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HAREM

الحريم

*Silke Roth*

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## HAREM

## الحريم

Silke Roth

Harem

Harem

*In Egyptological research, the term “harem” (harim) comprises a conglomerate of phenomena, which can be distinguished as: 1) the community of women and children who belonged to the royal household; 2) related institutions, including administrative organizations and personnel; and 3) associated localities and places, like palaces and royal apartments, as well as agricultural land and manufacturing workshops. Key functions of this so-called royal harem can be identified as the residence and stage for the court of the royal women, the place for the upbringing and education of the royal children and favored non-royal children as the future ruling class, the provision of musical performance in courtly life and cult, as well as the supply and provisioning of the royal family. Related Egyptian terms include *jpt* (from Dynasty 1 onwards), *hnr(t)* (from the Old Kingdom), and *pr hnr* (New Kingdom). The compounds *jpt nswt* and *hnr(t) nswt*, commonly “royal harem,” are attested as early as the Old Kingdom. Only a few sources testify to the existence of the royal harem after the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.*

إن مصطلح «الحريم» في علم المصريات يحتوى على العديد من الظواهر التي يمكن تمييزها على النحو التالي: أولاً: مجتمع النساء والأطفال الذين ينتمون إلى العائلة الملكية. ثانياً: المؤسسات المتعلقة بالـ«حريم» بما في ذلك المنظمات الإدارية والموظفين. ثالثاً: المناطق والأماكن المرتبطة بالـ«الحريم» مثل القصور والاستراحات الملكية، فضلاً عن الأراضي الزراعية وورش الإنتاج. ويمكن تحديد الوظائف الأساسية لـ«الحريم» الملكي كالتالي: تسكين نساء البلاط الملكي، وتربية وتعليم الأطفال الملكيين، والأطفال غير الملكيين اللذين اعتبروا الطبقة الحاكمة في المستقبل، وتقديم الأداء الموسيقي في البلاط والطقوس الدينية، وتوفير وتقديم الغذاء للعائلة الملكية. وتعددت المصطلحات في اللغة المصرية القديمة المتعلقة بـ«الحريم» فهناك *jpt* (بدايةً من الأسرة الأولى)، *hnr(t)* (بدايةً من الدولة القديمة)، *pr hnr* (بدايةً من الدولة الحديثة) كما أن هناك مصطلحات مركبة مثل *jpt nswt* و *hnr(t) nswt* والتي تعني «الحريم الملكي» والتي ظهرت بدايةً من الدولة القديمة. ولا يوجد سوى القليل من المصادر التي تدل على وجود الحريم الملكي بعد الأسرة العشرين.

**I**n ancient Egypt, polygamy was basically restricted to the ruler and his family. Therefore, it is only possible to speak of a “harem” for the royal women and their social circle as well as

the related institutions and localities. Given the primary meaning of the harem in the oriental-Islamic cultural spheres and especially the Ottoman example, however, the associated terminology is only limitedly

applicable to the so-called harem of the Egyptian king. Nevertheless, both Ottoman and Egyptian harems were centrally involved in raising and educating the future ruler and, more generally, the future inner elite group.

### *The Term “Harem” and the Ottoman Paradigm*

The term “harem” generally describes a cultural phenomenon that is primarily known from oriental-Islamic cultural spheres, where it is still attested. It denotes a very protected part of the house or palace sphere in which the female family members and younger children of a ruler/potentate as well as their servants live separated from the public (Turkish *harem* from Arabic *ḥarām*, “forbidden,” “inviolable”; Peirce 1993: 3 - 5).

The imperial harem of the Ottoman sultan (sixteenth to seventeenth century CE), whose everyday life and hierarchical order is known from contemporary descriptions, is the paradigm for the western notion of the harem. The sultan’s mother, who held the highest rank, lived there with up to four of the ruler’s wives; the mother of the oldest son held a special position as principle wife. In addition, the unmarried sisters and daughters of the sultan, his younger sons, concubines, and numerous female servants were members of the harem. Eunuchs acted as intermediaries to the outside world. An important function of the female-dominated imperial harem that resided in secluded rooms of the palace was the education of future female leaders at court. The young men were educated in the male harem, which was constituted in the most inner and inaccessible court of the sultan’s palace around the person of the ruler (Peirce 1993: 5 - 6).

### *The “Harem” of the Egyptian King*

The so-called harem of the Egyptian king does not fulfill the two main criteria of the Ottoman paradigm: neither is there evidence that all women and children were gathered at one location nor that they were cut off from public life. Properly speaking, the harem of the Egyptian king comprised a conglomerate of phenomena, which can be distinguished as

follows: 1) the women and children who belonged to the royal household, particularly the queens and “harem women,” princes and princesses, as well as favored non-royal children of both sexes, who were educated at the royal court; 2) related institutions, including administrative organizations and personnel; and 3) associated localities and places, like palaces and royal apartments, as well as agricultural land and manufacturing workshops.

