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Campagno, Marcelo P

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صلة الرحم والعلاقات العائلية

Marcelo Campagno

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Marcelo Campagno

Verwandtschaftsbeziehungen
Liens de parenté et relations familiales

Core aspects of the kinship system in ancient Egypt are discussed here. The six basic terms through which Egyptians expressed relationships of marriage, descent, and collaterality are considered, as well as the principles that regulated marriage and inheritance. The existence of different terms for kin groups is also taken into account. Lastly, the importance of kinship in ancient Egyptian social organization—both in Predynastic and Dynastic times—is analyzed with consideration of its prominence among the peasantry, in elite contexts, and in the world of the gods.

يتم هنا مناقشة بعض المواضيع الأساسية بالنسبة إلى العلاقات العائلية من ضمنها الكلمات المصرية القديمة الستة التي تعبر عن الزواج والأولاد والأحفاد إلى جانب مناقشة المبادئ التي حكمت الزواج و الميراث ويتم أخد الكلمات المختلفة للعلاقات العائلية بالإعتبار. وأخيراً يتم تحليل أهمية العلاقات العائلية بالنظام الإجتماعي بالعصور المختلفة بمصر القديمة وتحلل هذه العلاقات بالنسبة إلى أهميتها ما بين الفلاحين وبعضهم وعلية القوم وبعضهم والآله وبعضها.

Kinship relationships constitute a system of social organization based on a cultural interpretation of links between individuals, within the sphere of human reproduction. They have, therefore, both a universal biological aspect and a cultural dimension that exemplify the diversity inherent in the multiple ways in which human beings produce society. Within the framework of this diversity, ancient Egyptian sources deriving from funerary, literary, and religious contexts enable us to assemble the traces of a kinship system that, with some variation, appears to have been remarkably stable through the millennia of ancient Egyptian civilization.

Terminology

The ancient Egyptian kinship system was composed of six basic terms; through these terms the three kinds of relationships inherent in any system of affinity and kinship could be expressed: marriage, descent, and collaterality (siblingship). With respect to marriage—that is, a stable link between two individuals of opposing sex coming from different kin groups—the Egyptians used the terms $h(ꜣ)y$ for "husband" and $ḥmt$ for "woman/wife." These terms imply very different semantic fields: while the word $h(ꜣ)y$ is written with the determinative of a phallus, associating the role of "husband" with the capacity to engender, the word $ḥmt$ is followed by the seated woman determinative, denoting the general meaning of the word ("woman"), and also the more specific one of "wife," thus constituting a "revealing synonymy" (Forgeau 1986: 157) wherein a woman was not strictly defined outside of marriage (Eyre 2007; Toivari-Viitala 2001). The same synonymy occurs in some modern languages, such as French and Spanish.
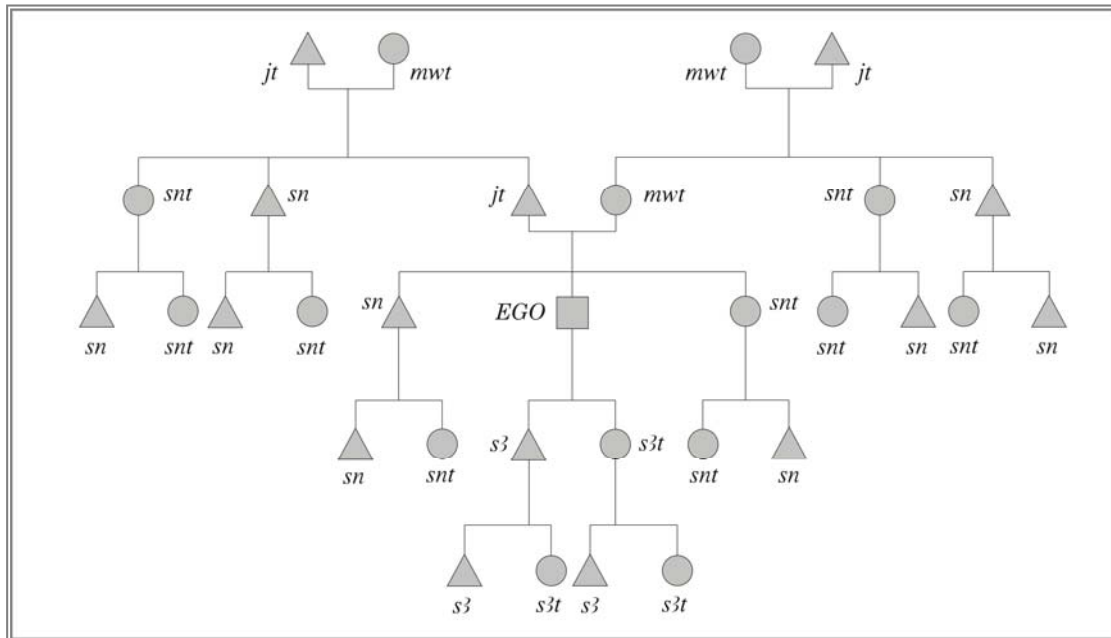
Figure 1. Diagram of the ancient Egyptian kinship system.

