Female Engagement in Domains of Social Power in Ancient Egypt's Dynasties 1–6: An interdisciplinary approach to women's titles

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by

Susan. A. Kelly
BAncHist, Macquarie University
M Res – Egyptology, Macquarie University

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Department of Ancient History
Faculty of Arts
Macquarie University, Sydney

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: Susan Kelly

Dated: 1st October 2020

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While many have played vital roles in the production of this work, any or all errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

Dedication

For all my female relatives,

especially my nana, my mum and my sister.

Abstract

Despite an exponential increase in women and gender studies in Egyptology over the last three decades, women's engagement in the socio-political-economic structure of the early Egyptian state remains underrepresented in modern scholarship. Historically, the State has often been investigated via hierarchical models of the male elite's autobiographical material, with prominence given to the study of official titles that act as barometers for the status and rank of the personnel. The dominant focus on male-centric state administration service has ignored women's participation in the State. This bias has resulted in an inadequate representation of women in both research and academic literature. The present research aims to address this imbalance by investigating records of female engagement in the early Egyptian state. This analysis was conducted on biographical details obtained primarily from women's titles from a cross-section of the society, from Dynasty 1 to 6 (c. 3000–2181 BCE). Using an interdisciplinary research methodology that combines textual evaluation and statistical analyses of 777 women's inscriptions, this dissertation engages with sociological theory to provide new interpretative models. The textual evaluation involved here deviates from a traditional title study in that female *serekhs*, cartouche and 129 titles are utilised to gauge the extent of women's engagement and social power in the State. Underpinning this theoretical approach is a refashioning of Michael Mann's theory of social power that defines resources as the medium through which power is exercised. In this research, social power is considered as the varying degrees of influence, prestige, rights and authority that is obtained through individual action and access to or control over symbolic, economic or productive resources of the State. Thus, by examining and classifying the women's titles based on the action and central area of responsibility, this study evaluates the different ways in which women had access to social power in the political, economic and ideological domains in early Egypt. The dissertation offers new perspectives and models validated by quantifiable data that demonstrates to want extent women had varying degrees of social power in the ancient Egyptian state. The current research also contributes an unparalleled database of 1400 women's details from the first six dynasties that can be utilised in future historiographic, comparative and gender studies to augment our knowledge about the early Egyptian state.

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