Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta

Ústav filosofie a religionistiky

Religionistika

Diplomová práce

Markéta Svobodová

Sexuální přechody v životě žen ve starověkém Egyptě: Zrození a plodnost ženy podle staroegyptských pramenů

Sexual passages in the lives of women in ancient Egypt:
Birth and fertility of the woman according to ancient Egyptian sources

Praha 2016

vedoucí práce: PhDr. Hana Vymazalová, Ph.D.

PODĚKOVÁNÍ

Na tomto místě bych ráda poděkovala PhDr. Haně Vymazalové, Ph.D. za vstřícné a trpělivé vedení práce. Dále děkuji Martinu Pehalovi, Ph.D. za podnětné konzultace, zvláště za pomoc při sestavování sémiotického čtverce. Děkuji Matoušovi Preiningerovi za podporu a podnětné poznámky. Mgr. Barboře Vlčkové jsem velmi vděčná za korekturu textu.

PROHLÁŠENÍ

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu, a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne

ABSTRAKT

Práce se zaměřuje na vysvětlení sexuálních přechodů žen spojených s plodností, jakými jsou menstruace, těhotenství a porod, ve staroegyptském světě. V egyptské mytologii jsou přechody spojené s plodností provázány se smrtí. Cílem práce je pak pochopit tento vztah, který je často metaforicky vyjádřen v ikonografii či podsvětní literatuře. Práce shromažďuje materiál z rozličných zdrojů, archeologických, písemných a ikonografických, a to nejen z Egyptského prostředí, ale i z řeckého a římského. Použitých metod je několik: od kognitivní lingvistiky přes sémiotickou analýzu až po náboženskou antropologii. Menstruace, těhotenství a porod ve staroegyptském světě jsou vysvětlené na úrovni pojímání těla Egypťany, ale také na úrovni rolí, které hrají v ikonografii a v mytologii. Vztah mezi zrozením a smrtí je nakonec vysvětlen v souvislosti s plodností. Základním poznatkem práce je znázornění dichotomie mezi femininním pečujícím a maskulinním tvořivým principem, která je přítomná v různých kontextech odkazující na narození a smrt: v ikonografii, na úrovni tělesných tekutin, či v mytologickém zrození.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA: ženství, starověký Egypt, sexualita, rituály přechodu, léčebné rituály, menstruace, těhotenství, porod, tělesné tekutiny, děloha, symboly, metafory, smrt, plodnost, ikonografie.

ABSTRACT

The thesis seeks to explain the sexual passages of women related to fertility, such as menstruation, pregnancy and birth, in the ancient Egyptian world. The passages related to fertility have strong connotations with death in the Egyptian mythological context. The aim of the thesis is to understand this relationship, often metaphorically conveyed in iconography or in the netherworld literature. The thesis collects material from various sources, archeological, textual, iconographical, not only Egyptian, but also Greek and Roman. The methods used vary from cognitive linguistics and semiotic analysis to religious anthropology. Menstruation, pregnancy and birth in ancient Egypt are explained not only on the level of the understanding of the body of the Egyptians, but also in terms of what role they play in iconography and mythology. Furthermore, the relationship between birth and death is made with regards to fertility. The basic findings of this thesis consist of illustrating a dichotomy between the feminine nurturing principle of and masculine creative principle which appear in different contexts related to birth and death: in iconography, on the level of bodily fluids, or in mythological creation.

KEYWORDS: womanhood, ancient Egypt, sexuality, rites of passage, healing rituals, menstruation, pregnancy, birth, bodily fluids, uterus, symbols, metaphors, death, fertility, iconography.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: FEMALE FERTILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ICONOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

1.1. THESIS OBJECTIVES

The topic of this study was initially dedicated to the rites of passage of women in ancient Egypt. It soon became clear that such a topic is almost impossible to carry out, as there seem to be almost no ritualised social passages in ancient Egypt. Only two ritualised passages appear to have existed and these are the ultimate passages identical for both genders and concerning all humans: birth and death. This study is thus not focused on the rites of passage of women as such, but on their passages related to fertility: mainly birth, but also pregnancy, menstruation and death.[1]

The material studied is mainly iconographic and textual; to interpret the iconography, medical and religious texts are used. The purpose of this work is to understand the processes and states concerning feminine fertility and fertility in general, not only from a medical point of view, as well as the daily life of the ancient Egyptians, but more importantly to uncover their meaning in the mythical and ritual context. Simply put, how to understand female fertility in the mythological imagery of ancient Egyptians from the perspective of metaphors.

The thesis collects material from various sources – material, textual, iconographical, not only Egyptian, but also Greek and Roman. The methods used vary from cognitive linguistics to religious anthropology, all wrapped up under the heading of anthropology. The sparse character of the material concerning feminine fertility and the Egyptian tendency to combine all the areas of life and death, mythology and real life, hopefully allows me to take this path. The width of the material has allowed the use of different methods, e. g. to interpret healing and protective rituals, theories of healing rituals are applied.

1.1.1. METAPHORS OF BIRTH AND DEATH

Metaphors concerning pregnancy and birth are found not only in birth rituals and imagery, but also in the funerary context. Birth in this world and in the netherworld are parallel. This relationship appears to be transcultural.[2] The idea of fertility and regeneration is what connects them in the Egyptian context. For example, birth bricks were used in both birth and funerary rites to protect the ritual actors (see chapters 5 and 6). The symbols they employed, however, were different in the two cases. The Abydos birth brick used during delivery ensured the health of the child and the mother through the invoked goddesses. Birth bricks in tombs ensured the regeneration of the deceased, provided by the same goddesses. The relationship between birth and death is also a subject of concern of this paper.

---

[1] The exact explanation of what is a sexual passage is difficult to find. This work does not focus on sexuality in terms of intimacy, but on sexuality related to fertility. In women's lives, this means several physiological changes (therefore "sexual passages"): menstruation, intercourse, pregnancy, delivery and menopause. Menstruation, pregnancy and delivery are treated by medical texts the most, therefore this work will focus on these. No sources are to be found concerning menopause, and the experience of intercourse falls within the category of intimacy which is not the concern of this paper.

[2] R. G. de Vries, "Birth and Death. Social Construction at the Poles of Existence", in *Social Forces* 59.4 (1981): 1074–1093, p. 1074.

1.2. SOURCES AND METHODS

Iconographical and textual material concerning pregnancy and birth reveals possible metaphors describing these dangerous periods in women's lives. Medical texts enable to understand magical acts and objects used in ancient Egyptian healing, and to understand the way the Egyptians thought the female body functioned. Textual sources used in this thesis are gynaecological texts, analysed in Chapter 2. *Pyramid* and *Coffin Texts* are analysed mainly in Chapter 6.

Archaeological material, images and ritual objects related to birth, come from sources concerning healing and protective rituals (e. g. amulets or the Abydos birth brick) or from the funerary context (e. g. depictions in tombs or the birth bricks deposited inside). In Chapter 3.1.2. ostraca from Deir el-Medina, as collected by Vandier d'Abbadie, are studied.

The methods employed in this thesis are based mainly on Lakoff's and Johnson's work on the embodiment of metaphors.[3] Nyord's analysis of the body in the *Coffin Texts*, which is discussed in this thesis as well, is also in part based on their notions.[4] Furthermore, several works of anthropologists of religion, namely Douglas, Obeyesekere and Turner, were adopted in this thesis.[5] In Chapter 3.2. a semiotic square, invented by Greimas and Rastier, is used as an analytic tool.[6]

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 of the thesis, following the Introduction, is concerned with the explanation of medical sources concerning female fertility and the understanding of sexual passages related to birth in Egypt from a medical point of view.

From Chapter 3 on, the focus shifts towards the iconography related to sexual passages and the female body. The concept of the body as a container is studied with regards to bodily fluids: mainly menstrual blood and milk, but also Osiris' efflux, *rḏw*. The iconography of pregnancy is discussed in Chapter 4 and the one of birth in Chapter 5.

From Chapter 6 onward, similarities between the birth of a child and the regeneration of the deceased are discussed. Chapter 7 summarizes the studied material and provides its interpretation.

---

[3] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980.

[4] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh. Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009.

[5] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, London – New York: Routledge, 2002.
G. Obeyesekere, "Medusa's Hair. An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience", in M. Lambek (ed.), *A Reader in Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002, p. 382–397.
V. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970.

[6] A. J. Greimas, F. Rastier, "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints", in *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 86–105.

1.4. WOMEN IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Before proceeding to study the iconography of birth in Egypt, an overview of the life of ancient Egyptian women is necessary. The public life of Egyptian women is far easier to define than their private life, as "the research difficulties lie in the idealised pictorial sources and the absence of sufficient corrective information".[7] The information from literary texts or tombs mostly shows the Egyptian society in an ideal way. Concerning the public life, the roles of women in ancient Egypt were very different from the roles of men.[8] Women could probably not become scribes and for most of the time, they were confined to their homes.[9] In iconography, women were usually represented with paler skin than men, due to their work in the house. Nevertheless, they could own land or transmit it and initiate legal proceedings, in which they had the same status as men.[10] Men dominated the administrative hierarchy and women worked in their houses or on the land. At least two exceptions can be made from this general rule: queens and priestesses. Throughout Egypt's long history, there were about six queens. They presented themselves with male symbols of kingship; they were more of female kings than queens.[11] God's wives of Amun (or "Divine Adoratrices"), priestesses of the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasty based in Thebes, also concentrated a lot of power in their cultic and administrative position.[12]

Women got married probably after their first menstruation, around the age of 12. Their husbands were usually older and the marriage was probably arranged by the brides' fathers.[13] Until the Ptolemaic period, no sources speak of a formal marriage ceremony.[14] Marriage probably meant moving in the house of the husband. "Marriage in ancient Egypt was predominantly rendered as a male engineered process expressed by the phrase *rdj X Y m ḥmt*, "to give X to Y as wife," used from the Old Kingdom onward."[15] Producing offspring was perhaps the main goal of the married couple. Great emphasis was laid on fertility in general.

---

[7] R. Landgráfová, H. Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess. Ancient Egyptian Love Songs in Context*, vol. 1, Prague: Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, 2009, p. 34.

[8] This text does not analyse the differences between sex and gender in ancient Egypt. For more information and references, see D. Sweeney, "Sex and Gender", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2011. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at: http://eprints.cdlib.org/uc/item/3rv0t4np

[9] It is possible that women could write, although scribe schools were probably restricted for boys only. See H. Vymazalová, F. Coppens, *Moudrost svitků boha Thovta. Vědecké poznání za vlády faraonů*, Praha: Universita Karlova v Praze, Filozofická fakulta, 2011, p. 31–34.

[10] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, London – New York: Continuum, 2010, p. 4.
A. M. Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky. Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility", in A. E. Rautmann (ed.), *Reading the Body. Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, 187–201, p. 187.

[11] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 4.

[12] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 87.

[13] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 57.

[14] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 58.

[15] J. Toivari-Viitala, "Marriage and Divorce", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2013, p. 4. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at: https://www.academia.edu/2971079/Marriage_and_Divorce

Divorce could be initiated both by the husband or the wife and their rights were equal during the process.[16] A public act of swearing an oath in a temple was enough to divorce a marriage.[17]

Women rarely had their own tomb or funerary stelae; more often they shared them with their spouses.[18] Both men and women underwent the same judgement in the afterlife. After the end of Old Kingdom, both genders were reborn as Osiris.[19]

[16] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 4.
[17] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 43.
[18] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 4.
[19] A. M. Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky", p. 200.

2. MEDICAL TEXTS: UNDERSTANDING HEALTH AND HEALING OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Ancient Egyptian healing was inseparable from magic and mythology. It consisted of a combination of magical acts, manipulation with ritual objects and uttering spells, as well as small surgical or other medical actions. The patient was often identified with one of the gods, suitable for that particular illness and context.[20] He or she was therefore identified as a god and related to events happening on a cosmic level.[21] "The vast majority of magical spells employ such divine transfiguration to apply to the most liminal moments of the human cycle."[22] This chapter seeks to give an overview of the understanding of the female body and its health with regards to fertility from the perspective of gynecological texts.

Several medical texts focusing on the health of women have survived to the present day. These texts are crucial for the study of the perception of the woman's body in Egypt: papyri *Kahun* (Twelfth Dynasty), *Ramesseum II, III, IV* (Thirteenth Dynasty), *Smith* (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Dynasty), *Ebers* (Eighteenth Dynasty), *Berlin 3027* (Eighteenth Dynasty, also known as *Book for the Mother and Child*), *Carlsberg VIII* (Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasty), *London* (BM 10059, Eighteenth Dynasty) to name a few.[23] These papyri advise the doctor on how to identify a disease in a woman (or her child, as in *Berlin 3027*), how to treat it, how to enhance fertility, avoid pregnancy or how to recognize pregnancy, and, most importantly, how to protect the woman and her child during pregnancy and childbirth.

The acquaintance with the more elaborate Greek *Hippocrates' Corpus* from the fifth to the second century B.C.E. illuminates the perspective on women's bodies in ancient Egypt. In some cases, Egyptian medical knowledge directly influences the *Corpus*, as in *Carlsberg VIII* 4: 1,10-1,16: "(…) You should place for the night a tuber of onion ⌜… into⌝ her vagina until the break of day. If a stench appears in her mouth, she will give birth. If ⌜… she will⌝ never ⌜give birth⌝."[24] According to Iversen, this case is "one of the extremely rare concrete examples of a direct influence from Egyptian medicine in the Greek medical literature as far

---

[20] The identification of a person with a mythological being or god is frequent in ritual contexts: not only in healing but also in rituals for the deceased, who was identified as Osiris. See M. Smith, "Osiris and the Deceased", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2008, p. 2–4. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. ⌜online⌝. 23.3.2016 ⌜cit. 2016-03-23⌝. Accessible at: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/29r70244
G. Pinch, "Magical Techniques", in *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, London: The British Museum Press, 2nd edition, 2006, p. 76–89.

[21] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth Brick from South Abydos. New Evidence on Childbirth and Birth Magic in the Middle Kingdom", in D. P. Silverman, W. K. Simpson, J. Wegner (eds.), *Archaism and Innovation Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, New Haven: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilisations, Yale University; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2009, 447–496, p. 458.

[22] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth Brick from South Abydos", p. 458.

[23] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. Surgery, Gynecology, Obstetrics, and Pediatrics*, vol. 1, Cairo – New York: The American University in Cairo University Press, 2014, p. 97–102.

[24] All the translations of spells are from E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 125.

back as Hippocrates."[25] The ancient Greek doctors and the Egyptian doctors shared a similar conception of the woman's body that was closely related to the special activity of this body: the ability to give birth. The man was considered creator of the child and the woman was a container or vessel for it.[26] This division was made probably due to the life-giving Nile flood: the sky was viewed as female, whereas the earth as male. "The water and silt, which renewed the land and made the crops grow, came not from the sky [as is usual for example in Europe], but from the earth."[27] The language describing pregnancy mirrors this understanding as well: "to take" or "to receive" a child.[28] The woman's body was either "open" or "closed" and those concepts were related to the relationship of the upper and lower part of the body. If, according to *Carlsberg VIII*, the woman gives birth, it is because her upper and lower parts of the body are connected. The smell of the onion/garlic inserted into the vagina will pass through her body and come out by her mouth.

The idea of closeness or openness of the woman's body connected with other processes happening in this body; most importantly menstruation, which is one of the key physiological processes related to birth. Menstrual blood was, in the mind of the Egyptians, identical to the blood of parturition or miscarriage. "The blood shed in menstruation and that which was thought to nourish an embryo during pregnancy were one and the same".[29] When the body was "open", the shedding of the blood occurred. When it was "closed, the woman was pregnant and its purpose was to nourish the child.