As for descent terms, Egyptian had two words to refer to lineal-ascendant kin: *jt* for "father" and *mwt* for "mother," as shown in the diagram in Figure 1. These terms were also used to refer to the lineal kin of more distant ascending generations. Thus, both the father's father and the mother's father of *ego* (that is, the point of view taken in describing a relationship) were identified as *jt*, while *mwt* was employed to designate individuals related to *ego* as the father's mother or the mother's mother. Similarly, in the descending line, the term *s3* and its feminine *s3t* were primarily used for the identification of the "son" and the "daughter" of *ego*; however, the same terms were also used to refer to the son/daughter of the son/daughter of *ego*.

Concerning sibling relationships, and in a more extended sense, collateral kin—that is, *ego*'s kin, not connected by a lineal ascendant or descendant link—Egyptian had only the term *sn* and its feminine *snt* (fig. 1). The term was basically used to indicate the "brother" or "sister" of *ego* but, in other contexts, it could also designate the link with brothers/sisters of the mother/father of *ego* ("uncles" and "aunts"), as well as with their sons/daughters ("cousins"), and with the sons/daughters of

the brothers/sisters of *ego* ("nephews" and "nieces")—and even with more remote collateral kin.

Although there were no specific Egyptian terms to designate relationships consisting of more than one link (mother + mother, brother + mother), as is the case with our terms "grandmother" or "uncle," both lineal and collateral consanguineous relationships could be expressed through "compound" or "descriptive" terms, such as *mwt nt mwt* ("mother's mother") or *sn (n) mwt.f* ("his mother's brother") (Robins 1979). Egyptian kinship terminology expressed a symmetrical system (the same terms are used for paternal and maternal kin) as well as a bilateral one (the descent of *ego* was traced through both father's and mother's kin).

The stelae presented in line-drawing in Figures 2 and 3 both date to the Second Intermediate Period and probably come from Abydos (Hein and Satzinger 1993: 103 - 111, 128 - 132). Their inscriptions provide basic examples of the range of kinship relationships depicted on non-royal monuments, as well as different strategies of display. Figure 2 (Vienna ÄS 195) lists the father and mother,

Figure 2. Second Intermediate Period stela of Khentyemhat listing kin of the stela owner (Vienna ÄS 195).

Figure 3. Second Intermediate Period stela of Khons with examples of extended-kin terminology (Vienna ÄS 180).

as well as various people designated *sn* and *snt,* of the stela owner and the individual named in line 10. Figure 3 (Vienna ÄS 180) depicts numerous kin of both the stela owner and his "nurse." These kin are often designated with compound terms, such as "his brother of his mother" (*sn.f n mwt.f*) and "the mother of his mother" (*mwt nt mwt.f*).

The strong distinction between kin connected to *ego* by descent ("fathers" and "mothers" being in the ascendant line, and "sons" and "daughters" being in the descendant line) and other kin (all of them subsumed under the collateral term *sn/snt*) may suggest that two different criteria for kin membership coexisted. As stated by Judith Lustig, "unlike the lineal terms which express difference in status between alter and ego, . . . persons called *sn/snt* may be conceptualized as structurally equivalent to ego" (Lustig 1997: 48); indeed, the term *sn/snt* could also be used
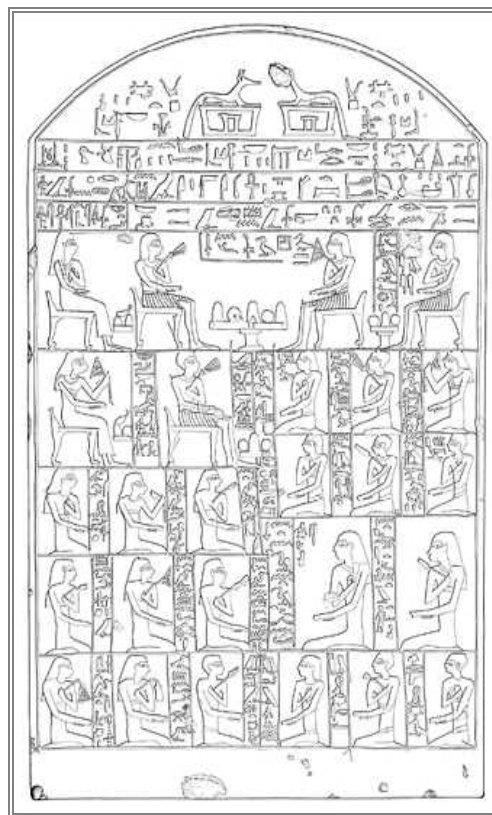
to refer to "friends," "lovers," "equals," or other individuals related to *ego* through a link of horizontal proximity (Revez 2003), as in the case of the Old Kingdom title *sn ḏt*, "brother of the estate" (Moreno García 2006a: 134). In this sense, it could be argued that the Egyptian perception of kinship emphasized the specific link between each individual and his or her kin network through descent against the whole network of kinship links—the kindred—which displayed a broad conception of collateral ties.