As more or less comprehensive terms for these groups of people, institutions, and localities, *jpt* was used from the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty on and—closely related to it—*hnr(t)* from the Old Kingdom; in the New Kingdom, *pr hnr* was also used. These terms are usually translated as “harem” and are evident especially in titles and administrative documents (Lorton 1974; Reiser 1972: 1 - 16; Ward 1986: 69 - 101). The compounds *jpt nswt* and (rarely) *hnr(t) n nswt*, commonly translated as “royal harem,” are first attested in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasties (Hassan 1936: 204 - 208, figs. 226 - 228; Junker 1944: 123 - 124, fig. 46; Kahl et al. 1995: 56 - 57). In the context of administrative texts, it seems that *jpt nswt* as term for an administrative unit was replaced by (*pr*) *hnr* in the New Kingdom and then is primarily used in titles (Reiser 1972: 11 - 12, 77 - 78). The obvious increase in sources for administrative officials, including the range of titles, indicates the expansion of the royal harem from the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty onwards; there are, however, few records after the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Reiser 1972: 31, 74 - 75).

### *The “Divine Harem”*

In addition to the royal *hnr(t)*, *hnr(t)*-collectives for male and female gods are attested from the Old Kingdom and are clearly associated with music and dance in the temple cult. These *hnr(t)* can be identified as the “musical corps” of the respective gods—not as their “harem”—and are therefore not treated in this article (for general comments, see Müller 1977: 815; Naguib 1990: esp. 188 - 207; for the temple of Luxor as *jpt rsjt*, “southern sanctuary/shrine” of Amun of

Karnak—and not his “southern harem”—see, for example, Bell 1998: footnote 2; and Naguib 1990: 193). The prominent role of some royal women in these collectives as “great one of the *hnr(t)* of (god) NN” is discussed below (see *Women in the Harem*).

### *Women in the Harem of the Egyptian King*

1. Royal women. The importance of securing the line of succession and also of marriage policies for maintenance and extension of social and political networks explains why numerous, sometimes concurrent, wives can be assigned to Egyptian kings (cf. Roth 2001: 375 - 443; Troy 1986: 151 - 179). However, since there are only few, controversial records documenting multiple marriages of non-royal people, one must assume that polygamy—and thus the harem—was basically restricted to the ruler and his family (Eyre 2007: 241 - 242; Robins 1993: 64 - 67; Simpson 1974).

Except for their inviolability as an earthly embodiment of goddesses, there is nothing that indicates the female members of the royal family were cut off from wider court and public life. On the contrary, sources reveal that they regularly accompanied the ruler in public appearances, for example, at audiences and festivals (cf., for example, Lichtheim 1975: 231 - 232 for Sinuhe B 248ff.; Moran 1992: 1 for EA 1.26 - 32; Roth 2008). Nevertheless, access to the royal women was without doubt restricted and was controlled by officials and guards (see below *Economy and Administration of the Harem* and cf. representations of the harem quarters at Amarna, e.g., here fig. 1). It is also unlikely that all royal wives, daughters, and younger princes lived together in one location. It is more probable that only the principle wife and her children, as well as the king’s mother, resided close to the ruler and accompanied him on some of his travels. The majority of the secondary wives and their entourage seem to have resided in separate palaces in the main residence or in so-called “harem palaces” throughout the country. This situation may apply for most of the numerous daughters of foreign rulers who joined the harem within

the framework of the diplomatic marriages and who usually held the rank of subsidiary wives (Roth 2002: 120 - 128). A clear exception is Maatheru Neferura, a daughter of the Hittite king Hattusili III, who was appointed “great wife of the king” (*hmt nswt wrt*) of Ramesses II and was “installed” in the royal palace, “following the sovereign everyday” (Kitchen 1979: 255.2; cf. Roth 2003).

The current state of research reveals no hierarchies amongst the royal women in the harem except for the differentiation between the principle wife (*hmt nswt wrt*, “great wife of the king”) and the king’s secondary wives (“simple” *hmt nswt*) that is attested from the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty on (Kuchman Sabbahy 1982: 372 - 373; Roth 2001: 47 - 49; Troy 1986: 107). However, interpreting the queen’s title *hnwt hmwt nbwt*, “lady of all women,” as a leading position in the context of the harem could be implied by the single known occurrence of the epithet *hnwt nt hmwt nswt tmwt*, “lady of the royal women altogether” of Meritra Hatshepsut (statue of Neferperet, Cairo CG 42121, 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; cf. Karnak Cachette). A hierarchical order can also be proposed for the so-called harem of Mentuhotep II, which fulfilled a purely cultic function (see Kuchman Sabbahy 1997; contra Callender 1994: 12 - 15). In all probability, there existed a “natural” ranking based on the seniority principle. But this does not seem to have been of major importance since the significance of royal mother and king’s wife varied or changed in any given case or according to the development of the ideology of queenship. For example, royal mothers did not automatically hold the highest rank amongst women at court, as seen in the cases of the young Thutmose III and Siptah, for whom queen dowagers Hatshepsut and Tauseret respectively functioned as regents (cf. Roth 1997). The mothers of these kings, attested in sources in marginal positions, can thus be considered subsidiary wives.