2.1. Medical spells and mythology

Knowledge of Egyptian mythology is the key to understand the spells of the medical texts. According to the Heliopolitan tradition Nut and Geb, the sky and the earth, had four children: the gods Osiris, Isis, Nephthys and Seth. Seth killed his brother Osiris and dispersed his body through the land. Isis, his sister and wife, then collected the parts of his body with the help of their sister Nephthys. Isis conceived a child, Horus, magically bringing the deceased to life for a short moment. The pregnant Isis hid in Khemnis with her son Horus, in the Delta, fearing her brother Seth. In Khemnis, she magically protected Horus from all sorts of danger. Later, when Horus came of age, he avenged his father, defeated Seth, reclaimed the throne and Osiris became the ruler of the realm of the deceased.[30]

The key part of the myth for the purpose of this study is the liminal period when Isis is hiding with her child in Khemnis. This was the liminal period right before and sometime after the birth of Horus, which was particularly dangerous for Isis and women in general. The rate of mortality of women during parturition was high.[31] In her pregnancy, the woman was

---

[25] E. Iversen, "Papyrus Carlsberg No. VIII with Some Remarks on the Egyptian Origin of Some Popular Birth Prognoses", in *Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser* 26.5 (1939): 20–22.
[26] C. Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 2.
[27] A. M. Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky", p. 195.
[28] A. M. Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky", p. 189.
[29] P. J. Frandsen, "The Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 66.2 (2007): 81–106, p. 86.
[30] J. G. Grifiths, *The Origin of Osiris and his Cult*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980, p. 129.
[31] G. Robins, "Women and Children in Peril. Pregnancy, Birth and Infant Mortality in Ancient Egypt", in *KMT* 5.4 (1994–1995): 24–35.

endangered by demons and other destructive forces, as were Isis and Horus. Therefore, during this period, the mother and her child were ritually protected through magical spells and taboos, often referring to Isis' mythical situation.[32] One of the amulets that women used for their protection, the *tj.t* knot or "the knot of Isis", represented the tampon Amun tied in Isis' womb to protect her from Seth.[33]

The spells concerning the health of the mother and her child often emphasize the identity of the child-patient with Horus or of the mother-healer with Isis:[34] "You are Horus! Wake up as Horus! You are the living Horus! I am driving away the disease that is in your body (…)" (*Book for Mother and Child* E: 2,10–5,7). Another example is provided by *Ramesseum* III. B. II. 23–34:

> "⸢…⸣ It is I who comes from the marshes ⸢…⸣ Isis, divine: I hit my temples, I tousled my hair when I found my son Horus, his heart weary, his lips pale (…) **Recite this incantation over the seven straws of flax, spun and woven by a woman who has given birth. Tie seven knots in it and give to the child on his neck** (…)."[35]

The number seven and the tying of knots have an important meaning in magic.[36] Seven was the number signifying the onset of the cosmos, in this case it may imply the beginning of the life of the child.[37] The gender of the child was irrelevant, supposing that little girls were ill as well. The divine role the participants of the healing process acquire was what mattered. This connection to the mythological order of the world can heal the patient, otherwise it would be in opposition to the rules of the cosmos. This view is shared by several anthropologists studying healing rituals. An example is Dow's explanation of how healing rituals work, applicable to the ancient Egyptian context:

> "(1) A generalized cultural mythic world is established by universalizing the experiences of healers, initiates, or prophets, or by otherwise generalizing emotional experiences. (2) A healer persuades the patient that it is possible to define the patient's relationship to a particularized part of the mythic world, and makes the definition. (3) The healer attaches the patient's emotions to transactional

---

[32] J. Loose, "Laborious 'Rites de Passage'. Birth Crisis in this World and in the Beyond", in *VI Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia Atti*, vol. 2, Turin: International Association of Egyptologists, 1993, p. 285–290, p. 287.

[33] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 166, 179.
G. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 81.
W. Westendorf, "Isisknoten", in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 3, 1980, p. 240.

[34] Names of the mother and the child are to be directly inserted into some of the spells. *Book for Mother and Child*, Q-T; see E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 133 for the translations.

[35] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 113. The emphasised text is written in red on the papyri; see *ibid.*, p. 27.

[36] See chapters 3.1.1. and 6.3.

[37] On the number seven, see M. Rochholz, *Schöpfung, Feindvernichtung, Regeneration. Untersuchung zum Symbolgehalt der machtgeladenen Zahl 7 im alten Ägypten*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002, esp. p. 210–220, focusing on the number seven and knots. "Unabhängig vom verwendeten Material bindet und festigt der Knoten an sich die ihm innewohnende Kraft und verhindert durch eine magische Barriere das Durchdringen schädlicher Kräfte, kann diese aber auch festhalten." *Ibid.*, p. 210.

> symbols in this particularized mythic world. (4) The healer manipulates the transactional symbols to assist the transaction of emotion."[38]

The woman giving birth thus identified herself with the mythological situation of Isis, through the spells and rituals. The woman's emotions were directed toward the circumstances described by the particular spell.

A number of other gods associated with birth are invoked in these spells: Re, the solar deity, Khnum, a fertility deity and Nephthys are all deities related to birth: "The voice of Ra calls Nephthys, because the stomach of this child whom Isis bore hurts. ⸢An enchantment will be⸣ driven away (…) from all the limbs that Khnum created for this child born from his mother." (*Book for the Mother and the Child* B: 1,4–1,9).[39] Meskhenet, the birth goddess, Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky also play important roles in medical texts (*Book for the Mother and the Child* F: 5,8–6,8):

> "(…) A child is coming! It is known to you, in your name Meskhenet, how to make the spirit for this child that is in the body of this woman. I have prepared for him a royal order for Geb to make for him the soul and spirit and all that is necessary, Nut (to prepare) diapers for this woman (…)."[40]

All these deities appear also in iconography related to birth and pregnancy.

2.1.2. Healthy lactation and mythological beings

Medical texts also provide information concerning healthy lactation (*Ebers* 808–813, *Berlin* 14–18).[41] The health of breasts directly affected the nurturing of the child; too much or too little milk was harmful both for the mother and for the child. A famous spell from this category is a remedy for "not having the nipples down" in *Ebers* 808: 95, 1–3: "bathe them in the blood of one whose menstruation has come for the first time. Rub it on the belly and both of her thighs so that *gesu* ⸢a disease of the breasts overflowing with milk⸣do not appear with her".[42] The first menstrual blood of a girl helped to stop the breasts from producing an excessive amount of milk. Why this is the case is explained in Chapter 3.2.2.

Goddesses breast-feeding gods and kings, the "divine wet nurses", are very common in Egyptian iconography and textual sources. In iconography, the king was often lactated by a goddess on temple reliefs and on other sources.[43] The goddess lactating the king legitimized him as being of higher status than other mortals and demonstrated a transmission of divine

---

[38] J. Dow, "Universal Aspects of Symbolic Healing. A Theoretical Synthesis", in *American Anthropologist* 88 (1986): 56–69, p. 66.

[39] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 128.

[40] This spell is uttered over birth bricks. E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 130.

[41] For further information on lactation see A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, Monaco: Groupe Artège, 2015, p. 175–184.
E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 182–185.

[42] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 119. *Gesu* is a disease of the breasts overflowing with milk, treated by spreading the blood of a girl who had her first menstruation, on the patient's breasts.

[43] S. L. Budin, *Images of Woman and Child from the Bronze Age. Reconsidering Fertility, Maternity, and Gender in the Ancient World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 37.

power from the goddess to the king.[44]

Lactation played an equally important role in the netherworld literature.[45] "The texts reveal that a variety of goddesses (and even Horus!) could fulfill the role of Divine Wet Nurse, but most especially Isis, Nephthys and Nekhbet (…) provid[ing] physically for the deceased king after death."[46] In the funerary context, the divine wet nurses fulfilled the same role as real wet nurses taking care of the newborn: nurturing him and protecting him against any danger. After his rebirth, the deceased was a helpless infant who wished the same care the newborn needs from his mother. Horus desired and received the same care from Isis.[47]

Lactation was important for the health of the child and of the deceased king. The role of lactation in the *Pyramid Texts* was studied by Leclant. In the *Pyramid Texts*, the deceased king was nurtured and protected by a nursing goddess, often Isis or Nephthys. Leclant has demonstrated that these passages refer to the moment *after* the deceased king has entered the realm of the dead;[48] now, it was his divine status that was emphasized. The child was lactated only after his or her birth and the same applied to the deceased king.[49]

In *Coffin Texts*, as Nyord suggests, milk had another layer of meaning. A relation between the divine milk and the purity of the mouth and of the deceased was established: "Osiris has cleansed my mouth with milk of the Red Cow…".[50] Other examples of this relation can be found in *Coffin Texts*.[51] *Pyramid Texts* relate milk and natron-water which emphasizes the purificatory role of the former.[52] Its possible meanings are further studied in Chapter 3.2.2.

---

[44] R. Noyrd, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 331.
[45] For lactation in *Pyramid Texts*, see J. Leclant, "Le rôle du lait et de l'allaitement d'après les Textes des Pyramides", in *Journal of Near Eastern Archaeology* 10.2 (1951): 123–127.
For milk in *Coffin Texts*, see R. Noyrd, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 330.
[46] S. L. Budin, *Images of Woman and Child from the Bronze Age*, p. 40–41.
[47] See Chapter 6.
[48] *Pyramid Texts* (*PT*) 268, *Pyr.* 371c–372; *PT* 412, *Pyr.* 729a–c or *PT* 470, *Pyr.* 911b–912b.
[49] J. Leclant, "Le rôle du lait et de l'allaitement d'après les Textes des Pyramides", p. 126.
[50] *Coffin Texts* (*CT*) II, 81b–82b [96].
[51] *CT* I, 62e–63a [96] or *CT* VII, 205k [993]. See R. Noyrd, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 330.
[52] *PT* 34–36, *Pyr.* 26a–29c.

3. BODY AS A CONTAINER

3.1. BODY AS A CLOSED AND PROTECTED SPACE

3.1.1. BODY AS A CLOSED SPACE IN MEDICAL TEXTS

While the last chapter provided a basic overview of the main concerns of gynaecological texts, the interest of this chapter is the metaphor of the body as a container related to the concept of the closed body. First, iconographical material from Deir el-Medina showing women after parturition is consulted. Bodily fluids related to fertility and nourishment of the child are studied in Chapter 3.2.

Medical texts emphasise the importance of the "closeness" of women's bodies for their health and protection from demons, especially during pregnancy. *London* 41: 13,14–13,41 provides a protective spell for the future mother, associated with Isis. This spell against bleeding encourages to utter those words over a knotted tampon, like the one protecting this goddess:

> "Anubis came forth to prevent the flood from entering the pure territory of (the goddess) Tayet to protect what is in her. **This incantation is recited over linen yarn on which a knot has been made. Place inside her vagina.**"[53]

Anubis was the god who protected Isis and her son Horus, who were hiding from Seth in Khemnis. This spell parallels blood in the woman's body with the Nile flood, which is a well-known association.[54] Tying a knot while reciting a spell was a common medical practice. The knot had a protective function, reinforced by its mythological connection to Isis and its fabrication in a ritual context. From an anthropological perspective, this evokes the notion of "closeness".[55]

London 45: 14,5–14,8 provides similar mythological connections, emphasizing the relation between the body, the Nile, the womb and the blood. It is crucial to keep the body "closed": "(…) the bowels of the rectum[56] and belly have been as if ⸢bound⸣ since the time that what is existed, because of the coming of the flood inside to close the mouth of the womb

---

[53] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 124.
Similar spells are *London* 41: 13,14–14,1 and *London* 42: 14,1–14,2.

[54] Association with Nile:
J. Toivari-Viitala, *Women at Deir-el Medina. A Study of the Status and Roles of the Female Inhabitants in the Workmen's Community during the Ramesside Period*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor her nabije oosten, 2001, p. 162.
W. Westendorf, "Das Isisblutsymbol", in *Zeitschrift für Ägyptologische Studien* 92 (1966): 144–154, p. 146.
P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", p. 86.
The spell in the case *London* 41 also makes a similar parallel.

[55] On the protective function of knots and their classification in ancient Egypt, see W. Willeke, "Entangled, Connected or Protected? The Power of Knots and Knotting in Ancient Egypt", in K. Szpakowska (ed.), *Through a Glass Darkly. Magic, Dreams and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006, p. 243–270.

[56] According to the Egyptians, the digestive system, accessible by the rectum, was connected in the belly with the reproductive organs of the woman. E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 167.

as Lower Egypt is closed in south Djadja, as a mouth of a valley is closed."[57] When the womb was closed, the unborn child was protected, as the spell *London* 40: 13,9–13,14 for the "strengthening of the egg" illustrates.[58] By the "egg", the unborn child was meant. Similarly, the tampon that protected Isis against dangers reinforces the "closeness" of the body. Nyord in his analysis of the body in *Coffin Texts* claims that the womb was conceptualized in mortuary literature as "a CONTAINER, somewhat surprisingly, however, never for the foetus itself, but rather for the protection (…) it is given."[59] An example which he cites is from the *Spell 148*: "It is inside my womb that he has knit a protective circle/entourage around (…) him".[60] The womb was thus a container for protection. Nyord, unfortunately does not give any further explanation of this. Is it so that the medical spells for the protection of the womb focused not primarily on the child as such but on the protection given to it? It is true in some cases, but the spell for the strengthening of the egg focused primarily on the child. A further study of this subject would certainly be interesting.

Figure 1: Ostracon BM 8506 from Deir el-Medina, showing a nursing woman.

3.1.2. BODY AS A CLOSED SPACE: WOMEN ON OSTRACA FROM DEIR EL-MEDINA

Images on ostraca from Deir el-Medina show nursing women in several instances, sitting on simple chairs and wearing jewellery. In the background, lotus flowers are often depicted (fig. 1[61]).[62] These are the so called "scènes de gynécée" from Deir el-Medina.[63] These "scènes de gynécée" lack archaeological context, but they can be dated within the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Dynasty.[64] The material sources from Deir el-Medina are unique: the letters or ostraca provide a particular insight into the lives of women in this village. Backhouse, in a

---

[57] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 124.
[58] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 124.
[59] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 291.
[60] *CT* II, 218e [148]. Translation by R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 291, n. 3045. Notice the word "knit" used in this *Coffin Texts*; knots have a magical protective power in the Egyptian context.
[61] British Museum. Collection online. *British Museum*. [online]. [cit. 2016-03-14]. Accessible at: *http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=118195&partId=1*
[62] J. Backhouse, "Figured Ostraca from Deir el-Medina", in H. Abd El Gawad, N. Andrews, M. Correas-Amador, V. Tamorri, J. Taylor (eds.), *Current Research in Egyptology 2011. Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Symposium Which Took Place at Durham University, United Kingdom March 2011*, Oxford – Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2012, p. 25–39.
B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh (1934 à 1935). Troisième partie, le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois*, vol. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1939, p. 126–150, fig. 47, 48, 50–53.
J. Vandier D'Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca figurés de Deir el-Medineh nos 2256-2722. Documents de fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire*, tome 2, fasc. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1946, p. 80–84.
M. Arnette, "Purification du post-partum et rites des revailles dans l'Egypte ancienne", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 114.1 (2014): 19–71.
[63] J. Vandier D'Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca figurés de Deir el-Medineh*, p. 80.
[64] J. Backhouse, "Figured ostraca from Deir el-Medina, p. 26–27.
A. R. Schulman,"A Birth Scene (?) from Memphis", in *Journal of American Research Center in Egypt 22* (1985): 97–103.

recent article, states, after comparing the ostraca from Deir el-Medina to images of nursing goddesses, that "it is possible that the depictions of breastfeeding women at Deir el-Medina, were seeking to emulate the goddesses [mainly Hathor and Isis] and that these women were looking for their protection and blessings for their children."[65] The images on ostraca would thus be similar to protective and healing spells, but in a visual form.