Marriage and Inheritance

We have no evidence for the existence of rules of preference in the choice of marriage partners. Marriage between cousins, between uncles and nieces, and between half-siblings is known from various periods in Egyptian history (Forgeau 1986: 144). However, marriage between full brothers and sisters was

limited to the royal entourage, except during the Roman Period, when the practice occurred in Greek and mixed households (Bagnall and Frier 1994: 127ff.; Černý 1954; Clarysse and Thompson 2006: 193ff.). This pattern of evidence does not suggest that Pharaonic Egypt had no prohibitions against incestuous relationships, as is sometimes proposed. First and foremost, the king was a divine being and was therefore beyond such regulations. Moreover, relationships that are considered forbidden are culturally variable; in Egypt, incest taboos may have applied to relations between parents and children, or to relations of the so-called "second type incest," which implies that two consanguineous kin of the same sex could not share the same sexual partner (Baud 1999: 363 - 368). Monogamous marriage was predominant, although the possibility that a man could have more than one wife was not excluded, especially among the elite. A marriage could be dissolved by divorce, which—at least, during the first millennium BCE—was subjected to regulations regarding the return of the dowry; such regulations varied according to the causes of the divorce (Johnson 1999). Adultery between a man and a married woman was morally condemned and, according to literary texts, both parties seem to have been subjected to severe penalties (Eyre 1984).

Inheritance seems to have followed the principle of bilateral descent, wherein men and women were allowed to inherit from both parents. However, the eldest son (*s3 smsw*) seems to have received double the portion of the inheritance that his siblings received, presumably because he was responsible for the burial of his parents (Janssen and Pestman 1968). In polygamous marriages, the descendants of the first wife appear to have been privileged in their inheritance. Couples without descendants could decide to adopt individuals who were not linked by close blood ties. Sometimes, a man could adopt his own wife in order to transfer his belongings to her (Eyre 1992; Vernus 1981: 112). In addition to the inheritance of rights and possessions, there was a strong tendency for professions to be transferred from father to son (for example, in the priesthood and among craftsmen), as well as some political-administrative positions during various periods (such as the office of nomarch at the end of the Old Kingdom).

Kin Groups and Social Organization

The core of the family comprised the married couple, unmarried children, and other female kin (aunts, sisters, widowed mothers) who had lost or never formed their own family unit. The mode of residence appears to have been of a neolocal type—that is, any new couple constituted a new nuclear family and established a new, independent home, as we see in Ani's instruction to his son: "[3,1] Take a wife while you're young, that she make a son for you" . . . [6,6] Build a house or find and buy one" (Lichtheim 1976: 136, 139). However, in First Intermediate Period sources, the emphasis on the preservation of the paternal house (*pr jt*) suggests that the eldest son could stay in the home (Moreno García 1997: 42 - 45). In any case, perceptions of the nuclear family probably predominantly reflected the ideals of the elite, who lived in urban settings, rather than those of the rural population, among which various forms of extended families likely prevailed (Moreno García 2006a).

The Egyptian language had a remarkably extensive set of terms for kin groups larger than nuclear families. From the late Old Kingdom on, the term *3bt* referred to households or extended families, while the term *h3w* identified the close kin of an individual. From the Middle Kingdom on, several terms were in use, such as *mhwt* (clan or extended kin group), *whyt* (kin group in village contexts), *hr* (kin group living in the same household), and *hnw* (all members of a household). During the New Kingdom, *dnjt* or *dnwt* was used to refer to a familial kin group. Moreover, terms with broader meanings, such as *ht* (group, corporation, generation) or *wndw(t)* (group, troop, gang), were sometimes used to refer to kin groups (Allam 1977; Franke 1983: 178 - 298).