Although the women of the royal family are by definition the most important members of the royal harem, there are relatively few

sources that indicate a direct connection between them and the institutions identified as harems, *jpt nswt* and (*pr*) *hnr(t)*. An example is the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty biography of Weni that mentions a trial against the royal wife *m jpt nswt*, which substantiated the identification of *jpt nswt* as “royal harem” (Sethe 1932: 100.13; cf. Reiser 1972: 1). Other sources reveal that royal women had their own *jpt nswt* or *hnr(t)* at their disposal: Sinuhe served in the *jpt nswt jrjt-p<sup>t</sup> wrt hswt hmt nswt*, the “*jpt nswt* of the one who belongs to the *P<sup>t</sup>*, great one of favor, and wife of the king” Neferu (Sinuhe R 3 - 5; but cf., for example, Parkinson 1997: 27). A *jpt nswt n hmt nswt wrt* (or *ʿst*) is also attested for Tiy and Nefertiti in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (e.g., Davies 1905a: pl. 29, 1905b: pl. 19; cf. also the title of Pay in Raven 2005: passim). The Mittani princess Giluhepa is accompanied on her way to the court of Amenhotep III by the “(female) elite of her *hnr(t)*-women” (*tpjw nw hnrw(t).s*; Helck 1957: 1738.12 - 14). A related phenomenon is the *jpt nswt* of the god’s wives of the 19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasties (see Gosselin 2007: 189 with footnote 33).

According to the spelling of the collective terms *jpt* and *hnr(t)* with female determinatives, the people associated with these institutions were primarily women (Reiser 1972: 14 - 16; cf. Bryan 1982: 36 - 37; Nord 1981: 138 - 139; Ward 1986: 71, fig. 2). Apparently the queens outranked these “harem women.” The inscription on a stela of Piankhy lists the royal consorts before the *jpt nswt*, the “women of the royal *jpt*,” who, for their part, rank higher than the royal daughters and sisters (25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; Schäfer 1905: 18). In the records of the harem conspiracy against Ramesses III, the queen is also named before the “women of the *pr hnr*” (for this and the queen as *wrt hnr(t)*, “great one of the *hnr(t)*,” see the discussion below).

2. “Harem women.” The *hnr(t) nswt*, the “*hnr(t)*-women of the king,” are attested at the latest in the Middle Kingdom (Firth and Gunn 1926: pl. 83; for the Old Kingdom, see Hassan 1936: figs. 226 and 228). In sources from the New Kingdom that can clearly be

associated with the royal (*pr*) *hnr(t)*, the group of women usually appears as *hnr(t)* or, for example, as *hnmwt pr hnr(t)*, “women of the *pr hnr*,” in the “harem conspiracy” against Ramesses III (Redford 2002: especially 7 - 25). Since *hnr(t)* is consistently used as collective term for mostly female singers and dancers in cult and ritual performances from the Old Kingdom onwards (Naguib 1990: 188 - 207; Ward 1986: 69 - 80), the primary meaning of the royal (*pr*) *hnr(t)* and its members can be found in the musical-artistic accompaniment of courtly life and the *Staatskult* (Bryan 1982; Callender 1994: 7 - 9; Nord 1981; for *Staatskult*, see Assmann 2003). This assumption is substantiated by other sources: a *jmjt-r<sup>3</sup> hnr n nswt*, “(female) overseer of the *hnr* of the king” Neferesres, who was associated with the *jpt nswt*, bears the title of “(female) overseer of the dancers” and “(female) overseer of all pleasant enjoyments of the king” (and the like, Old Kingdom; Hassan 1936: 204 - 208). An inscription in the tomb of the overseer of the *jpt nswt* Iha describes him as “one who conducts the *hnr(t)* women...who has access to the secret place, who sees the dance in the private quarters” (Middle Kingdom; Griffith and Newberry 1895: pl. 21 top, line 9, 13 - 14). Reliefs in non-royal tombs at Amarna indicate that a separate wing of the royal palace was inhabited by women who were employed as, for example, musicians (fig. 1; Davies 1908: pl. 17 and 19, especially pl. 28). They may be identified as *hnr(t)*-women. As the highest-ranking members of this musical-artistic corps, royal women were given a special function in the cult of the gods from the New Kingdom on. This is illustrated in the title *wrt hnr(t) NN*, “great one of the *hnr(t)* of (god) NN” (from the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty on; Gosselin 2007: 69, footnote 83; Naguib 1990: especially 133 - 186; Troy 1986: 76 - 79, 186 - 187), and also through representations of the queen, for example, as leader of the “songstresses of Amun” during the Festival of Opet (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; Epigraphic Survey 1936: pl. 88; cf. Roth 2006a, 2008).

Nevertheless, some scholars (e.g., Raven 2005: 8; Redford 2002: 50) still consider *hnr(t)*

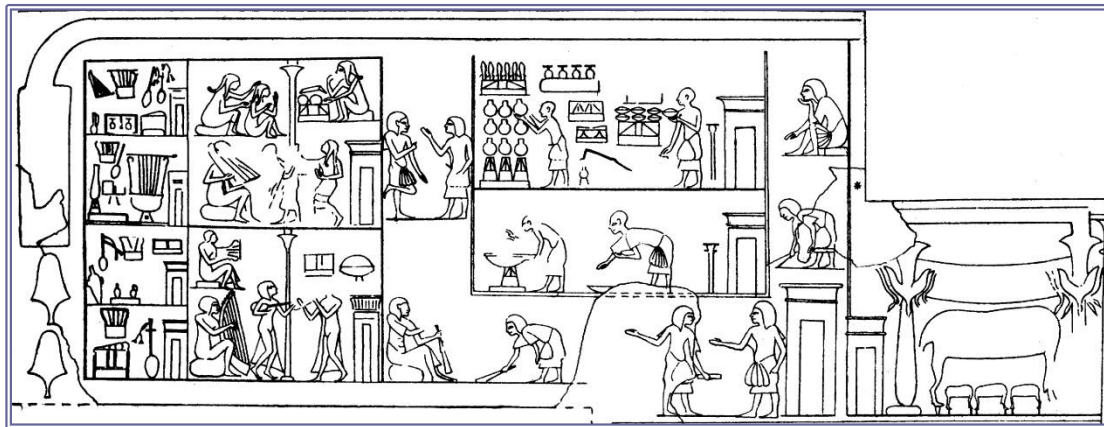


Figure 1. Women in the palace of Amarna. Drawing after a relief in the tomb of Ay in Amarna. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