What role did the jewellery play in these images? Statuettes of naked women embellished with jewellery and tattoos discovered in household contexts in Deir el-Medina were described by Bruyère.[66] Jewellery symbolized protection of the women, as was noted by the scholar.[67] Medical texts generally recommend to embellish mothers or their children by special amulets and jewellery, often giving their description and ritual techniques advising on how to make them effective.[68] Similar statuettes discovered in tombs were often considered to be concubines of the deceased, however, these dolls represent pregnant women.[69] Concubines are not necessary present in the after world, but pregnant women representing fertility are. Bruyère claims that those depictions "characterize, first in their houses of the living and then in tombs, the universal concern of generation".[70] The jewellery and tattoos indicate protection, by magically defining the boundaries of the body, separating what is inside and outside. What is outside should not invade the interior, particularly in the context of birth and in the funerary context of the rebirth of the deceased.

Arnette suggests that the "scènes de gynécée" depict a liminal state of post-partum period, a time of purification and liminal segregation of the mother and her child, during which she receives gifts. She claims that the woman is in a special place, the *Wochenlaube*, a temporarily built shelter for this particular liminal period.[71] Arnette's theory is intriguing but questionable, as it is not sufficiently backed by archaeological or textual material.

> "During this transitional period, the woman is in the centre of celebrations, during which beverages and food are exchanged, and goes through a number of rituals (…). Under the pavilion of birth [i. e. *Wochenlaube*] she receives typically feminine objects (…) the feet of the mother are washed, sign of purification, which can be interpreted as a prelude to her reintegration."[72]

---

[65] J. Backhouse, "Figured ostraca from Deir el-Medina", p. 36.
[66] B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir El Médineh (1934 à 1935)*, p. 124–150.
[67] B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir El Médineh (1934 à 1935)*, p. 127.
[68] *Ramesseum* III. B. 20–23, 23–34; *Book for the Mother and the Child* A: 1,1–1,4; L: 7,6–8,3, M: 8,3–9,3; N: 9,3–9,7, O: 9,7–2,2, P: 2,2–2,7; Q: 2,7–3,3.
[69] B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir El Médineh (1934 à 1935)*, p. 126.
Concubines are mentioned by F. Jonckheere as well : "La durée de la gestation dans les textes égyptiens", in *Chronique d'Égypte* 30 (1955): 19–45, p. 23.
[70] B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir El Médineh (1934 à 1935)*, p. 150. Translation from the original: "caractérisent dans leurs maisons des vivants d'abord et dans les tombeaux ensuite, l'universel souci de la génération."
[71] This term was invented by E. Brunner-Traut, "Wochenlaube", in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 3 (1955): 11–30.
[72] M. Arnette, "Purification du post-partum", p. 50–51. Translation from the original: "Pendant cette marge, la femme se trouve au cœur des fêtes, a l'occasion desquelles boissons et aliments sont échangés, et subit aussi un certain nombre de rites (…). Sous le pavillon de naissance, elle reçoit les instruments typiquement féminins (…) les pieds de la mère sont lavés, signe de sa purification, ce que l'on peut

Nursing scenes from Deir el-Medina share two distinctive characteristics: (1) the specific chair, (2) the jewellery and headdress of the women. The chair is used only in the context of childbirth.[73] Schulman analysed these specific chairs.[74] The scholar describes them as having a "jarstand-like base, decorated horizontally by a series of concentric bands, with the seat and back consisting of a single unit which is curved to fit the shape of the lady's spine".[75] Could this chair be made specifically with regards to the needs of women who just gave birth? Given they appear only in birth context this interpretation is probable; women after delivery often need to sit on very soft chairs (before they heal).

Backhouse proceeds as further as making a connection between the images of nursing women from Deir el-Medina and iconographical material from the tomb TT336, as both are connected with death and rebirth:

> "It is also possible that the images had another layer of meaning. In the tomb of Nefer-renpet at Deir el-Medina (TT336) we see Meretseger, the serpent goddess of the site, breast feeding the tomb owner who, we are told, becomes a child again in another time. Perhaps the images of breast feeding women did not solely relate to protection of the child in this life but also to his rebirth."[76]

The relationship of birth and rebirth in the afterlife is studied in Chapter 6.

---

interpréter comme prélude à son agrégation." Arnette bases her theory on ostraca from Deir el-Medina containing post-partum images of women and inventories.

[73] There may be one exception to this rule, but Schulman refuses it. See A. R. Schulman, "A Birth Scene (?) from Memphis", p. 101–102.

[74] Schulman made a list of images where those chairs appear. A. R. Schulman, "A Birth Scene (?) from Memphis", p. 99, n. 9.

[75] A. R. Schulman, "A Birth Scene (?) from Memphis", p. 99.
The chair is very similar in shape to Egyptian headrests. This interpretation is based solely on the similarity of the shapes of the chairs and the headrest, therefore might be deliberate. Hellinckx in his analysis of the iconography of the headrests concluded that "the assimilation of the head and the sun is realized in three ways, namely by equating the headrest symbolically to the *akhet*, to the sky, or to both of them." The birth of the sun is likened to awakening of man in the morning and to the rebirth of the deceased. Comparing this metaphor of the headrests to the chairs of Deir el-Medina, the meaning of the chairs and the reason why they appear in such a specific context may be explained: the birth of the new child can be, as we have seen, likened to the birth of the sun. However, this interpretation is based solely on the comparison of the appearance of the chair and the head-rest, it is therefore not conclusive. See B. R. Hellinckx, "The Symbolic Assimilation of Head and Sun as Expressed by Headrests", in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 29 (2001): 61–95, p. 61.

[76] J. Backhouse, "Figured Ostraca from Deir el-Medina", p. 36.

3.2. Liquids flowing in and out of the closed body

Concerning the health of a woman, great emphasis was laid on the notion of a "closed" womb; blood must not escape her body, except during menstruation. The uterus is transculturally, referred to as a "receptacle", or a "vase".[77] The metaphor of the "CONTAINER" is also employed by Nyord in his study on the body in *Coffin Texts*.[78] This imagery of a "closed" and "opened" body, which the metaphor of the receptacle conveys, is necessary to understand menstruation and its possible implications concerning the funerary domain.

Little is known about menstruation in ancient Egypt.[79] A term traditionally employed for menstruation, but also purification, is *ḥsmn*.[80] "The woman rids herself of the blood and is thereby purified and restored to her normal status."[81] Menstruating women were considered *bwt*, meaning worthy of avoiding in ritual contexts. Menstruating women are taboo according to cult-monographs, manuals and lists giving lists of interdictions.[82] This notion is also confirmed by absentee lists from Deir el-Medina tomb workers, attesting that man were absent from work when their wives or daughters had *ḥsmn*.[83] Frandsen suggests that "activities related to *human* procreation were evidently incompatible with the purity required for service related to temple/tomb which, in turn, had as its goal various forms of recreation/regeneration *of the divine*".[84] Husbands or fathers of menstruating women were to avoid work on tombs for the fear of contamination by *bwt* because it could decrease the regenerative power of the tomb.[85] However, the existence of such a list is attested only for

---

[77] For references, see V. Dasen, "La métaphore du récipient", in V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale. Maternité et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 347–358.

[78] For Nyord's explanation of "CONTAINER", see mainly R. Nyord, "The 'CONTAINER schema'", in R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 68–78.

[79] Main texts to consult are:
F. Colin, "Un espace réservé aux femmes dans l'habitat de l'Égypte hellénistique d'après des papyrus grecs et démotiques", in *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, Firenze 1998*, Florence: Instituto Papirologico 'G. Vitelli', 2001, p. 259–268.
P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in in Ancient Egypt".
J. B. Jørgensen, "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess", in R. Nyord, K. Ryholt (eds.), *Lotus and Laurel. Studies on Egyptian Language and Religion in Honor of Paul John Frandsen*, Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2015, p. 133–164.
T. G. Wilfong, "Menstrual Synchrony and the 'Place of Women' in Ancient Egypt", in E. Teeter, J. Larson (eds.), *Gold of Praise. Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1999, p. 419–434.

[80] A. Erman, W. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, vol. 1–5, Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1955. Next cited only as "*Wb*". *Wb* 3, 163.8.
Wb 3, 163.3-6.
For other terms related to menstruation: P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", p. 82–87.

[81] P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", p. 84.

[82] P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", p. 87–89.
F. Colin, "Un espace réservé aux femmes dans l'habitat de l'Égypte hellénistique d'après des papyrus grecs et démotiques", p. 267.

[83] P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", p. 90–96.

[84] P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", p. 100.

[85] Frandsen also suggests that women were leaving their houses during menstruation; see P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in in Ancient Egypt", p. 96.
O. OIM 13512, interpreted by T. G. Wilfong in "Menstrual Synchrony and the 'Place of Women' in Ancient Egypt". Some theories suggest that a special place in the house was reserved for menstruation

New Kingdom Deir el-Medina and therefore these interpretations could be employed only in this particular context of building royal tombs.

3.2.1. MENSTRUATION AND THE MYTH OF THE RETURN OF THE GODDESS

Jørgensen, as well as te Velde before him, suggests a connection between the myth of the return of the goddess and menstruation.[86] In this myth, which has many variations, a goddess (the eye or the daughter of the sun god) disappears to Nubia and has to return back.[87] Jørgensen suggests that "[t]he myth can be seen as the coming of age of a young nubile goddess, who travels into exile at the onset of the menarche and returns as a marriageable woman who can unite with her brother or husband."[88] Jørgensen's interpretation is interesting, but the connection which he makes between menarche and marriage is not confirmed by Egyptian sources. A liminal period between the onset of menarche and marriage is never mentioned in the textual records. Jørgensen's interpretation concerns the world of gods. However, it seems unlikely that such a transitional period would exist for gods and not for men. According to relevant sources, it seems more probable that the beginning of menarche meant that a woman was marriageable without the need for any transitional period. This does not, however, mean that there is no connection between this particular myth and menstruation. It appears more convincing that the myth was related to the monthly experience of menarche, possibly requiring a seclusion of the woman followed by her return as a fertile future mother. This topic, however, requires further study.

3.2.2. MENSTRUAL BLOOD AND *RDW*: MAKING THE CONNECTION

On the basis of the comparison of menstrual blood with *rḏw* (literally meaning "efflux"), a substance coming from Osiris during his regeneration, Jørgensen has established a parallel between the two *bwt* fluids.[89] *Rḏw* can "refer to any form of liquid bodily emanation, as for example sweat or sperm".[90] *Rḏw* is pure and impure at the same time. It is the unwanted substance that is issued from the body of Osiris after his death and, at the same time, it is a perfect and creative substance.[91] Jørgensen made the parallel between menstruation and the

---

(see F. Colin, "Un espace réservé aux femmes dans l'habitat de l'Égypte hellénistique d'après des papyrus grecs et démotiques"). However, none of the evidence proves a specific place for menstruating women.

[86] J. B. Jørgensen, "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess".
H. te Velde, "The Cat as Sacred Animal of the Goddess Mut", in *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982, p. 127–139, p. 136.

[87] For different versions and fundamental studies of the myth, see J. B. Jørgensen, "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess", p. 133, n. 2.

[88] J. B. Jørgensen, "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess", p. 163.

[89] J. B. Jørgensen, "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess", p. 143.
D. Meeks, *Mythes du Delta d'après le papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2006, p. 42–44.
A. Winkler, "The Efflux that Issued from Osiris. A Study on the rḏw in the Pyramid Texts", in *Göttinger Miszellen* 211 (2006): 125–139.
J. Kettel, "Canopes, rḏw.w d'Osiris et Osiris-canope", in *Hommages à Jean Leclant. Etudes Isiaques. Institut français d'archéologie orientale*, vol. 3, *Bulletin d'Egyptologie* 106.3 (1993): 315–330.

[90] D. Meeks, *Mythes du Delta*, p. 44. Translation from the original: "peut aussi designer toute forme d'émanation corporelle liquide, la sueur, le sperme, par exemple."

[91] For the comparison, see A. Winkler, "The Efflux that Issued from Osiris", p. 132–136.
D. Meeks, *Mythes du Delta*, p. 42–43.

efflux by studying the *bȝs* jar associated with Bastet which he believes contained the goddesse's menstrual blood.[92] A text describing this jar says: "He grasps you ⸢the *bȝs* jar⸣ and provides for himself this your pure and perfect efflux ⸢*rḏw*⸣ which came forth from you, being as this pure and perfect efflux ⸢*rḏw*⸣ which came forth from Osiris".[93]

Another link stands between menstruation and the Osiris' efflux; the Nile. Both fluids are being compared by Egyptian texts to the Nile flood.[94] Other bodily fluids are often compared to the Nile or otherwise related to it; sperm or milk as well, not only menstrual blood and *rḏw*.[95] Menstrual blood is a nourishing substance (as it feeds the foetus), but it is *bwt* as soon as it leaves the body. The efflux released by Osiris' body during his regeneration is also *bwt*, unwanted, but it has to be returned into the body through libation[96] Thus, it is a creative substance as well.[97] The fluid coming from Osiris has probably a connection to the liquids released by the body during the process of mummification.[98] These liquids release a strong smell, similarly to menstrual blood.[99] The differences and resemblances of these fluids are further studied in the next chapter.

3.2.3. Menstrual blood and *rdw*: an explanation

Jørgensen's attempt to link menstrual blood and *rḏw* is interesting, although not exhaustive. The Egyptologist offers a base for this comparison, but its details are unclear. Is their relationship based on the notion that both are *bwt* bodily fluids? However, isn't this true of almost all bodily liquids depending on the context they appear in?[100] An attempt to push Jørgensen's comparison further is made and to explain the differences and resemblances of such fluids.

Menstrual blood and *rḏw* are comparable in their dimensions of bodily fluids that are ambivalent, powerful and unwanted depending on the circumstances. Bodily fluids emanating

---

[92] J. B. Jørgensen, "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess", p. 142.
[93] pBrooklyn, 47.218.50, 2, 112, 14, translated by J. B. Jørgensen, "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess", p. 143.
Interestingly, Osiris's efflux, as well as the efflux of the deceased, was contained in canopic jars. See D. Meeks, *Mythes du Delta*, p. 36–37.
[94] J. Kettel, "Canopes, rḏw.w d'Osiris et Osiris-canope", p. 324–5.
Efflux of Osiris as the Nile flood: *PT* 436, *Pyr.* 788a–b; *PT* 553, *Pyr.* 1360a–b; *PT* 676, *Pyr.* 2007a–b.
Menstruation as the Nile flood: pBritish Museum 10059 ⸢41⸣ 13, 14–14, 1; see also Chapter 3.1.
[95] Connections of bodily fluids related to birth to the Nile:
Menstrual blood and *rḏw*, see Chapter 3.2.2.
Sperm, semen: The Nile is the semen of Hapi. See M. Müller, "Niltöchter, Nymphen und die Nilbraut. Weibliche Wassergenien in Ägypten 2000 v.Chr. bis 2000 n.Chr.", in *Imago Aegypti* 3 (2010): 91–151, p. 94.
Milk: T. Oestigaard, G. A. Firew, *The Source of the Blue Nile. Water Rituals and Traditions in the Lake Tana Region*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, p. 33.
[96] Derachain states that the receptacle in the *Salt 825* papyrus containing the statue of the god wrapped in ram skin was in fact a vessel used for libation: "Il pourrait y avoir une allusion au rôle fécondant de l'eau que ce vase contenait normalement, et qui, sortie du corps d'Osiris, en se répandant sur la terre, faisait naître la vie partout." P. Derchain, *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (B. M. 10051). Rituel pour la consérvation de la vie en Egypte*, fasc. 2, Bruxelles: Palais des académies, 1965, p. 93.
[97] A. Winkler, "The Efflux that Issued from Osiris", p. 130.
[98] J. Kettel, "Canopes, rḏw.w d'Osiris et Osiris-canope", p. 319.
[99] J. Kettel, "Canopes, rḏw.w d'Osiris et Osiris-canope", p. 325.
[100] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 199.

from the body are generally, according to the anthropologist Douglas, imbued with a special power.[101] The power is given by the fact that they are on the margins of the body and therefore liminal in character, neither properly belonging to the body nor completely detached from it. "The danger that is risked by boundary transgression is power", claims Douglas.[102] This power thus makes from these liquids a substance that is *bwt* in certain circumstances. Impurity is "matter out of place".[103] Menstrual blood is impure as soon as it leaves the body: its place is inside the body.

