

BRYAN, BETSY

- 2005 “Property and the God’s Wives of Amun”, in: Lyons, Deborah – Westbrook, Raymond (eds.). *Women and Property in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean societies*, Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University, pp. 1–15.

DODSON AIDAN

- 2002 “The problem of Amenirdis II and the heirs to the office of god’s wife of Amun during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 88, pp. 179–186.

GOSSELIN, LUC

- 2007 *Les Divines Épouses d’Amon dans l’Égypte de la XIXeme a la XXIeme dynastie*, Paris: Cybele.

GRAEFE, ERHART

- 2017 “A new High Steward of the God’s wife Nitocris: Padibastet, grandson of Pabasa and successor of Padihorresnet”, in: Pischnikova, Elena (ed.). *Tombs of the South Asasif necropolis: new discoveries and research 2012–14*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, pp. 241–249.
- 2021 “Entrance and the vestibule of the high steward of the god’s wife, Padibastet, in the tomb of Karabasken (TT 391)”, in: Pischnikova, Elena (ed.). *Tombs of the South Asasif necropolis: art and archaeology 2015–18*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, pp. 91–102.

GITTON, MICHEL

- 1981 *L’Épouse du dieu Ahmes Néfertary. Documents sur vie et son culte posthume*, Besançon: Belles Lettres.
- 1984 *Les divines épouses de la 18e dynastie*, Besançon: Belles Lettres.

GUEGAN, IZOLD

- 2020 “The men of the *hnr*”, *Prague Egyptological Studies* XXV, pp. 112–127.

HABACHI, LABIB

- 1979 “A Head of queen Touy and a block of Shabaka now kept in museums abroad”, *Göttinger Miscellen* 31, pp. 47–53.

HARING, BEN

- 2007 “Ramesside Temples and the Economic Interests of the State: Crossroads of the Sacred and the Profane”, in: Fitzenreiter, Martin (ed.). *Das Heilige und die Ware. Zum Spannungsfeld von Religion und*

Ökonomie, London: Golden House Publication [Internet-Beiträge zur Ägyptologie und Sudanarchäologie VII], pp. 165–170.

HORNUNG, ERIK

1999 *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

KUHLMANN, KLAUS K.

1983 *Materialien zur Archäologie und Geschichte des Raumes von Achmim*, Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern [Sonderschrift, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo 11].

MÁLEK, JAROMÍR

1974 “Two monuments of the Tias”, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 60, pp. 161–167.

MARTIN, GEOFFREY THORNDIKE

1997 *The Tomb of Tia and Tia. A royal monument of the Ramesside Period in the Memphite Necropolis*, London: Egypt Exploration Society.

NORD, DEL

1975 “Review of Elfriede Reisner, *Der Königliche Harem im Alten Ägypten und seine Verwaltung*”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 34/2, pp. 142–144.

1981 “The Term *hnr*: ‘Harem’ or ‘Musical Performers’?”, in: Simpson, William Kelly – Davies, Whitney M. (eds.). *Studies in Ancient Egypt the Aegean, and the Sudan. Essay in honor of Dows Dunham on the occasion of his 90th birthday, June 1, 1980*, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, pp. 35–54.

POPE, JEREMY

2013 “The problem of Meritefnut: a “god’s wife” during 25th–26th Dynasties”, *Journal of Egyptian History* 6/2, pp. 177–216.

SANDER-HANSEN, CONSTANTIN EMIL

1940 *Das Gottesweib des Amun*, Kobenhavn: Munksgaard.

TEETER, EMILY

1993 “Female Musicians in Pharaonic Egypt”, in: Marshall, Kimberly (ed.). *Rediscovering the Muses. Women’s Musical Traditions*, Boston: Northeast University Press, pp. 68–91.

1999 “Celibacy and the adoption among the God’s Wives of Amun: a revaluation of the evidence”, in: Teeter, Emily – Larson John, A. (eds.). *Gold of praise: studies on the ancient Egypt in honor of Edward F. Wente*, Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, pp. 405–414.

TROY, LANA

1986 *Patterns of queenship in ancient Egyptian myth and history*, Uppsala: Universitet.

YOYOTTE, JEAN

2008 “The divine adoratrices of Amun”, in: Ziegler, Christiane (ed.). *Queens of Egypt: from Hetepheres to Cleopatra*, Paris: Grimaldi Forum, pp. 174–182.

Dana Bělohoubková

Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University; dana.belohoubkova@ff.cuni.cz