as a direct lexical derivation of the root *hnr/hnj*, “to lock up,” and translate the term in the oriental-Islamic sense of harem, e.g., “the secluded ones,” “house of seclusion.” However, for the Middle Kingdom it is possible to recognize a “separate” locality, *hnrt*, which was connected with the state-operated production of textiles by women (Quirke 1988: “enclosure”) that evidently also took place in the environment of the so-called “harem palace” in Medinet Kom Ghurab (see below).

The women in the immediate vicinity of the king were also joined by the *nfrwt* (*n ḥ*), “the beautiful ones (of the palace),” next to whom the *mrwt nswt*, “the beloved ones of the king,” are listed in one text: the “overseer of the precious ointments” Khety is “one who gives veils to the beautiful ones and ornaments to the beloved ones of the king” (Middle Kingdom; Gardiner 1917: pl. 8, line 3 - 4). The *nfrw* can be identified as the young girls in the harem, who apparently had the task of entertaining the ruler (Reiser 1972: 17; Troy 1986: 78 - 79). In Papyrus Westcar “all of the beautiful ones from the interior of (the) palace,” clad only in nets, rowed king Sneferu across the palace lake (P. Westcar V 1ff.; Lichtheim 1975: 216; Parkinson 1997: 110). The newly established “women’s house” of the crown prince Ramesses (II) is provided with “*jpt nswt*-women in the style of the beautiful ones of the palace” (Kitchen 1979:

328.4 - 5).

In a source from the Middle Kingdom, a group of *hkrwt*-women, “ornamented ones,” is mentioned in connection with the royal *jpt* and the *hnrt*-women at the royal court: the overseer of the *jpt nswt* Iha “who brings the *hnrt*(*t*)-women” is also “one who locks up the ornamented ones” (*st3 hnrtw(t)*, *htm hr hkrwt*; Griffith and Newberry 1895: pl. 21 top, lines 9 and 16). Are these “ornamented ones” the *hnrt*(*t*)-women dressed in their valuable robes? This may be suggested by the titles *jmj-r3 hkr nswt n hswt nswt* “overseer of the king’s regalia of the royal songstresses” (sic?: Old Kingdom; Lepsius 1972: Bl. 77; cf. Jones 2000: 200 - 202) and *hntj hkr n jb3w*, “foremost one of the regalia of the dancers” (Old Kingdom; Hassan 1950: 192, fig. 192; Jones 2000: 690 - 691). However, the numerous women with the honorary title *hkrw nswt*, “ornamented one of the king,” (variation *hkrw nswt w3tt*, “sole ornamented one of the king”) are not—as once assumed—to be identified as the royal subsidiary wives or concubines, who were “passed on” to distinguished officials once their career in the harem had ended (Kees 1933: 77). In fact, they seem to have been court women from every—and also the lower—social class, and only a few were enlisted in the harem or had the rank of a royal wife (especially Drenkhahn 1976; Seipel 1977b). By contrast, Lana Troy (1986: 77 - 79) suggests that the *hkrwt nswt* were high ranking

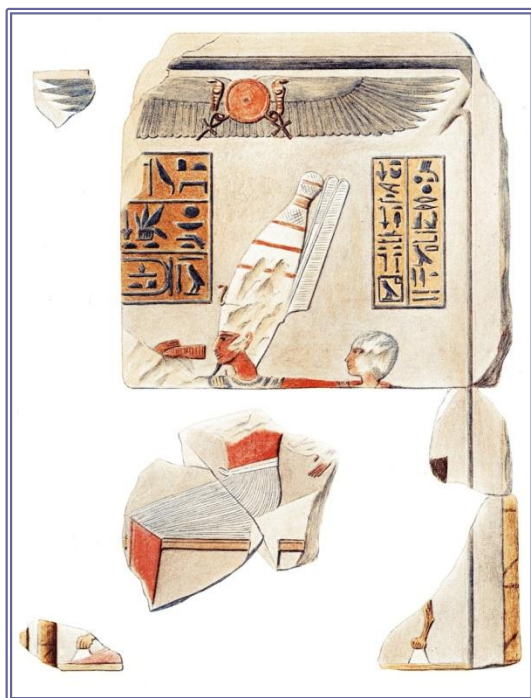


Figure 2. Mentuhotep II with the royal wife Aashait. Drawing after relief fragments from the tomb chapel of Aashait in Western Thebes. 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

court women and “prominent members” of the (*pr*) *hnr(t)*, who, alongside the *nfrwt*, “the beautiful ones,” were responsible for music during the performance of the cult. However, Danijela Stefanović (2008) doubts any connection between the *hkrwt nswt* and the royal court from the late Middle Kingdom onwards.