In the *Coffin Texts*, the efflux has a creative potential. Shu has created the eight Heh (*Ḥḥ*) gods from it and the *ba* of Osiris was created from it as well.[104] *Rḏw* is, at the same time, an unwanted substance in relation to the deceased because it is an impure discharge from the bodily margins.[105] The substance has to escape the body during the treatment of the deceased.[106]

Menstrual blood, as was shown in the last chapter, is impure as well. In the case of the Deir el-Medina tomb construction, any contact with it could possibly prevent tomb constructors from work because of the fear of contaminating the tomb with an impure substance preventing fertility.

Menstrual blood and *rḏw* are ambivalent substances; sometimes wanted and sometimes unwanted. Nyord provides an explanation of why the efflux of Osiris is ambivalent. The reason lies in its *potentiality*: "It is clearly a substance which belongs to the body in which it is created (…) but where, at the same time, and like semen, it is only of potential use."[107] Does this, however, truly apply to *rḏw*? The efflux of Osiris is creative on its own, as well as sperm in mythology, without the need to enter any container. The potentially creative but impure efflux comes from the body of Osiris and returns to it, now being positive for the god. Semen, in contrast, does not return as a creative substance to the same body. These two fluids and their mythological connotations are too complicated to provide an easy explanation. A further study of their relationship is necessary.

Menstrual blood provides a nourishing environment for the child. Its purpose is, in contrast to *rḏw* and sperm, fulfilled only *inside* the body from which it comes. According to the notion that creative power is always masculine, menstrual blood cannot have this kind of power and it does not have it; its function is not to create, but to nourish. Menstrual blood is an ambivalent bodily liquid as well as *rḏw* (or sperm), but feminine and uncreative as such. Menstrual blood nourishes the child, but is impure once it is outside the body. *Rḏw*, in contrast, has to escape the deceased body and becomes creative once it does. The discharges are in both cases impure and have a special power.

An interesting possibility is to establish a relationship between *rḏw* and other creative yet ambivalent bodily fluids in mythology: spittle, sperm, blood and tears. Not all forms of mythical birth were taken into consideration in this paper because they surpass its immediate

---

[101] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 199.
[102] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 199.
[103] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 41.
[104] *CT* II, 1b, 6c, 7d and 19e [76, 78]. For the creation of *ba* see *CT* 94–96.
[105] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 466.
[106] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 466.
[107] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 446.

interest. Shu and Tefnut, representing air and moisture, were created from Atum's sperm.[108] Sperm is negatively connoted with poison through the word *mtw.t* meaning both sperm and poison.[109] The second way of Atum's creation of Shu and Tefnut was by spitting and sneezing.[110] Spitting is employed in netherworld texts to insult and repel the enemy and is also sometimes treated as a poison.[111] Blood, according to the *Coffin Texts*, can be creative: one of the Heh gods Shu creates is "Blood of Shu, Bull of the Uraei".[112] In the same texts, blood has a negative connotation with the blood of the defeated enemies.[113] Lastly, humans were created by tears of Re-Atum.[114] Having tears in the eyes, on the other hand, parallels hunger in the belly.[115]

Spittle, sperm, blood and tears are both creative, but in certain circumstances impure and unwanted. "Examples of mythological creation by semen or saliva should be understood no differently from tales of the creation of mankind from the creator's tears (…) plants and minerals from divine sweat, blood, et cetera. In each instance, the cast off portion of the god's body retains divine power and may engender new life."[116] *Rḏw* is different from these four bodily fluids; it needs to leave the body and then to return to in a pure state.

Nyord claims that in the *Coffin Texts*, an emphasis is laid on the capacity of the deceased to produce offspring on earth through his sperm.[117] However, in these spells the deceased does not create the offspring alone but with a female counterpart. This is another example of how the bodily experiences of copulation and birth translate to the mythological context. Certain spells in the *Coffin Texts*[118] provide "the outline of a system in which the deceased wishes to visit the world of the living, through his *ba*, in order to copulate with the express purpose (according to *CT* 576) of engendering children. This progeny is described in *CT* 503 as 'his heir', who apparently owes his existence to the 'seed' of the deceased, which is said to be 'safe on earth'".[119]

---

[108] *PT* 527, *Pyr.* 1248a–d. J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 13.
[109] *Wb* 2, 169.1–8.
The relationship between sperm and poison was established by H. te Velde, *Seth. God of Confusion*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, p. 37, 45.
See also A. H. Gordon, C. W. Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead. Biomedical Theory in Ancient Egypt*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, p. 137.
[110] *PT* 600, *Pyr.* 1652c. J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 13. Other forms of creation include the Ptah's creation of the world through utterance, or the birth of Re from Apophis' umbilical cord.
[111] *PT* 534, *Pyr.* 1270a–b. For other references, see R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 4th edition, 2008, p. 84–88.
[112] *CT* II, 12b [76]. R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 328.
[113] For example *CT* I, 293d [69].
For other references, see R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 328.
[114] *CT* VII, 465 [1130].
For other references, see R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 324.
[115] *CT* VI, 409g–i [775]. R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 324.
[116] R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 78.
[117] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 423.
[118] *CT* II, 72d–88d [95] or *CT* IV, 331k–q [697]. For other references, see R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 424–442.
[119] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 440–441.

3.2.4. MILK AND MENSTRUAL BLOOD

Milk is a bodily liquid related to birth and fertility, as menstrual blood, sperm and Osiris' efflux. Interestingly, all these liquids, as stated above, are metaphorically related to the Nile flood and its fertile power. Milk is, as well as menstrual blood, a fluid that helps to nourish the child. Milk is a typically female substance, although a male god can also provide it to the deceased.[120] In contrast to male substances, neither milk nor menstrual blood are creative.

A spell against the disease *gesu* was mentioned in Chapter 2.1.2. An overproduction of milk of a woman was treated by the application of the first menstrual blood of another girl on the breasts of the diseased. This medical case established a relationship between milk and menstrual blood. The first blood of a girl is a magical substance preventing the overproduction of milk in the breasts. How to explain this? Menstrual blood falls into the same category as milk: female liquids nourishing the child. The difference is that one nourishes the child in the womb, the other one after the birth. When blood escapes, it does not fulfil its purpose any more. The role of milk is, in contrast, fulfilled only when escaping the body, similarly to *rḏw*. When a woman produces milk, it is for the nourishment of a born child.

Menstrual blood and milk are structural opposites. They are both nourishing, but one inside and one outside. One is impure, because it fulfils its role only inside, the other one is pure, because it nourishes only once it escapes the body. Overproduction of milk is thus an unhealthy excess of a nourishing substance, cured by the application of its structural opposite. Overproduction of milk has to be contradicted by something similarly powerful: the first menstrual blood of a girl, who just started to be potentially fertile. As we saw in the case of the tomb construction, the menstrual blood could prevent the "fertility" of the tomb. Isn't this a similar case? The excessive production of the nourishing milk is balanced by the application of a substance marking potential fertility.

Ivanovna suggests that in later phases of Egyptian history milk may have been considered as analogical to blood. A Stoic philosopher living in Egypt in the first century A.D. reports that Egyptian priests were not to drink milk because of its similarity with blood.[121] The Greek *Hippocratic Corpus* operated with the idea that menstrual blood and milk are the same, the milk being an excess of menstrual blood: "a menstrual period cannot occur because, as the Hippocratics believe, the excess blood is diverted to the breasts where it is converted into milk".[122] Blood nourishes inside, milk outside, but were, at least for the Greek doctors, the same.

In *Coffin Texts*, milk coming from a god had a purifying role. Libation, for which milk could be used, employed to balance out the loss of unwanted *rḏw*, had the same effect. Milk was often used in purification rituals.[123] The divinity's milk, as well as water, were both considered to be purifying substances.

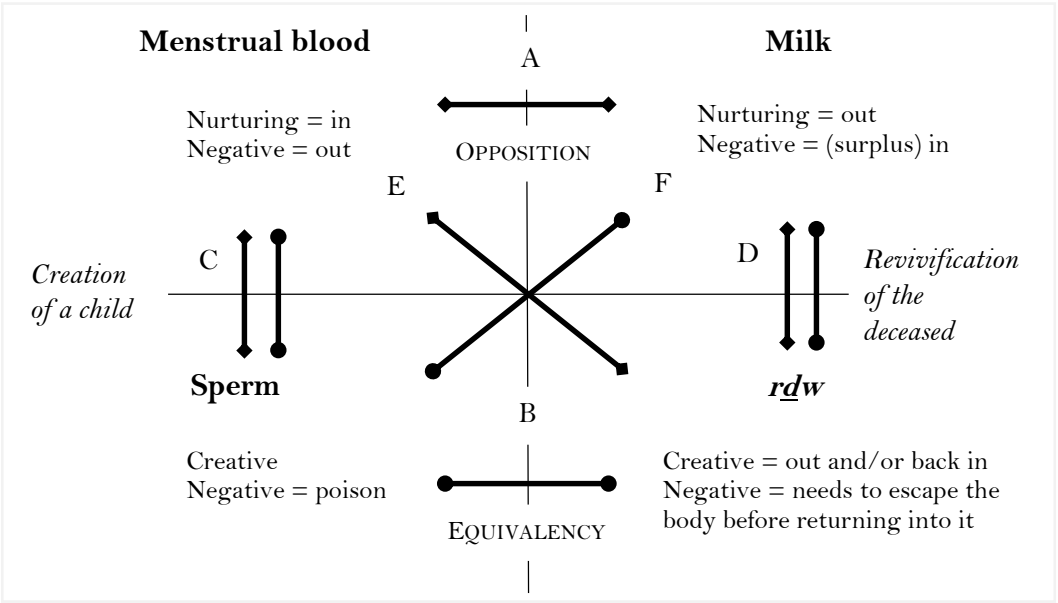
---

[120] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 446.
[121] P. W. van der Horst, *Chaeremon. Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984, p. 23.
[122] H. King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, Florence: Routledge, 2002, p. 53.
See also M. Ivanovna, *Milk in Ancient Egyptian Religion*, independent thesis, Uppsala: Uppsala University. Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2009, p. 40. Uppsala University Publications. *University of Uppsala*. [online]. 1.5.2016 [cit. 2016-05-01]. Accessible at: http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A713303&dswid=-6202
[123] For milk and purification, see M. Ivanovna, *Milk in Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p. 12, 22, 31 and 37.

3.2.5. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NURTURING AND CREATIVE FLUIDS

The method employed in this thesis to analyse the relationship between bodily fluids is inspired by a semiotic analysis invented by Greimas and Rastier.[124] The "semiotic square" is a theoretical model based on an analysis of oppositional concepts, providing a logical and comprehensible network of relationships.[125] The "semiotic square" is used here only as a tool to illustrate the relationships. An attempt to make a true semiotic analysis is not made in this thesis.

NURTURING - FEMININE



CREATIVE - MASCULINE

Positive relationship: ●——●

Negative relationship: ◆——◆

Table 1: Analytic tool of creative and nurturing (feminine and masculine) bodily fluids in the creation of the human child and regeneration of the deceased, inspired by the "semiotic square".

The bodily fluids analysed are menstrual blood, milk, sperm and *rdw* (Table 1). These fluids are creative or nurturing and are relevant for the study of the relationship between birth and rebirth. Other creative fluids, spittle, tears and blood fall into the same category as sperm, as was shown above; it is sperm that is of immediate interest in this analysis.

[124] A. J. Greimas, F. Rastier, "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints".

[125] L. Herbert, *Tools for Text and Image Analysis. An Introduction to Applied Semiotics*, p. 41. Signo. Site internet des théories sémiotiques, [online], 10.5.2016 [cit. 2016-05-10]. Accessible at: http://www.signosemio.com/documents/Louis-Hebert-Tools-for-Texts-and-Images.pdf

Why make a relationship between the four bodily fluids? Do they have anything in common? They all have to do with the prototypical fertilizing nature of the Nile and with fertility in general. The argument is that feminine substances nurture whereas masculine create and that this idea, which is obvious in the Egyptian context, is evident from the character of the bodily fluids. The semiotic analysis attempts to further systemize their relationships.

Relationship A between menstrual blood and milk is an opposition. Both are feminine nurturing substances, but they are exclusive. One nurtures inside and one outside. Milk nurtures only when it is flowing out of woman's body, menstrual blood only if it stays inside. Also, both are unwanted in certain circumstances. Outside the body, menstrual blood is taboo and may be a sign of a health issue. Breasts can overproduce milk, which is unhealthy as well. The child needs both liquids, but one before the birth and one after.

Relationship B between sperm and *rḏw* is one of equivalency. These masculine substances are creative, but ambivalent. The sperm connotes poison and *rḏw* needs to escape the body of the deceased. *Rḏw* is considered impure and destructive while inside the corpse, but after it escapes it is transformed into a life giving substance.

In the relationship C, sperm creates and menstrual blood consequently nourishes the child. The *Papyrus Jumilhac*, dating to the end of the Ptolemaic or beginning of the Roman period, explicitly states that "the white parts of the fetus were provided by semen and the red or colored parts by the menstrual (and umbilical?) blood."[126] Both were in certain contexts worth of avoiding. Menstrual blood outside of the body was taboo and semen was perhaps connoted with poison.

Relationship D is similar to C. *Rḏw*, once it returns to the body through libation, is comparable to milk. Both are pure substances, one creative and one nurturing, necessary for the revivification of the deceased. Milk, or a substance similar to it, is a libation fluid used to revive the body of Osiris, similarly to *rḏw*.[127] *Rḏw* can be, as we saw, any kind of emanating bodily fluid, therefore also milk.[128] The *Pyramid Texts* make a direct connection between milk and *rḏw*:

> ⸢You have⸣ your ox, ⸢your fowl, your thousand of⸣ red ⸢ … ⸣, your thousand of figs, your thousand of wine, your thousand of sidder-bread, your thousand of ḫbnnt, your thousand of roast grain, to which Geb gave birth for you. ⸢Water⸣ shall provide nurture for you, ⸢the outflow that comes from Osiris shall provide nurture for you⸣. Ah to you, father Pepi Neferkare! You have your water, you have your inundation, you have your milk that is from your mother Isis's breasts.[129]

A connection is made in the comparison of milk to natron-water, the latter being associated with *rḏw*.[130] The overproduction of milk is unwanted and causes harm and *rḏw* is unwanted as well; it needs to escape the body, as it is *bwt*.

---

[126] A. H. Gordon, C. W. Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead*, p. 169.
[127] *PT* 34, *Pyr.* 26a–b.
[128] D. Meeks, *Mythes du Delta*, p. 44.
[129] Translation by: J. P. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005, p. 248. *PT* 665.
[130] *PT* 423, *Pyr.* 765a–767b.

Menstrual blood and *rḏw*, constituting relationship E, both connote decay; menstrual blood is unwanted outside the body and *rḏw* is unwanted inside the body (in the first stage). On the contrary, F is in opposition to E. Sperm and milk (F) are analogical to each other, according to Gordon and Schwabe, not only in their colour but also in their function, in the context of the revivification of the deceased:

> "In revivification Spell 734 from the Pyramid Texts, milk from the breasts of Isis caused the deceased king to arise from the dead. Those ideas of revivification, sustenance and purification often overlap. Revivification might also be shown by a libation by a priest or by a goddess pouring the revivifying liquid or suckling the deceased."[131]

Milk enables the revivification of the deceased, it is, however, not convincing that it would be a creative substance as such. In mythology, sperm and *rḏw* are capable of creating on their own and this never happens with milk. Milk and *rḏw* (when it returns to the body, for example in a form of libation) are analogical because they flow into the body (of both a child and the deceased) to regenerate and nurture it.