The existence of terms like these that refer to larger kin groups is significant because it points toward the prominence of kinship in ancient Egyptian social organization (Campagno 2006). Kinship links were likely of great importance in the articulation of social ties both before and after the emergence of the state in the Nile Valley. In accordance with anthropological models of non-state societies, it can be hypothesized that, during Predynastic times, kinship constituted the main axis of social organization in village communities. Archaeological evidence seems to support this assumption: the grouping of tombs in clusters in cemeteries at various sites, such as Badari, Armant, Naqada, and Hierakonpolis, is similar to funerary practices known through ethnographic evidence, where such a distribution of burials reflects contemporaneous descent groups; the parallelism in the shapes of Predynastic tombs and houses (both were oval or rounded from the earliest times but included rectangular shapes from Naqada I on) may reflect a perception of continuity between the two domains, which in turn may suggest the perceived symbolic survival of the dead kin as members of the community; and indeed, the disposition of grave goods around the deceased could reflect notions of reciprocity, which are at the heart of kinship relations (Campagno 2000, 2002, 2003).

In Dynastic times, the state introduced a new mode of social organization based on the monopoly of coercion, but kinship continued to be a decisive factor in many social realms. Some pointers hint at its importance among the peasantry: the organization of agricultural tasks in family units (Eyre 1999: 52), practices involving cooperation (that is reciprocity) in the field labor, such as we see in tomb representations (discussed, for example, by Caminos 1990) or in the management of irrigation (Butzer 1976: 109 - 110), the (likely) prominent role of village elders in local decision-making (Moreno García 2001), the scant interference of the state in intra-community matters—all these suggest the importance of kinship logic in the articulation of social dynamics in peasant villages.

The importance of kinship can also be seen in state-elite contexts. Beyond the state's power to exert the monopoly of coercion over society's subordinate majority, the integration of the state elite itself was accomplished through kinship ties. The inheritance of the throne from father to son, matrimonial alliances as strategic reinforcements of cohesion among the elite, the possibility of "making" new kin members through mechanisms of adoption (Eyre 1992), the expression of rank in kinship terms related to the monarch (as in the case of the title *sꜣ nsw*, literally "king's son"), as well as the placement, around a principle tomb, of multiple burials of probable kin-group members, as is found in the Old Kingdom cemeteries at Abusir and Elephantine (Bárta 2002; Moreno García 2006a), evoke the importance of kinship logic in the articulation of the nucleus of state society.

Additionally, the relevance of kinship can be detected in the Egyptian world-view, especially in the way links between the king and the gods, and among the gods, were expressed. On the one hand, the king was referred to in many contexts as the son of diverse deities. From the 4th Dynasty on, the monarch incorporated into his titulary a new name marking his status as *sꜣ Rꜥ*, "Son of Ra," directly connecting him to the sun-god. In the Pyramid Texts, the king was presented as the son of many gods, such as Atum, Nut, Geb, Isis, and Osiris. During the New Kingdom, pharaohs were recognized as bodily sons of Amun. In all these relationships that the king had with the gods, one idea is emphasized: the king was not only a god himself but also the *kin* of the gods.

Links among the gods themselves were also expressed through kinship ties, as evidenced, for example, in the way the gods of the Heliopolitan Ennead were related to one another: Atum created a brother-sister pair (Shu and Tefnut), who begot another brother-sister pair (Geb and Nut), who in turn engendered four children (Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys); kinship links were then projected forward to the next generation,

when Horus, the posthumous son of Osiris, fought and subdued his uncle Seth (who had committed fratricide against Osiris), thus attaining the kingship. Beyond the Ennead, other deities were also related to one another through kinship links, most notably as triads of father, mother, and child, such as those of Sobek, Hathor, and Khons in Kom Ombo; of Amun, Mut, and Khons in Thebes; of Horus, Hathor, and Ihi in Dendara; and of Ptah, Sakhmet, and Nefertem in Memphis.

Bibliographic Notes

Although topics related to kinship have received Egyptological consideration, kinship is still under-represented as a proper subject of study among themes concerning Egyptian society. Treatments of kinship in the Pharaonic Period include Robins (1979), Willems (1983), and Lustig (1997), the most comprehensive being that of Franke (1983), who focuses mainly on Middle Kingdom sources. Earlier periods have received less attention. Some hypotheses on the importance of kinship prior to state formation have been proposed by Campagno (2000, 2002). Old Kingdom evidence has been considered by Baud (1999), who concentrates on the royal family, and Moreno García (2006a, 2006b). Bierbrier (1980) analyzes New Kingdom sources from Deir el-Medina and Whale (1989) considers representations of the family in private tombs of the 18th Dynasty. For the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the basic reference is Shaw (1992). In addition, a recent study edited by Fitzenreiter (2006) considers different aspects of the role of genealogies in several periods of Egyptian history.

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Figure 1.   Diagram of the ancient Egyptian kinship system. By Marcelo Campagno, after Lustig (1997: 47).

Figure 2.   Second Intermediate Period stela of Khentyemhat listing kin of the stela owner (Vienna ÄS 195: Hein and Satzinger 1993: 132).

Figure 3.   Second Intermediate Period stela of Khons with examples of extended-kin terminology (Vienna ÄS 180: Hein and Satzinger 1993: 109 - 110).