A few scenes show the king in intimate contact with his wives or “harem women,” although one must note that it is likely these had a primarily ritual meaning connected with the regeneration and reincarnation of the king. For example, Sahura and Mentuhotep II are depicted embracing their wives in the context of their funerary temples (fig. 2; Borchardt 1913: Bl. 48; Naville 1910: pls. 12 and 18; Schoske 1995: fig. 49). In a scene inside the High Gate of Medinet Habu, Ramesses III is shown being cared for by young girls and entertained with games (fig. 3). They are captioned once as *msw nswt*, “royal children,” which suggests that the younger royal

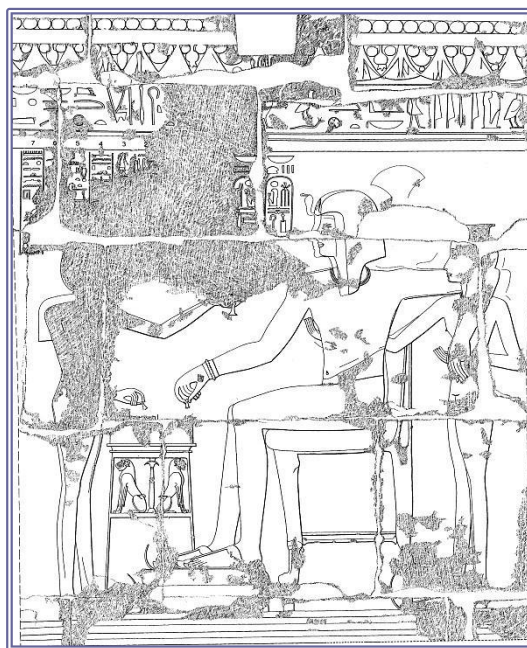


Figure 3. Ramesses III being entertained by young girls. Drawing after a relief in the High Gate of Medinet Habu in Western Thebes. 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

daughters also belonged to the “beautiful ones of the palace” (Epigraphic Survey 1970: pls. 630 - 658, especially pl. 648; for the role of the *msw nswt* during the regeneration of the king, see Kaiser 1983).

### *Children and Upbringing in the Harem*

Another key function of the harem was the upbringing of royal and elite children (in general Feucht 1995: 229 - 236; Janssen and Janssen 2007: 97 - 126). From the Old Kingdom on, a *pr mn'(t)*, a “house of education” or “house of the nursery,” is attested as place of learning (Jones 2000: 240) and from the Middle Kingdom a *k3p*. The latter can be identified as part of the royal private quarters or the *jpt nswt* (Quirke 1990: 39 - 41, 44 - 45, 2004: 26). It is possible that a number of *k3p* existed, which were assigned to particular royal children (Feucht 1995: 301 - 303). *Sb3w nswt*, “instructors of the king,” (from the Old Kingdom on; Jones 2000: 883) and *mn'(t) nswt*, “tutors” or “wet nurses of the king” (New Kingdom; Roehrig 1990; for a *mn't pr-3* from the Old Kingdom, see Jones 2000: 436) were responsible for raising and

educating the royal children.

The sons and daughters of distinguished officials could be raised together with royal children, thus creating a close personal bond between the future ruling class and the successor to the throne (in general Seipel 1977d). Later in their careers they bore titles such as *sbꜣtj nswt* or *sdꜣtj(t) nswt*, “foster son/daughter of the king” (from the Old Kingdom on; Jones 2000: 884, 986 - 987); *hrd(t) n kꜣp*, “child of the *kꜣp*” (from the Middle Kingdom on; Feucht 1995: 266 - 304; Quirke 2004: 28 - 30); and *sn(t) mnꜥ n nb tꜣwj*, “foster brother/sister of the Lord of the Two Lands” (New Kingdom; Roehrig 1990).

#### *Economy and Administration of the Harem*

The institutions connected with the so-called royal harem were mostly autonomous and had their own estates with agriculture, cattle, and manufacturing workshops (especially weaving centers and mills; for general information, see Reiser 1972: 48 - 87). They seem to have been entrusted with the production of fine textiles (“royal linen,” *mk*-fabric) and served the private households of the royal family. The institutions of the harems had their own (tax) income in the form of food supplies, clothing, and fabrics, but were for their part exempted from taxes. When the king was traveling with his entourage, this “traveling harem” was supplied by local institutions (see Reiser 1972: 60 - 61 for the Horemheb decree; cf. Quirke 1990: 17 - 24 for Papyrus Boulaq 18).