The attempted semiotic analysis helped to create relationships between different fluids in terms of their different aspects with regards to fertility and their creative or nurturing function. This analysis is nevertheless not exhaustive and the topic requires further study.

3.3. Metaphors in myths and rituals

Metaphors are frequently used in anthropology to explain the concepts and minds of studied cultures, and metaphor itself has been studied since Aristotle.[132] A metaphor is "comprehending some entity from the point of view, or perspective, of another".[133] The images and interpretations in Chapter 3 show the importance of metaphor for the Egyptian religion.

Lakoff and Johnson, one of the most prominent authors in this field, have showed that metaphors govern reasoning. Understanding is impossible without them.[134] The classical metaphor is "TIME IS MONEY".[135] In our culture, time is understood from the financial perspective: we "spend time", we "buy more time". Metaphors are primarily embodied, according to Lakoff.[136] "We do not just employ and construct metaphors but we live through them. Our ordinary conceptual system by means which we live, think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature."[137] Although metaphor was first employed in linguistics, it is used also in other domains of research.

An influential article by Roman Jakobson defines two axes of language: paradigmatic and syntagmatic.[138] The paradigmatic (or associative) dimension is in fact the selective

---

[131] A. H. Gordon, C. W. Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead*, p. 136.
[132] C. Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture*, Oxford; Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 21–31.
[133] C. Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture*, p. 4.
[134] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 3
[135] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 8.
[136] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, Chicago – London: Chicago University Press, 1987, p. 9.
[137] C. Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture*, p. 16.
[138] R. Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances", in R. Jakobson, M. Halle (eds.), *Fundamentals of Language*, The Hague: Mouton, 1956.

dimension of language use; it is the ability to understand that one word is 'like' another, that is its metaphoric use.[139] The combinative dimension is the ability to combine words one after the other.[140] In any utterance, according to Jakobson, we "select the parts to be used from the inventory of the language as a whole" (vertical activity) and at the same time we combine words together accordingly (horizontal activity).[141] Jakobson's theory can be useful for the study of images: an artist producing it (1) does the selective work of choosing which images are convenient for which context, and (2) he combines them in a pattern understandable or "logical" to his own culture and context.

This chapter has uncovered the metaphor "female body is a container", a very old metaphor which is still used in the western world.[142] In the Egyptian context, it is the male who creates the child. The woman provides the environment for it and nurtures the child. First with menstrual blood and later with milk. The ancient Egyptian religion is full of metaphors of this kind, some of which are uncovered in this thesis. Throughout its history, we find the same religious images or phrases used with slight variations; that is why this tradition is considered coherent throughout its history. Therefore, even images related to birth excavated in different contexts, such as tombs or households, communicate with each other and relate to each other. That is why the metaphor "female body is a container" is found in texts and images from different contexts within the culture of ancient Egypt. The unveiling of this communication permits the understanding of such images. The uncovering of the metaphors communicated by the images or spells helps us to understand the relationships of ideas, unrelated at first sight.

[139] R. Jakobson, *On Language*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 119.
[140] R. Jakobson, *On Language*, p. 119.
[141] C. Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture*, p. 22.
[142] C. Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture*, p. 8.
V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale. Maternité et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 347–358.

4. Pregnancy in Ancient Egypt: iconology of solar birth

Fig. 2: Nut with the sun in her womb in KV9.

The last chapter provided an understanding of the female body as a nurturing container for the child. The present chapter focuses on particular images of pregnant goddesses. The most important sources concerning pregnancy are gynaecological texts, which were studied in Chapter 2, the majority of which focus on the preventing of the uterus from bleeding. Iconographical and mythological sources are more abundant and permits to study the pregnancy of Isis, Hathor and Nut.[143] The iconography of pregnancy operates mainly with solar imagery.[144] Pregnancy in ancient Egypt is very closely tied to the interpretation made in the last chapter, the female body as a container.

Isis, Hathor or Nut are interchangeable in some contexts. Of course, each one has her own name, mythology and attributes, but it is clear that "[a]ll the goddesses [are], by syncretism, similar to Hathor, who is a variation of Isis".[145] How is this possible? Hathor, Nut and Isis convey the same idea in different forms, suitable to their particular context.

The metaphorical relationship of the sun as the child in the womb of his mother is iconographically conveyed in a variety of ways that seem unrelated. However, they all carry the same metaphorical message. Only a few examples are presented in this thesis: the goddess Nut carrying the solar disc in her womb on the depiction from the tomb of Ramesse VI (KV9; fig. 2[146]) dating to the New Kingdom, counterweights of the *mnj.t* (*menat*) necklaces associated with Hathor and an amulet dating back to the second or third century A.D. carrying the image of Isis and her son, Harpocrates.

---

[143] R. O. Faulkner, "The Pregnancy of Isis", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 54 (1968): 40–44.
For Nut's pregnancy, see S. Tower Hollis, "Women of Ancient Egypt and the Sky Goddess", in *The Journal of American Folklore* 100.398 (1987): 496–503.
For images of pregnant women and goddesses, see C. Speiser, "Femmes et divinités enceintes dans l'Egypte du Nouvel Empire", in V. Dasen (ed.), *Naissance et petite enfance dans l'antiquité. Actes du Colloque de Fribourg, 28 novembre au 1er décembre 2001*, Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg; Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004, p. 55–70.

[144] There are a few representations of pregnant women in tombs, with a slightly emphasised belly. These images are not useful for this analysis, as they are not metaphors.

[145] B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Medineh (1935 à 1940)*, p. 88. Translation from the original: "[t]outes les déesses [sont], par syncrétisme, semblables à Hathor, qui elle-même, est une variante d'Isis".
Hornung shares the same perspective, see E. Hornung, *Tal der Könige. Die Ruhestätte der Pharaonen*, Zürich und München: Artemis, 1982, p. 89.

[146] Image is taken from S. Töpfer, "The Physical Activity of Parturition in Ancient Egypt. Textual and Epigraphical Sources", in *Dynamis* 34.2 (2014): 317–335, p. 324.

4.1. NUT FROM THE TOMB OF RAMESSE VI

Nut is a sky goddess who swallows the sun and gives birth to it every day at sunrise and sunset. The image of Nut from the Valley of the Kings (fig. 2) shows the frontal depiction of the goddess, her body ending under her torso containing a red disk with a child inside (she could also be kneeling), surrounded by two seated women (who could be Isis and Nephthys), their hands in a gesture of praise. The hands of Nut surround her child, expressing protection or presentation.[147] The colour of her disk is red, evoking the sun and blood at the same time.[148] The child is represented in the form of the hieroglyph for "child": a sitting child with a finger at his mouth and a side lock. The foetus was considered to be an independent being not only in mythology and in everyday contexts.[149] The child was named before birth and Meskhenet made a *ka* for the child before his birth as well.[150] Another similar image has been discovered on an ostracon. [151] The most interesting difference is that here the child is depicted with an erected phallus, indicating his strength.

4.2. MENAT, HATHOR AND THE FEMALE BODY

Barguet shows that counterweights of *mn.t* necklaces (fig. 3)[152], associated with Hathor, represent a pregnant female body by comparing it with a series of "dolls" found in Sixth Dynasty graves from Thebes (fig. 4).[153] These "dolls" are shaped similarly to the image of Nut in fig. 2, dominant parts of the female body being the long torso and its "basin" shaped end. Hathor, literally "house of Horus", is associated with this god as his mother and wife.[154] In an ostracon from Deir el-Medina, Hathor is called "Mistress of the vagina", reinforcing her

---

[147] P. Barguet, "L'origine et la signification du cointrepoids du collier-menat", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 52 (1953): 101–113, p. 107.

[148] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 142. A suggestion could be made that the red evokes the menstrual blood which is supposed to nourish a child but as this is a relief in a tomb it probably evokes the sun and its power.

[149] V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale*, p. 130. "Cette figure imaginaire exprime la perception de l'enfant à naître comme un être physiquement déjà formé et doué de conscience."

[150] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 115 and p. 63. Marshall's theory is supported by papyrus *Berlin 3027* (F 5,8–6,8).
See also N. Yamazaki, *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind, Achet 2*, Berlin: Achet Verlag, 2003, p. 24.

[151] For the reference to the second image, see M. G. Daressy, *Ostraca. Catalogue général des antiquitées du Musée du Caire nos 25001-25384*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1901, p. 15. Daressy describes it as "[p]laquette sur laquelle est dessiné en noir une déesse de face, tenant devant elle un disque contenant un Horus enfant".

[152] British Museum. Collection online. *British Museum.* [online]. [cit. 2016-03-14]. Accessible at: *http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=110086&partId=1&object=23240&page=1*

[153] P. Barguet, "L'origine et la signification du cointrepoids du collier-menat", p. 103.
For the dolls, see H. E. Winlock, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahari. 1911-1931*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1942, p. 207.
For the figure, see British Museum. Collection online. *British Museum.* [online]. [cit. 2016-03-14]. Accessible at:
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=118802&partId=1

[154] P. Barguet, "L'origine et la signification du cointrepoids du collier-menat", p. 103.
A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 27.

connection to birth and sexuality.[155] In the counterweights of *mn.t* necklaces, shaped as the dolls, she is often shown nursing Horus.[156]

The close connection between Hathor and *mn.t* is proven by her epithets "the one of the *mn.t*". Hathor's temple in Dendera was called "the house of *mn.t*"[157] and one of the chapels of this temple contained a sacred *mn.t*.[158] By analogy to what Barguet discovered, it could be said that the form of the *mn.t* counterweight is similar to the shape of Nut from fig. 2.[159] The connection between the dolls, the counterweight and the images of the pregnant goddess has been affirmed by several authors.[160]

In the tomb of Inherkhau in Deir el-Medina, the counterweight of the *mn.t* necklace is substituted by a scarab, *ḫpr* sign in Egyptian.[161] "The scarab was used by the ancient Egyptians as a symbol of the rising sun being pushed across the sky (…), exemplifying the notion that the sun god can create his own means of rebirth."[162] The fact that the counterweight was in this particular case substituted by a scarab is significant, meaning that there exists a connection between the symbol of the

Fig. 3: Counterpoise-menat

Fig. 4: Wooden paddle doll, Middle Kingdom.

[155] G. Pinch, *Votive Offerings to Hathor*, Oxford: Griffith Institute; Ashmolean Museum, 1993, p. 219.
[156] P. Barguet, "L'origine et la signification du cointrepoids du collier-menat", p. 104 : "Ces décorations constituent preuve que le *Menat*, malgré ses différences orthographiques avec le mot : nourrice ⌈*mn'ṯ*⌋, est en relation directe avec le rôle qu'Hathor tient d'ailleurs de son nom vis-à-vis Harpocrate." B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Medineh (1935 à 1940)*, p. 87.
[157] P. Barguet, "L'origine et la signification du cointrepoids du collier-menat", p. 107.
[158] E. Chassinat, *Le temple de Dendara*, vol. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1935, p. 131–132.
[159] L. Manniche, "In the Womb", in *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 17 (2006): 97–112, p. 101.
[160] L. Manniche, "In the Womb".
A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 27–28.
[161] P. Barguet, "L'origine et la signification du cointrepoids du collier-menat", p. 107, fig. 5.
N. Cherpion, J.-P. Corteggiani, *La tombe d'Inherkhâouy (TT 359) à Deir el-Medina. Textes*, vol. 1, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2010, p. 95.
N. Cherpion, J.-P. Corteggiani, *La tombe d'Inherkhâouy (TT 359) à Deir el-Medina. Planches*, vol. 2, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2010, pl. 82, 84 and 76.
Petrie gives examples of beads from *menat* necklaces left here as votive offerings, discovered in Hathor's temple in Serabít, some of which are shaped as scarabs. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Researches in Sinai*, London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, W., 1906, p. 152, fig. 159.
[162] K. M. Cooney, "Scarab", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2008. UCLA Encyclopedia of

scarab and Hathor, and possibly with a pregnant woman as well. This symbolism is reinforced by the fact that in this case, the scarab's front legs are substituted by horns of ibex, symbols of regeneration.[163]

4.3. AMULETS PROTECTING THE UTERUS

Dasen wrote an excellent analysis of Egyptian Roman amulets protecting the uterus and the child, many of which were found in Egypt and contain images from the Egyptian mythology. These amulets mostly date from the second to the third centuries A.D. Even though these images contain many Roman elements, it is still useful to study them for their images relating to the Egyptian tradition.[164]

Fig. 5: Haematite uterine amulet, third century A.D. CBd-747.

CBd-747 (fig. 5)[165] is a haematite amulet dating to the third century A. D.[166] An ouroboros, first attested in the Eighteenth Dynasty, in this context called Orôriouth, encircles the images in the gem.[167] Orôriouth, in this amulet referred to as OPWPIOY, symbolises the protection of the uterus and its name in fact means uterus (*w'r.t, w'r.tj* in Egyptian).[168] Inside the ouroboros is a cupping glass, *sikua* in latin, a common symbol for the uterus on this kind of protective amulet, locked by a seven-bitted key.[169] The number seven has important

---

Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at : http://escholarship.org/uc/item/13v7v5gd

[163] C. Cannuyer, "Entre Cancer et Capricorne. Le scarabée de la tombe de Sennedjem à Deir el-Médineh", in *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 14 (2001): 45–52, p. 45.

[164] Most of this type of amulets and gems can be found in the "Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database". Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database. *Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at:
http://classics.mfab.hu/talismans/object/list.
The amulets described here are referenced according to their number in this database.
A. Delatte was the first to clearly interpret those amulets. A. Delatte, "Etudes sur la magie grecque", in *Le Musée Belge* 18 (1914): 5–96, p. 77 (for the cupping glass) and 81ff (for the key).

[165] This is not a unique amulet; similar gems to this one can be found in the Cambpell Bonner Magical Gems Database; e.g. CBd-748 or CBd-749. For this particular image, see Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database. *Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at:
http://classics.mfab.hu/talismans/cbd/747?cbd_id=747&multiple_cond=and.

[166] S. Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum. Zu Bildernund Zauberformeln auf geschnitteten Steinen der Antike und Neuzeit*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004, p. 236.

[167] R. K. Ritner, "A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 30. 3 (1984): 209–221, p. 219.

[168] S. Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen*, p. 486.

[169] V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale*, p. 60.

connotations with healing, as it was discussed in Chapter 2.2. The key stands for the desire to keep the uterus closed so that the pregnant woman is not endangered, similarly to the protective tampon of Isis.[170] On the top of the cupping glass are two ram hons, probably an allusion to Khnum.[171] Above the cupping glass in the middle of the amulet is Isis, wearing Roman clothes and a crown, in her right hand holding a cupping glass. With her left hand, she touches the solar disk crowning Harpocrates, substituting a head for Bes acephalous underneath him.[172] Another inscription mentions Hathor (AΘWP), reinforcing the protective power of the amulet.[173] The verso of this amulet contains another image of the cupping glass, as Michel suggest, and this image evokes the sun and its rays.[174] This theory is reinforced by the fact that a scarab, symbolizing the sun, is depicted right above it.

The purpose of this amulet was to protect the uterus and stop the bleeding.[175] Haematite was believed to have styptic properties.[176] The use of this amulet was probably similar to the use of ancient Egyptian amulets; they were worn on the body to protect it. The older amulets were probably made over and over again for each malady from perishable materials, but the Roman ones were imperishable. Ancient Egyptian medicine probably put more emphasis on the ritual *action* of making the amulet and Romans put a greater emphasis on the amulet as such.[177] This assumption is made by Ritner as well when he claims that "[i]t is in the rite—and not the spell—that the essence of Egyptian magic has to be sought".[178] Some features of ancient Egyptian healing stayed the same in the Roman context: the role of Isis as a protector of the womb, Harpocrates as her son born with her protection, the solar symbolism of the child to be born, or the fact that the cupping glass is firmly closed by a seven-bitted key, metaphorically very similar to the seven knots often tied to protect the woman in pregnancy.

The cupping glass was first identified by C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets. Chiefly Greco-Roman*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 94.

For the description of this gem, see S. Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, p. 236.

[170] V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale*, p. 60.

[171] V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale*, p. 64.

Khnum is the one who helps to open the uterus. See R. K. Ritner, "A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection", p. 214–215.

[172] S. Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, p. 236.

C. Bonner, "Amulets Chiefly in the British Museum", in *Hesperia* 20 (1951): 301–345, n. 27.

According to B. R. Hellinckx, there is a connection between the head and the sun; as we shall see, there is also a connection between Horus and the sun. B. R. Hellincks, "The Symbolic Assimilation of Head and Sun as Expressed by Headrests".

[173] S. Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, p. 236.

[174] S. Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, p. 236.

[175] R. K. Ritner, "A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection", p. 212–213.

[176] R. K. Ritner, "A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection", p. 213.

A. A. Barb, "Bois du sang, Tantale", in *Syria* 29 (1952): 271–284, p. 279.

[177] This interesting distinction requires further study of the differences between Egyptian and Roman medicine.

[178] R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 67.

4.4. PREGNANCY AND THE SUN: A METAPHORICAL ANALYSIS OF IMAGES

Images of the woman with a child in her womb presented in the last chapter are associated with the rebirth of the sun.[179] It could thus be said that an image of "a pregnant woman", iconographically standing for either Hathor, Isis, Nut or an ordinary woman, is, at least in some cases, a metaphor for the "rebirth of the sun". Metaphors are always embodied: "the structures used to put together our conceptual systems grow out of bodily experience and make sense in terms of it".[180] There is no surprise that such a key cosmological concept as the nature of the sun has a mirror in the essential physical experience of giving birth.

Two embodied experiences underlie the metaphor: the path of the sun and the birth of the child. The path of the sun creates the rules of the cosmos, in which the individual lives: the night, the day, the netherworld and the everyday world. This cosmos, as well as the sun, is personal. The sun god is not alone; his cosmos is inhabited by other gods enabling rebirth, rebirth of the child included: Nut, Hathor or Isis. The birth of the child became associated with the "birth" of the sun. The child born, as well as the deceased, as is established in Chapter 6, in a sense participates on the daily rebirth of the sun. The embodied experiences of childbirth and of the path sun were at the dawn of this metaphor.

Egyptian texts and images provide metaphors and the decoding of some of their meanings may be attempted, e.g. that there was an equivalence between "a pregnant woman" on a bodily level and the "rebirth of the sun" on the cosmic, while this metaphor was communicated by different individuals, already born into a system and understanding of these metaphors and images, again and again.[181] The structuring of the world was closely connected to mythology and the physical experiences lived every day.

---

[179] Some flints used as votive offerings, discovered in Deir el-Medina, can be considered as "pregnant stones" (see V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale*, p. 42–47).
Another interesting example of this imagery is provided by C. Graves Brown: "Though our nodules do not actually have the unborn child painted in, the nodules suggest that embryonic form emerges from stone, Hathor or Nut give birth to the sun disk (…) The solar significance of the flints is apparent not only through the image of Nut pregnant with the sun disk, it is also manifest in the lotus, the scarab and the *akhet*, motifs recognised on the stones." C. Graves Brown, "Emergent Flints", in K. Szapakowska (ed.), *Through a Glass Darkly. Magic, Dreams and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, Swansea: The Classical Press of Whales, 2006, p. 47–62, p. 54.

[180] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, p. xiv.

[181] J. Lacan, "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud", in *Psychanalyse et sciences de l'homme* 3 (1957): 47–81.

5. GIVING BIRTH

Birth, as well as death, is very rarely depicted in ancient Egypt and in Antiquity in general,[182] all of these being liminal phases associated with many dangers.[183] However, even though birth is usually not directly depicted or described, it is still present in the Egyptian mythology and iconography. A significant mythical birth is the one Isis gave to Horus and Nut to the sun, presented in preceding chapters.

The textual source directly describing birth is the story of Rudjedet's delivery in *Papyrus Westcar*, a papyrus from the Hyksos period telling a series of stories within a narrative frame referring to the Old Kingdom. Medical texts do not give any recommendations directly concerning birth.[184]

Several images indirectly depict birth, such as temple decorations or decorations in *mammisis*, chapels associated with the birth of a god or a divine king.[185] Direct depictions of birth include an image form Dendera, Ptolemaic period, where the delivering woman is helped by Hathor. Another example from the temple of Armant dates to the Roman period, depicting the birth of Caesarion by Cleopatra.[186] The objects carrying images related to birth uncover some aspects of this life-giving act; magical wands and birth bricks were used as ritual objects to protect the mother and the child during delivery. Pregnancy is related, as we saw in the last chapter, to the coming of the new day. Birth is connected with the coming forth of a new day, but also with death.

5.1. RUDJEDET'S DELIVERY

The logical way to commence the analysis of the imagery and mythology behind birth is to begin with the only textual source concerning birth that is available.[187] According to *Papyrus Westcar*, in the story describing the birth of three royal children, future kings of the Fifth

---

[182] V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale*, p. 111.
M. J. Raven, "Egyptian Concepts on the Orientation of the Human Body", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 91 (2005): 37–53, p. 50.

[183] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 81–82 for textual evidence of birth and p. 83–85 for iconographical evidence.
See also S. Töpfer, "The Physical Activity of Parturition in Ancient Egypt" for birth in general.

[184] "Remarkably, the medical texts do not contain any description of the parturition itself and as well there are no magical incantations and spells which have to be recited at the moment of delivery. The gynaecological texts do not deal with parturition, but only with the problems before and afterwards." S. Töpfer, "The Physical Activity of Parturition in Ancient Egypt", p. 318.

[185] The study of *mammisi* temple decoration will not be part of this thesis, as I am mainly concerned with the life and health of women, not of gods. For more information, see Kockelmann, H., "Birth House (Mammisi)", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2011. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 10.5.2016 [cit. 2016-05-10]. Accessible at: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8xj4k0ww#
For the divine birth of the king, see H. Brunner, Die *Geburt des Gottkönigs. Studien zur Überlegung eines altägyptischen Mythos, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen* 10, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964.

[186] E. Strouhal, B. Vachala, H. Vymazalová, *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians*, fig. 51.

[187] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature. The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, vol. 1, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2nd edition, 2006, p. 220–222. I chose to work with Lichtheim's translation, as it is the most widely available.

Dynasty, Re sends five divinities, Isis, Nephthys, Meskhenet, Heqet and Khnum, to help Rudjedet with the delivery of the children. The fact that it was the solar god Re who initiated the birth activities is significant because of the metaphor of the child as the sun, explained in the last chapter.

The five gods approached Rawoser, Rudjedet's husband, as dancing girls with *sḫm.w* (*sistra*, a musical instruments associated with Hathor) and *mnj.t* necklaces: "then they presented him ⸢Rawoser, Rudjedet's husband⸣ with their menat and sistra" (*wn.jn=sn ḥr ms n=f mnj.t=sn sḫm.w)*, claiming they "understand delivery" (*mk n rḫ.wjn smsj*) and it is in this disguise that they were accepted into Rudjedet's house by Rawoser.[188]

The Hathoric elements, *sḫm.w* and *mnj.t*, are present as musical instruments in this scene related to birth, although Hathor as a goddess is not explicitly present among the five deities.[189] She is present implicitly in the imagery of the girls dancing with their instruments. Several scholars established a link between birth and the word *ḫnr.t*, conveying the notion dance and seclusion at the same time: dancing women may have been present during delivery, and delivery occurred in a secluded and protected space.[190] Music may have been played during delivery, as various documents suggest: music helped to ward off evil (by Bes or Hathor) and to welcome the new-born into the world.[191] Hathor is thus present, but not in her personal form.

The divinities then locked themselves in a room with Rudjedet. The text does not say whether they regained their true appearance. It can be supposed that they did because during the delivery itself they act individually. The fact that "they locked themselves in" (*ꜥḥꜥ.n ḫtm.n=sn ꜥt ḥr=s ḥnꜥ=sn)* is significant for our interpretation. The protection, granted by the closure of the room (as is seen even in the determinative for the verb "to close", *snj*) shows another layer of meaning of the idea of "closeness" and "openness".[192] These concepts have been evoked in the context of body imagery related to birth and in the magical protection that amulets grant to pregnant women, now we encounter it in the context of space; a closed space

---

[188] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 220.

[189] *Menat* necklace can also be used as a musical instrument. See S. Emerit, "Music and Musicians", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2013. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. ⸢online⸣. 23.3.2016 ⸢cit. 2016-03-23⸣. Accessible at: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6x587846

[190] A. M. Roth, "The *pss-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony. A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth", in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992): 113–147, p. 143.
F. Colin, "Un espace réservé aux femmes dans l'habitat de l'Égypte hellénistique d'après des papyrus grecs et démotiques", p. 259. Colin suggests that places described by this term or terms deriving from them could be places dedicated to menstruating women.

[191] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 83.
S. Emerit, "Music and Musicians", p. 11.
For Hathor's role as entertainer, see also N. Reeves, "A Rare Mechanical Figure from Ancient Egypt", in *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 50 (2015): 43–61, esp. p. 48–49.

[192] For places possibly designed for birth, see H. Altenmüller, "Geburtsschrein und Geburthaus", in P. der Manuelian, *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, vol. 1, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1996, p. 27–37.

is a safe space, a closed body is a healthy body. The delivery can now be carried out, as the space is protected.

"Isis placed herself before her [Rudjedet], Nephthys behind her, Heqet hastened the birth." (*ỉḥ'.n rdj.n sj ȝst ḫft-ḥr=s Nbt-ḥwt ḥȝ=s Ḥqt ḥr sḫȝḫ mswt*).[193] For the birth of each royal child, the position of the goddesses is always the same, only the names of the children differ. The children "slide into" (*w'r.jn ḫrd*) Isis' arms, after she utters magical words, in one case "Don't be so mighty in her womb, you whose name is 'Mighty'" (*jm=k wsr m ḫt=s m rn=k pwy n wsr=j-r=f*).[194] These words are similar to magical words in medical texts: they communicate with the child and order him how to act. Isis knowing the name of the child has power over it.[195] Isis and the other gods *know* the necessary magical acts for a successful delivery.

The children are all described as having limbs overlaid with gold and a headdress of lapis lazuli.[196] The goddesses then "washed him, having cut his navel cord, and laid him on a pillow of cloth" (*j'.jn=sn sw š'd ḫpȝ=f rḏj ḥr jfdj m ḏbt*).[197] "Brick of garment" seems to be a better translation of "pillow of cloth".[198] Meskhenet later declares the fate of the children: "the king who will assume kingship in this whole land". Khnum gives health to the children.[199] The text mentions a purification of Rudjedet for the period of two weeks.[200] Rudjedet's two-week purification period could be related to the images of Deir el-Medina from Chapter 3.1.2., which may show women during their purification period.

---

[193] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 220.

[194] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 220.

[195] G. Pinch, "Magical Techniques", p. 87–88.

[196] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 220. Those attributes are normally assigned to the appearance of gods.
For the interpretation of this passage, see H. Goedicke, "Anthropological Problems, Gynaecological questions", in H. Györi (ed.), *Mélanges offerts à Edith Varga. "Le lotus qui sort de terre"*, Budapest: Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts, 2001, p. 113–122, p. 117.
J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 436–437.

[197] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 220.

[198] The pillow of cloth in the passage "laid him on a pillow of cloth", *rḏj ḥr jfd m ḏbt*, was sometimes interpreted as a birth brick. It is extremely interesting that different variations of his word *jfd*, point to its meaning as a garment (with the determinative of cloth, *Wb* 1, 71.14-17) but with the determinative of a stone, this word means "rectangle/block of stone" (*Wb* 1, 71.10-11). The word "four" is also very similar, *jfd* with the determinative for the number "four" (*Wb* 1, 71.1-4). This number also evokes a brick, or a rectangular object. The word *ḏbt* means "brick", but also sheet (*Wb* 5, 553.7-554.18). Although the word "Meskhenet" is not directly used, we can still understand *jfd m ḏbt* as a "brick of garments". For comparison, D. Begnato translates this expression directly as "brick". D. Bagnato, *The Westcar Papyrus. A Transliteration, Translation and Language Analysis*, Vienna: Edition Atelier, 2006, p. 82.
Roth and Roehrig interpret this passage as "four bricks". A. M. Roth, Catherine H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 88 (2002): 121–139, p. 133.

[199] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 220.
H. Goedicke offers an interesting insight into what could be a social parallel to Meskhenet: "the social custom of having the mother-in-law look at the new-born before she informs her son, the child's father, is the matrix for any notion of prognostication." According to Goedicke, notions of prognostications are not Egyptian but were brought to the country during the New Kingdom under foreign influences.
H. Goedicke, "Rudjet's Delivery", in *Varia Aegyptiaca* 1 (1985): 19–26, p. 23–26.

[200] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 221.

Papyrus Westcar provides several important questions and clues to understand delivery, although they are not exhaustive: the ideal positions and roles of the goddesses during childbirth, the problem of birth bricks and the cutting of the umbilical cord. These elements are studied in the following section.

Fig. 6: Reconstruction of the Abydos birth brick.

5.2. THE ABYDOS BIRTH BRICK

Wegner recently discovered a birth brick in Abydos in a mayoral residence, dating to the Middle Kingdom (fig. 6).[201] The discovery is unique; some researchers have assumed the use of birth bricks during delivery even before this finding. Besides the birth brick discovered by Wegner in Abydos, another proof of the use of birth bricks during labour is attested: they are mentioned in the tomb chapel of Watetkhethor in Saqqara, in a scene of singing female dancers.[202] "Among the lines of the song is the phrase *jj (j)fd*, 'O four', determined by four rectangles. This is presumably a reference to the four bricks of birth, already sufficiently personified to be called upon."[203] Birth bricks are also mentioned in a medical text.[204]

The birth brick discovered by Wegner is made of unbaked clay, decorated by several images. On the bottom side (side A),[205] an image of a seated woman nursing a child, with one woman behind her and one in front of her, this scene being flanked by Hathor-headed emblems on tree trunks.[206] The images on the four other sides of the brick (sides C, D, E, F; the image on upper face, side B, is now destroyed,)[207] show apotropaic figures of the same kind as those depicted on magical wands, also used during birth.[208]

The Abydos brick was used during delivery, concludes Wegner.[209] "The standard technique of childbirth in ancient Egypt involved squatting by the woman in labor upon balanced birth bricks designated by this term *meskhenet*."[210] The child slips into the space

---

[201] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 448, fig. 7.
[202] W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altaegyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, vol. 3, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs,1936, pl. 29. For other textual sources concerning the use of bricks, see A. M. Roth, C. H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", p. 129–139.
[203] A. M. Roth, Catherine H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", p. 131.
[204] *Book for the Mother and the Child* F.
[205] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 452.
[206] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 451–452.
[207] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 448.
[208] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 463–471.
H. Altenmüller, "Ein Zaubermesser des Mittleren Reiches", in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 13 (1986): 1–27.
[209] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 476.
[210] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 471. This position during child birth was used in Egypt until quite recently.

formed by the two "pillars" of bricks. The birth bricks bear the name of Meskhenet, the goddess of birth. Wegner suggests that before labour, the brick was imbued with the magical power of protection *s3* (*sa*) by reciting a spell and that the protective power of those bricks was also used in other rites of protection of the child in his early childhood.[211] Wegner insightfully commented that the scene combines two moments in parturition: (a) the delivery itself, Isis holding the hands in front of the mother, (b) and the consequent nursing of the healthy child.[212] Showing the delivery would be unfortunate, for the brick has to show the positive outcome.