A comprehensive staff of officials was entrusted with managing the institutions of the harem (for general information, see Reiser 1972: 68 - 87). A *ꜣ jpt* and a *wr jpt nswt*, “great one of the *jpt* (*nswt*),” are attested from the earliest periods (Kahl 2002: 25 - 26). From the Old Kingdom on, the *jmj-rꜣ jpt nswt*, “overseer of the *jpt* *nswt*,” held the highest office (Jones 2000: 55 - 57; in the New Kingdom also *jmj-rꜣ jpt nswt n pr hnrt*). He held a position of exceptional trust (Reiser 1972: 75), for example, as one “privy to the secret” (*hrj sꜣtꜣ*; Jones 2000: 609ff.) and “overseer of the sealed goods” (*jmj-rꜣ htm(t)*; Jones 2000: 195 - 196). His deputy was the *jdꜣnw n jmj-rꜣ jpt nswt*

(Middle Kingdom) or *jdꜣnw n pr hnrt* (New Kingdom). In the harem administration in the New Kingdom, the *rwꜣ n (pr) hnrt*, “inspector of the (*pr*) *hnrt*,” is well attested. Scribes were engaged in the institutions of the harem and their departments, for example, as *sꜣ jpt nswt* (from the Middle Kingdom on), *sꜣ nswt n pr hnrt*, and *sꜣ n pr-hꜣ n pr hnrt* (New Kingdom). Variations of the titles specified where the officials were located, for example, in the Middle Kingdom at el-Lisht and in the New Kingdom at Kom Medinet Ghurab, Memphis, and *Grgt-Wꜣst* (Raven 2005: passim, 2009: 159 - 160; Reiser 1972: 70, 75 - 76).

#### *Localities Associated with Harems*

The only sources prior to the New Kingdom are inscriptions that can be interpreted in relation to architectural structures and locations associated with the royal harem (Reiser 1972: 22 - 26, 32). From Predynastic times the associated hieroglyphs depict a building or the outlines of a building (Kahl 1994: 647 [O46], 653 [o3]). In the biography of Weni, the *jpt nswt* is a part of the palace or the royal private quarters in which the queen resided (6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; Sethe 1932: 100.13). P. Boulaq 18 from the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty illustrates that the *kꜣp* was also located in the private quarters of the royal palace (Quirke 1990: 39 - 41, 44 - 45).

The archaeological evidence, including reliefs, of the New Kingdom illustrates that the buildings of the harem were not only a part of the larger palace complex but were also separate from the royal palace and independent buildings of their own (Lacovara 1997b: 36 - 38, 2009: 104 - 107, also regarding a possible Middle Kingdom precursor at Tell el-Daba). The so-called “harem palace” of Kom Medinet Ghurab at the entrance to the Fayum formed the center of a city with associated cemeteries (18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; Kemp 1978; Lacovara 1997a, 2009: 104; Shaw 2008; [Digital Egypt for Universities](#); the [Gurob Harem Palace Project](#)). It comprised two long parallel building complexes within an enclosure wall that can be identified as a residential palace with associated economic

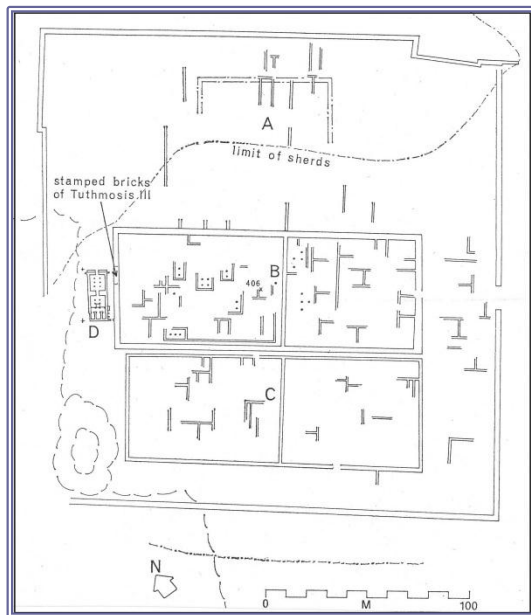


Figure 4. The so-called “harem palace” of Medinet Kom Ghurab. 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

area (fig. 4). Magazines and a small temple (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) complete the ensemble. The complex can be identified as the *pr hnr Mr-wr* or *pr hnr š*, “*pr hnr* of Merwer” or “of Shi,” attested in local titles of officials and administrative texts (cf. Kemp 1978: 131 - 132), which was adjoined by an extensive agricultural estate, cattle, and weaving centers. Finds from pits in which furniture and personal effects were burned are reminiscent of a Hittite custom and may indicate that foreign women resided in the harem palace (Politi 2001; cf. also Roth 2002: 127 - 128).

The North Palace of Malqata features a double structure similar to that of the Ghurab ensemble, which can thus be identified as a harem palace that stood in close proximity to the so-called King’s Palace (fig. 5; Lacovara 1997a: 300, 304, 1997b: 37, 2009: 104 - 105). In fact, a representation in the Theban tomb of Neferhotep shows the palace of the royal principal wife located directly next to the main palace, which thus probably represents the palace complex of Malqata, datable to the reign of Ay (fig. 6; Davies 1933: pl. 1). Moreover, a number of suites in the King’s Palace at Malqata can be identified as the living quarters of royal women (Lacovara

2009: 89; Reiser 1972: 33 - 34 with fig. 1; Spence 2009: 178).

The women’s quarters depicted in the tombs of the officials at Amarna apparently lay inside the residential palace (fig. 1; Davies 1908: pls. 17, 19, 28). However, their identification as the quarters in the Great Palace of Amarna termed the “northern” and “southern harem” (see, for example, Haslauer 2001: 79) is now questionable as a result of the latest research on the fragments of wall paintings found there (Weatherhead 2007: especially 1, 346; cf. also Lacovara 1997b: 29 - 30, 35 - 36).