5.2.1. THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE ABYDOS BRICK

Three women, two Hathoric emblems on red tree trunks, a child and a throne decorate side A of the brick. The similarity of the faces of the women and of the emblems is striking. Their skin is silver/grey and their wigs are blue. The women are decorated with green jewellery and they wear white clothes. The scene is harmonic, the colours are few and balanced: silver, red, blue, green and gold. Special attention should be brought to the colour of the skin of the feminine figures. Wegner supposes that "the equation of blue hair with the blue wigs of the Hathor heads (…) serves to connect all three females with the identity of the goddess herself."[213] All interpretations of this image agree that the scene shows a mother holding the child as a Hathoric figure, surrounded by Isis and Nephthys. The two goddesses hold the same position toward the woman giving birth as toward deceased as in the funerary context.[214]

Only the child has red/brown skin. Why is the child red, designating its human nature when all the other figures have divine attributes? The function of the brick is to deliver a human child, not a divine one. The mother is equated with Hathor and Isis sits in front of her so that the child can "slip into her arms". The child is not explicitly Horus because his skin would be silver. He is the human infant about to be born. The *active* roles during delivery are played by the mother and the midwives, magically identifying with the goddesses. The child plays a more passive role in this particular context and he is therefore not divinized.

Wegner makes a connection between Hathor and the tree trunks, drawn at the sides of the scene, through Hathor's epithet "Lady of the Sycamore".[215] Tree trunks may serve only as support for her image and not have a more important role. Hathor is often depicted on

---

See W. S. Blackman, *Fellahin of Upper Egypt. Their Religious, Social and Industrial Life with Special Reference to Survivals from Ancient Times*, London: G. G. Harrap, 1927, p. 24. A depiction of this situation is also found in the Egyptian context; a woman is in a squatting position, assisted by two Hathor figures (Chapter 5, n. 141).

[211] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 475.
For other interpretation of the use of those bricks, see A. M. Roth, C. H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", p. 135.
S. Töpfer, "The Physical Activity of Parturition in Ancient Egypt", p. 327–339.

[212] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 456.

[213] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 456.

[214] Chapter 6.1.1.
K. Camacho, *Head or Foot, Right or Left. Analyzing the Positions of Isis and Nephthys on Coffins and Sarcophagi from the Old Kingdom (2663-2160 BC) through Ptolemaic-Roman Periods (332BC-395 AD)*, PhD dissertation, American University in Cairo, 2014, esp. p. 134. Digital Archive and Research Depository. *American University in Cairo*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at: http://dar.aucegypt.edu/handle/10526/3939

[215] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 459.

mirrors or other objects in the form of the two heads flanking the scene, without any relationship to trees.[216] Researching this symbolism, the idea of flanking sycamore trees in this context always reappears, as some depictions show the sun rising either between Hathoric emblems, or between two sycamore trees.[217]

The tree goddess is associated mainly with motherhood, death and the sky.[218] Hathor, Nut, or Isis may be tree goddesses.[219] On a famous depiction in the tomb of Thutmose III, the sycamore tree goddess (in this case Isis) is shown nursing this king.[220] The tree goddess provides water, air, shade and fruits.[221] In the *Coffin Texts* she says: "I know those two sycamores, which are of turquoise between which Rē goes forth".[222] The birth of the sun on the horizon, *ȝḫ.t (akhet)*, between trees or between Hathoric emblems is depicted in several instances. The relationship between the birth of the child and the birth of the sun in the *ȝḫ.t* was suggested already by Stricker.[223]

What does this all imply for the interpretation of the Abydos birth brick? The position of the woman during labour in fact mimicked the image of the sun being born from the horizon. The birth bricks were like mountains on the horizon and the "hole" prepared for the child to slip in was the *ȝḫ.t*: the child mimicked the rising sun.[224]

Wegner suggests a relationship between the two sycamores and the *jšd* (*Ished*) tree. This tree is evoked in the Heliopolitan tradition of the rebirth of the sun. The god Re, or his daughter (Eye of Re, which can be Hathor as well) defeat the serpent Apopis at the *jšd* tree.[225] The splitting of the tree (*wp jšd*) follows the defeat of the enemies of Re and opens the eastern horizon and brings forth the birth of the sun god.[226] The apotropaic beings helping Re are the ones drawn on the sides of the birth brick, as well as on the magic wands used in childbirth,

---

[216] A. M. Roberts, *Hathor Rising. The Secret Power of Ancient Egypt*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1997, p. 56–60.
J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 459.
[217] A. A. Barb, "Diva Matrix. A Faked Gnostic Intaglio in the Possession of P. P. Rubens and the Iconology of a Symbol", in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes* 16.3/4 (1953): 193–238, pl. 29, fig. a.
H. Refai, "Überlegungen zur Baumgöttin", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 100 (2000): 383–392, fig. 10.
F. Daumas, "Sur trois représentations de Nout à Dendara", in *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Egypte*, tome 51, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1951, p. 373–400, p. 396.
[218] H. Refai, "Überlegungen zur Baumgöttin", p. 386.
[219] H. Refai, "Überlegungen zur Baumgöttin", p. 384.
[220] B. S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999, p. 170–171.
[221] H. Refai, "Überlegungen zur Baumgöttin", fig. 1–9.
[222] *CT* 159. R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. Spells 1–354*, vol. 1, Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1973, p. 138.
[223] B. H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus*, vol. 4, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989, p. 354.
F. Renggli, "The Sunrise as the Birth of a Baby. The Prenatal Key to Egyptian Mythology", in *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 16.3 (2002): 215–236, p. 219.
[224] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 459–461.
[225] H. te Velde, "The Cat as Sacred Animal of the Goddess Mut", p. 133.
[226] P. P. Koemoth, "Du chat a l'uraeus 'qui délimite' l'arbre de l'horizon oriental pour Rê et pour Osiris", in *Varia Aegyptiaca* 9 (1993): 19–31.
J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 463.

as serpents or leonine goddesses.[227] The forces that could possibly bring evil upon delivery are destroyed, as well as Re's enemies. The sun and the child can now be born.

The interpretation of tree trunks bearing Hathor's head is challenging. Why Hathor's head on the tree trunks? If the tree trunks represent Hathor as the Lady of the Sycamore, why aren't two sycamores painted on it? Why aren't two Hathors flanking the scene represented on it? A plausible interpretation is that the tree trunks with Hathor's emblems were actually used during the ritual. Their representation is so concrete and detailed that it leaves no place for another interpretation. However, the underlying meaning is in line with what Wegner suggests. The tree trunks may represent the horizon from which the sun rises and which is protected by Hathor. Wegner supports this interpretation by connecting the woman giving birth and the pylon of Egyptian temples:

> "In the Leiden birth spell which invokes the mother's Hathorian transfiguration it is said: 'Open for me. I am the one whose offering is large, the builder who built the pylon for Hathor, lady of Dendera, who lifts up in order that she may give birth...' This idea of 'building a pylon' is explicitly solar in its reference. The shape of the temple pylon is well known to be conceptually linked with the form of the *akhet*. The reference to the woman as a "builder" who constructs the pylon for Hathor states that the woman in labor (i.e. in squatting on the birth bricks) has herself physically formed this pylon or *akhet* to which Hathor is invited as an appropriate setting for birth."[228]

The iconography of the brick evokes the idea of openness and closeness, i. e. protection, that is translated in it in three different ways: (1) *cosmic protection*: the scene is flanked by Hathoric emblems which offer a magical protection and link the birth of the child with the "birth" of the sun on the horizon, (2) *protection by the goddesses*: the nursing goddess is protected by goddesses from the front by Isis and from behind by Nephthys,[229] (3) *bodily protection*: the bodies of the women are protected and completely sealed by jewellery on their necks, wrists and ankles. These three kinds of protection translated into the situation of the mother and the child, also protected by the goddesses and by magical spells, amulets and jewellery. Magical spells were uttered during the fabrication of the brick and during the ritual itself, as was the custom. The tradition is explicit in the story of Rudjedet in which Isis uttered magical the appropriate magical spells.

---

[227] Again, these wands demarcate the safe space for delivery, decorated by apotropaic beings warding off evil. No further analysis of these decorations will be made, as they are already treated by Wegner and Altenmüller.

[228] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 480.

[229] As well as the deceased (identified with Osiris) is protected and helped by Isis and Nephthys in the funerary context, Isis and Nephthys help the body of Osiris to be rejuvenated. See, for example, H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*, Chicago – London: Chicago University Press, 2nd edition, 1978, p. 201.

5.3. CUTTING OF THE UMBILICAL CORD, MAGICAL WANDS AND MILK CUPS

The cutting of the umbilical cord is a ritual act mentioned in the story of Rudjedet's delivery.[230] The use of a special knife to cut the umbilical cord, the *psš-kf* knife (meaning "the silex which divides"), is attested by several Egyptian sources.[231] The ritual use of the knife is analysed in Chapter 6.1.2.

Magical wands never mentioned in the story of Rudjeted's delivery, even though they were an apotropaic object used during delivery. Magical wands are attested for the Middle and the New Kingdom. Unfortunately, the archaeological context of most of the magical wands discovered is unknown. Fragments of a magical wand were discovered near the Abydos birth brick, leading to the assumption that their use was related.[232] Inscriptions on several magical wands state that their purpose was to protect the "mistress of the house", *nb.t pr*.[233] The wands are decorated with apotropaic beings, some of which are the same as on the sides of the birth brick. Pinch and Wegner both suggest that the wands were used to draw a protective circle on the ground around the woman giving birth. Again, this leads us to the idea of a "closed" protective space.[234]

Apotropaic beings appear on the Abydos birth brick, on the magical wands and also on milk cups. Four artefacts, all of which were discovered in cemeteries, have been identified as milk cups for children, one of which bearing the images of the same apotropaic begins.[235] The apotropaic imagery on the sides of the brick, on the wand and on the cup include the god Bes, the hippopotamus-goddess protecting children and their mothers Taweret holding the *s3* sign signifying protection, several serpents or various beings holding knives. A comparative study of the images from different contexts would certainly extend this topic further.

---

[230] An article summarizing the words and images connected with the umbilical cord: A. M. Blackman, "Some Remarks on an Emblem upon the Head of an Ancient Egyptian Birth-Goddess", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 3.2/3 (1916): 199–206.
A. H. Gardiner, "Umbilical Cord", in *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 66 (1931): 71.
[231] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 112.
[232] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 107.
[233] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 106.
[234] J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 480–481.
G. Pinch, "Magic in Ancient Egypt", p. 78.
[235] A. Marshall, *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, p. 186.
The milk cup is in New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 44.4.4.

6. BIRTH AND REGENERATION

The study of birth in ancient Egypt implies a connection with the rising of the sun on the east and with the rebirth in the netherworld. The key myth to study in this context is the myth of the birth of Horus. The god's father was the deceased Osiris, temporarily enlivened for Horus' conception. Osiris was truly reborn when Horus came of age and avenged him. Birth and rebirth are a dominant theme in the Osirian cycle. Furthermore, archaeological findings led to the connection between birth and rebirth. Birth bricks, magical wands, or the *psš-kf* knife, as well as deities related to birth, appear not only in the rituals of birth, but also in funerary context.

6.1. OBJECTS RELATED TO BIRTH IN TOMBS

6.1.1 BIRTH BRICKS IN TOMBS

Birth bricks were not used exclusively during labour. Different birth bricks bearing the same name, *mshn.t*, were discovered in New Kingdom royal burials and burials of high officials.[236] The importance of birth bricks in funerary practices and their relation to birth practices have been studied for some time before the discovery of the Abydos brick.[237] The ideal appearance of the birth bricks found in tombs is described by the *Spell 151* and *137* of the *Book of the Dead*: "this formula is to be spoken over a brick [*ḏbt*] of unbaked clay, in which this formula has been graven, and a hole made for it in the wall of the nether chambre".[238] These mudbricks were associated with four figures, jackal on a shrine, a mummiform body, a reed and a *ḏd* pillar, which were attached to the bricks. The bricks had to be distributed in the tomb according to the instructions in the *Spell 151*.[239] A spell was recited during the fabrication of the brick, as it was the case with the Abydos birth brick and other magical objects. Vignettes of the *Spell 151* usually show the positions of all the mythical actors: Isis on the left of the deceased, Nephthys on the right, four sons of Horus and four amuletic figures of the birth bricks above and below the deceased (fig. 7).

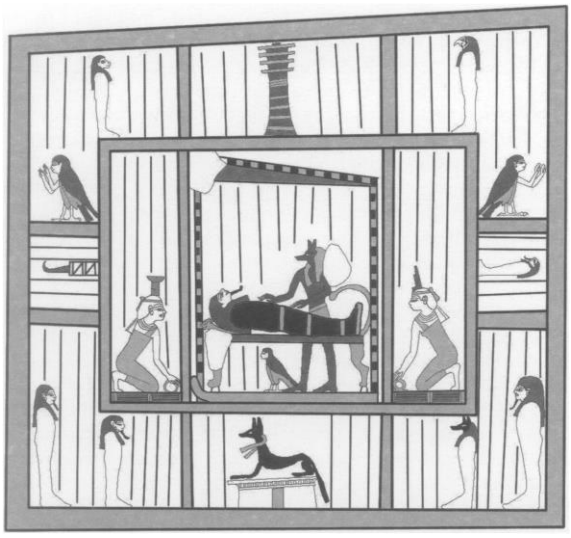


Fig. 7: The vignette depicting Book of the Dead Chapter 151 in the tomb of Sennefer (TT 96).

The four bricks of birth in tombs were personified as the goddess of birth,

[236] Roth and Roehrig provide an overview of those discoveries. A. M. Roth, C. H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", p. 121.
[237] A. M. Roth, "The *psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony", p. 145–146.
A. M. Roth, C. H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth".
J. Wegner, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos", p. 448.
[238] E. Thomas, "The Four Niches and Amuletic Figures in Theban Royal Tombs", in *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 3 (1964): 71–78, p. 72.
[239] A. M. Roth, C. H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", p. 121.

Meskhenet.[240] This goddess later split into four beings: *msḫn.t wr.t (The Big Meskhenet)*, *msḫn.t nfr.t (The Beautiful Meskhenet)*, *msḫn.t ʿ3.t (The Great Meskhenet)*, *msḫn.t mnḫ.t (The Excellent Meskhenet)*.[241] No indications that the individual bricks were identified with the four Meskhenets exist.[242] Meskhenet is present in the funeral context in a another manner as well. The goddess is represented on the vignettes of the scenes of the weighing of the heart, in the form of a brick with a female head.[243]

Birth bricks found in tombs had a protective function, connected with the four cardinal directions. The birth bricks "have the function to protect the deceased from dangers coming from four cardinal directions".[244] In the *Book of the Dead* it is said that the dead is lying on the *msḫn.t* of Osiris, which indicates a catafalque of the dead but a birth place as well (*msḫn.t* literally meaning "birth place").[245] Magical bricks were also used to protect a temple in construction and were connected with the protection from four cardinal directions.[246]

Birth bricks in tombs have several similarities with the birth bricks used during labor: (1) the name Meskhenet, (2) their protective function, (3) similar method of fabrication and of empowerment by magical spells (i. e. both are mudbricks, similar in size, made while reciting a spell).