New research on palace architecture by Kate Spence (2009: especially 169) focuses on aspects of the king’s presentation and access to his physical presence in this context. According to her approach, the palace structures she defines as semi-axial, which feature difficult access routes, are primarily associated with royal women. They usually comprise smaller rooms or suites that are grouped along a hall or a court with throne dais or another manifestation of the king’s presence. According to Spence, these structures establish and express the subordinate and ranked relationship of individuals to the ruler, which can most likely be associated with royal women or close family members (Spence 2009: 178 with fig. 4, 186 - 187). The most obvious example is the King’s Palace at Malqata; other candidates include the North Palace and Great Palace at Amarna.

The ritual palaces of the New Kingdom temple complexes, which display the main structures of a residential palace in simplified form, also apparently included rooms in which royal women resided when they accompanied the ruler in performing the cult (cf. Lacovara 1997b: 33, 2009: 98 - 100).

#### *Function and Role of the Royal Harem*

The following essential functions can be associated with the social groups, institutions, and localities connected with the harem of the Egyptian king: 1) residence and stage for the court of the royal women, 2) upbringing and

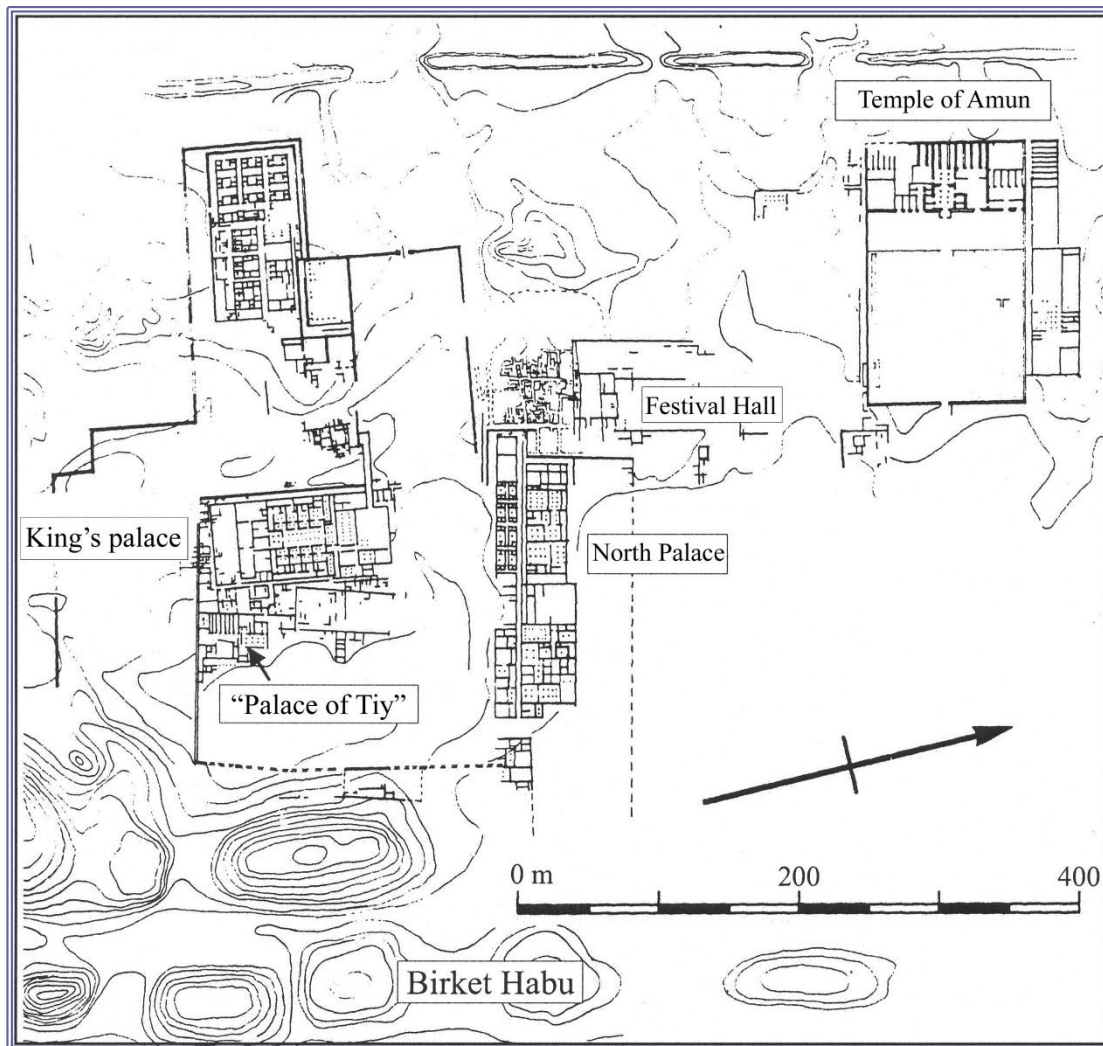


Figure 5. The palace city of Malqata. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

education of royal children and favored non-royal children as the future ruling class, 3) musical-artistic accompaniment of courtly life and performance of cult, and 4) supply and provisioning of the royal family.

Hence, the significance of the royal harem was far beyond the scope of controlling the ruler's sexual activity and its outcome (cf. Peirce 1993: 3 for the Ottoman harem). Comparable to the royal court, which can be defined as the monarch's "extended house," the royal harem played an important role as the "extended family and household" of the ruler as local-factual, social, economic, and ruling institution (for the court, cf. Raedler

2009: especially 134, 149). A formal affiliation with this extended family allowed individuals the opportunity to support or obstruct political interests and their exponents, and thus offered the possibility of participating in political power. As the place for raising and educating the heir to the throne and the future ruling class, the harem was repeatedly the origin of political intrigues. These "harem conspiracies," which are attested for the time of Pepy I, Amenemhat I, and Ramesses III, aimed at murdering the king and usurping the throne (for general information, see Köthen-Welpot 2006; Seipel 1977c; for details, see Kanawati 2003; Redford 2002). It is quite likely that the harem was involved in

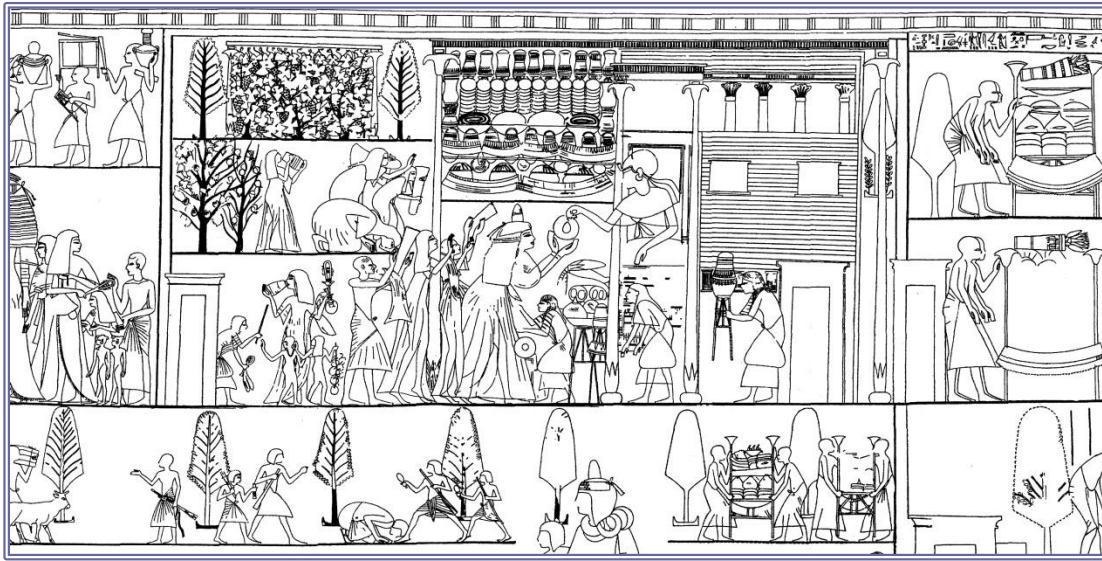


Figure 6. The palace of the king's principle wife next to the king's palace, probably in Malqata. Drawing after a representation in the tomb of Neferhotep in Western Thebes. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

arranging national and international diplomatic marriages for the Egyptian court (Seipel 1977e; for international diplomatic marriages, see Roth 2002: 85 - 130, 2003). In the framework of international diplomacy in the New Kingdom, the courts of the foreign royal wives acted as contact points for delegations from their countries and fulfilled the role of permanent diplomatic missions at the Egyptian royal court (Roth 2006b).

## Bibliographic Notes

The now outdated dissertation of Elfriede Reiser (1972) still presents a relevant synopsis of this topic. The main focus of this concise study is the harem as an institution, its administration, and economic significance. In subchapters, Reiser deals with basic questions of terminology, such as the designations of the non-royal female members of the harem, as well as the architectural remains then identified as harem complexes. However, she does not treat queens as a topic. Concise overviews of states of research in the 1970s and 1990s can be found in the articles of the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Seipel 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1977d) and the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (Haslauer 2001). Gae Callender (1994) offers a detailed discussion of the sources, which also elaborates on the role of the queens in the harem. Susan Redford's description (2002: 49 - 71) is geared to a general audience and is characterized by comparison with the Ottoman harem. Marine Yoyotte (2008) presents the most recent outline of this topic in her rather general article in a catalog for an exhibition on royal women. The ongoing fieldwork directed by Ian Shaw at Kom Medinet Ghurab (e.g., 2008; see also the Gurob Harem Palace Project) promises a significant contribution to the understanding of the archaeology of harems.

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- Figure 1. Women in the palace of Amarna. Drawing after a relief in the tomb of Ay in Amarna. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (After Davies 1908: pl. 28, detail.)
- Figure 2. Mentuhotep II with the royal wife Aashait. Drawing after relief fragments from the tomb chapel of Aashait in Western Thebes. 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (After Naville 1910: pl. 18.)
- Figure 3. Ramesses III being entertained by young girls. Drawing after a relief in the High Gate of Medinet Habu in Western Thebes. 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (After Epigraphic Survey 1936: pl. 640.)
- Figure 4. The so-called “harem palace” of Medinet Kom Ghurab. 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (After Kemp 1978: 127, fig. 3.)
- Figure 5. The palace city of Malqata. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (After Lacovara 1997b: 113, fig. 20.)
- Figure 6. The palace of the king's principle wife next to the king's palace, probably in Malqata. Drawing after a representation in the tomb of Neferhotep in Western Thebes. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (After Davies 1933: pl. 1, detail.)