6.1.2. THE *PSŠ-KF* KNIFE

Roth has studied the relationship between the *psš-kf* knives used for the cutting of the umbilical cord and the ones found in tombs used for the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.[247] Roth has pointed out a connection between the knife and the snake Apopis, the enemy of the sun god, in her theory concerning the cutting of the umbilical cord:

> "To change the amorphous non-existent into something that exists, according to Egyptian conception of existence, the non-existent must be differentiated and made specific. In birth, this differentiation is accomplished by cutting the umbilical cord that attaches the newborn child to the primeval waters of the womb, thus making him something separate and specific. The creation of the child thus mimics the creation of the world, which is accomplished daily by cutting the snake's body of Apophis in two."[248]

Roth relates ritual actions performed during the birth of the baby to funerary rituals, particularly to the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, which treated the mummy as a statue of

---

[240] M.-T. Derchain-Urtel, "Mesechenet", in W. Helck (ed.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 4, Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1983, p. 107.
[241] E. Koleva-Ivanov, "Osiris et les briques sacrées", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 112 (2012): 215–223, p. 221.
[242] A. M. Roth, C. H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", p. 131.
[243] A. M. Roth, C. H. Roehrig, "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", p. 130.
[244] E. Koleva-Ivanov, "Osiris et les briques sacrées", p. 219. Translation from the original: "ont pour fonction de protéger le défunt des dangers provenant des quatre points cardinaux".
[245] E. Koleva-Ivanov, "Osiris et les briques sacrées", p. 223. *Book of the Dead* 69.
[246] E. Koleva-Ivanov, "Osiris et les briques sacrées", p. 221.
[247] A. M. Roth, "The *psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony".
A. M. Roth, "Fingers, Stars, and the 'Opening of the Mouth'. The Nature and Function of the *nṯrwj* blades", in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79 (1993): 57–79.
[248] A. M. Roth, "The *psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony", p. 139.

the deceased. The mouth of the statue (or mummy) was symbolically opened, as was the mouth of the child after birth with the help of the *psš-kf* knife, probably used for the cutting of the umbilical cord and to help the child to accept nourishment.

> "The brandishing of the bloodstained *psš-kf*, perhaps wrapped in the umbilical cord itself, in front of a baby's face to demonstrate that he had been separated from his mother and needed to eat to survive, was reinterpreted as a ritual that ensured his ability to do so by giving his jaw the firmness required for nursing. The distinctive shape of the *psš-kf* may be connected with the shape of the bovine womb, with the hieroglyph used in the word *ḫnrt*, with the headdress of Meskhenet, the goddess of childbirth (…). All of these associations reinforce its meaning and suggest the richness of the symbol is relating to childbirth and rebirth."[249]

Roth also associates the *psš-kf* knife with Meskhenet's symbol, the bicornate uterus. The association reinforces furthermore the link between birth and rebirth.[250] The hieroglyph used in the word *ḫrn.t*, which might signify a dance troupe participating in childbirth, is very similar in shape to the *psš-kf* knife and to the bicornate uterus.[251] After the ritual of the Opening of the mouth, the deceased was able to defend himself during the judgement of the dead and to fully function in the afterlife.[252] Roth thus suggests associations between rites of birth with funerary rituals. Roth's ideas are interesting, although not sufficiently supported by primary sources. Many Egyptologists take her interpretation into account and it is relevant to mention it here.

6.1.3. Other elements related to birth in tombs and the afterlife

Besides the birth brick and the *psš-kf*, magical wands and milk cups, other objects related to birth appear in tombs. Deities mentioned in the netherworld literature or iconography, several of which have been already mentioned, are, for example, Meskhenet, Bes, Taweret, Khnnum, Renenunet, Shai or the seven Hathors.[253] The knot of Isis, or the *s3* sign held by Taweret, are amulets and symbols also present in the funerary context.

---

[249] A. M. Roth, "The *psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony", p. 147.
[250] A. M. Roth, "The *psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony", p. 144–145.
[251] A. M. Roth, "The *psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony", p. 143.
[252] H. Hays, "Funerary Rituals (Pharaonic Period)", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2010, p. 7–8. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1r32g9zn
[253] J. Janák, *Staroegyptské náboženství. Život a úděl člověka*, vol. 2, Praha: Oikúmené, 2012, p. 225.

6.2. THE WOMB AS A TOMB AND THE FERTILITY OF THE EARTH

The womb had to be closed and protected for a successful pregnancy and birth. The mother provided a protective space for the child. The same metaphor, at first tied to the physical health of the woman and her child, was translated into rebirth or regeneration of a deceased or god.

In Egypt, tombs served as wombs where the rebirth of the deceased took place.[254] This notion was realised in different ways in various contexts. The demotic *Papyrus Salt 825* describes a specific ritual of renewal, performed yearly in the House of Life, during which a clay statue of Osiris was wrapped in ram skin and put into a receptacle or a pot.[255] Every year, the old statue of Osiris was replaced by a new one, on which mummification rites were performed. Osiris was mummified and enlivened. Derchain explains this receptacle as a symbol of the uterus, where the god is to be regenerated.[256] Derchain uses the observations of Sauneron, who studied the similarity of the Coptic word for "uterus", ⲕⲁⲗⲁϩⲏ, and the Egyptian word for "pot" or "pottery" (*qrḥ.t*).[257] Sauneron goes further on to suggest the similarity between the words for uterus, pot and egg, based on the comparison of Egyptian words with the Coptic ⲕⲁⲗⲁϩⲏ.[258] Speiser provides additional information concerning the relationship between the "egg" and the "uterus", along with an interesting image of the embryonic phase of the sun from Dendera, where Nut appears as a chapel which serves for the womb of the sun god in his embryonic phase.[259] In the ritual of renewal, the deceased Osiris was treated as a child or an egg in the womb.

The relation between tombs and rebirth was elaborated by Hussein, who claims that the architecture of the tomb reflects female reproductive organs. The superstructure of a tomb represents the vulva, the corridor or shaft being the vagina and the substructure being the uterus of goddess Nut, Hussein argues.[260] The sarcophagus often had an image of Nut on the underside of the top lid, "embracing" the deceased. For Hussein, "the sarcophagus acts as the wall of the uterus of the goddess Nut".[261] The interpretation is backed by several *Pyramid Texts*, as the passage from the pyramid of Pepi I: "Osiris Pepi, your mother Nut has spread herself over you that she may conceal you from everything bad. Nut has joined you away from

---

[254] This connection was made for the first time by A. Rusch, "Die Entwicklung der Himmelsgöttin Nut zu einer Totengottheit", in *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch(-Ägyptisch)en Gesellschaft* 1 (1922): 18–22.
P. J. Frandsen, "Menstrual 'Taboo' in in Ancient Egypt", p. 101, n. 63.
M. I. Hussein, "Anatomy of the Egyptian Tomb. The Egyptian Tomb as a Womb", in *Discussions in Egyptology* 49 (2001): 25–33.
J. Janák, *Staroegyptské náboženství*, p. 224.

[255] P. Derchain, *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (B. M. 10051), Rituel pour la consérvation de la vie en Egypte*, Bruxelles: Palais des académies, 1965, fasc. 2, fig. XX.
H. Vymazalová, F. Coppens, *Moudrost svitků boha Thovta*, p. 35.

[256] P. Derchain, *Le Papyrus Salt 825*, fasc. 1, p. 93.

[257] *Wb* 5, 62.12–63.4.
G. Sauneron, "Copte ⲕⲁⲗⲁϩⲏ", *Mélanges Maspéro*, vol. 1, fasc. 4, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1961, p. 113–120.

[258] G. Sauneron, "*Copte* ⲕⲁⲗⲁϩⲏ", p. 115–117.

[259] C. Speiser, "De l'embryon humain à l'embryon divin en Egypte ancienne", in V. Dasen, *L'embryon humain à travers l'histoire. Images, savoirs et rites*, Fribourg: Infolio, 2007, p. 23–39, fig. 3.

[260] M. I. Hussein, "Anatomy of the Egyptian Tomb", p. 25.

[261] M. I. Hussein, "Anatomy of the Egyptian Tomb", p. 30.

everything bad: you are the eldest of her children."[262] Hussein's theory is ambitious, however, can we assume that the Egyptians consciously made the entire tomb, not only the sarcophagus, as a mirror image of the female reproductive organs?

Hussein's interpretation may not be correct in all its claims. Nut is the mother of Osiris and of the deceased at the same time (as every deceased is identified with Osiris). She is depicted in the sarcophagus as embracing the dead and she has "spread herself over" the deceased. All this evokes the idea of the sarcophagus being a metaphor for the womb.[263] Nut and the sarcophagus are the womb in which the deceased is regenerated. The way in which Nut is depicted conveys the idea of protection. Noyrd's observation that in the *Coffin Texts*, the womb is a container "never for the foetus itself, but rather for the protection (…) it is given" can be understood from this perspective.[264] The magical nourishment and protection of the deceased is the crucial characteristic of the womb. The womb provides not only the environment, but the magical encirclement necessary for regeneration.

Various authors have made connections between the uterus, the egg, the tomb, the sarcophagus, the chapel and the vessel, referring both to contexts of birth, death, the rebirth of the sun and the rebirth of the deceased.

6.2.1. Regeneration and the fertility of the earth

In ancient Egypt, fertility had to do with the earth. The soil fertilized by the Nile flood was the source of life for the ancient Egyptians. Analogously to the metaphor of a tomb as a womb, the notion of the earth as a fertilizing substance was communicated in various contexts.

The covering of the dead by a layer of clay or mud from the Nile is attested in several instances. The body of an Old Kingdom physician Neferherptah, to mention one example, was covered by a layer of Nile mud.[265] This custom, attested also in other burials of the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period, symbolically reinforced the importance of the rebirth in the netherworld, made possible by the fertility provided by the mud from the life-giving Nile flood.[266] This was not a unique case. Burials of a Middle Kingdom princess and several burials from the First Intermediate Period in western Saqqara had the same features.[267]

---

[262] *PT* 446, *Pyr.* 825a–d. J. P. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, p. 107. *PT* of Pepi I. *PT* 446, *Pyr.* 825a–d.

[263] The relationship between Nut, Re and Osiris should be further analysed in this context to fully uncover all the connections between the womb of Nut and the tomb.

[264] R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, p. 291.

[265] V. Dulíková, M. Odler, P. Havelková, "Archeologický výzkum hrobky lékaře Neferherptaha", in *Pražské egyptologické studie* 8 (2011): 9–16.
For other examples of this practice, see H. Vymazalová, "Skalní hrobky v hrobovém komplexu princezny Šeretnebtej (AS 68). Výzkum šachet a pohřebních komor", in *Pražské egyptologické studie* 12 (2014): 10–19, p. 18.
M. Bárta et al., *Abusir XXIII. The Tomb of the Sun Priest Neferinpu (AS 37)*, Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 2014, p. 210.

[266] V. Dulíková, M. Odler, P. Havelková, "Archeologický výzkum hrobky lékaře Neferherptaha", p. 12.

[267] For references, see V. Dulíková, M. Odler, P. Havelková, "Archeologický výzkum hrobky lékaře Neferherptaha", p. 12.

The burial custom described in the last paragraph mirrors the parallel between the womb and a receptacle, the intrinsically female metaphor. The mud provides an ideal environment where the regeneration can take place. The ritual of the "germinating Osiris", is active in its creative role; an active male creative principle is at work here.[268] Ritual objects used in connection with "germinating Osiris", *Osiris végétant*, connect the fertility of the earth and regeneration. According to Tooley, there are three types of related objects, usually called "Osiris bed": (1) Osiris sheaths, a standard part of late Egyptian funerary furniture, a wooden statue of a god with a hollow probably containing a corn mummy wrapped in linen,[269] (2) corn mummies, mummiform figures of Osiris made of soil and wrapped in linen and placed in anthropoid coffins and (3) Osiris bricks, pottery receptacles with lids, having a hollow in the shape of Osiris filled with soil and grains.[270]

The use of *Osiris végétant* in funerary rites can be traced to the Eighteenth Dynasty and their use in temples is not attested before the Ptolemaic period.[271] The "Osiris beds" were closely related to the Festival of Khoiak, which comprised the "day of moistening barley and spreading the bed" and a "formula for enchanting the bed".[272] Osiris was associated with the deceased through revivification enabled by the ritual. An *Osiris végétant* was created from soil, grains and linen, and magic provided the right circumstances for the revivification of Osiris. The deceased magically participated in this miracle. The statuette of Osiris symbolized the foetus to be born, enclosed in a sarcophagus (womb), and its revivification was achieved by the germination of the soil. The soil and the mud were the medium; the creative principle was Osiris and the seed.

The god Khnum, another male creative figure, implies in his activities a relationship between clay and birth.[273] Khnum created children on his potter's wheel. In his illuminating article, Dorman shows the connection between the god and the mythological use of the potter's instrument to separate heaven from earth, "which has to do the daily rejuvenation of the sun god in the eastern horizon, in which the potter's wheel seems to play a central role."[274] Khnum creates humans from clay on his potter's wheel, symbolically referring to the opening of the eastern horizon so that the sun can be reborn.

The use of a clay brick during birth can be explained at a religious level in terms of its potential connection to the opening of the eastern horizon and the birth of the sun. The brick was made of clay, from the same material Khnum used to create humans. The same god and

---

[268] Other creative male beings are: ithyphallic figures, god Khnum or fertility figures described by Baines: J. Baines, *Fecundity Figures. Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre*, Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips; Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985.
A. M. Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky", p. 191.
[269] M. Raven, "Papyrus Sheaths and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris Statues", in *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* 59/60 (1982): 251–296.
[270] A. M. J. Tooley, "Osiris Bricks", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 82 (1996): 167–179, p. 167.
[271] H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, p. 291.
[272] A. M. J. Tooley, "Osiris Bricks", p. 174.
[273] F. Dunand, C. Zivie-Coche, *Dieux et hommes en Egypte 3 000 av. J.-C., 395 apr. J.-C.*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1991, p. 69–71.
[274] P. F. Dorman, "Creation on the Potter's Wheel at the Eastern Horizon of Heaven", in E. Teeter, J. Larson (eds.), *Gold of Praise. Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1999, p. 83–100, p. 83.

the brick protected the child during birth. Furthermore, the positioning of the brick and its iconography represented the *3ḫ.t* and symbolized the rising of the sun. The child to be born was identified with the sun rising on the horizon, being the creative act of Khnum. In the previous chapters, a metaphorical connection between the birth of the child and birth of the sun was established. The god Khnum and his attributes bring this theory to a full circle.

6.3. MAGICAL PROTECTION AND ENCIRCLEMENT

Having studied the ways of protecting the body of women and of the deceased, it is now necessary to understand the wider context of this magical protection. The metaphor emerging from the studied material is "protection as encirclement". Women's bodies had to be closed to remain healthy, protected by a magical tampon or the *tj.t* knot. Their bodies were protected by jewellery, as in the case of iconographical material from Deir el-Medina and the space around the women during delivery was guarded as well, this time by birth bricks, circles traced by magical wands or possibly tree trunks with Hathor's emblems. Knots, jewellery or amulets were used in rituals to delineate a protected space. What was in the circle is safe, what was outside is potentially dangerous. This metaphor of protective encirclement is evident not only in protective or healing rituals, but in funerary rituals as well. The deceased was surrounded by birth bricks creating a protected space around him, in iconography he is guarded on one side by Isis and by Nephthys on the other and the sarcophagus and tomb served as protective spaces too.

The metaphor "protection as encirclement" has to be understood in the wider contexts of magical practices in Egypt. Ritner explains the etymology of the word *pḫr.t*, meaning both magical potion and medical remedy. "The association of this 'prescription' with magic cannot be questioned, for directly following the description of the remedy is a spell (…) to activate its curative powers".[275] This expression for potion and remedy comes from the word *pḫr*, meaning "to go around/to encircle".[276] The author concludes that, as is "evident from the (…) discussion of *pḫr*, the physical act of 'encircling' underlies an elaborate complex of magical conceptions which culminate in the adoption of the term as an expression for 'enchanting'".[277] The magical ritual of encircling for purification was practiced in Egypt throughout its history.[278] The same idea of encirclement appears in the myth of the solar god. "Re rules by enclosing and enchanting. (…) ⸢T⸣he circuit of Re both delineates the universe and establishes his sovereignty over it".[279] Ritner's observations apply to the conclusions outlined in the previous paragraph. Rituals and ritual objects employed to guard the living or the deceased provided this protection via the act of encirclement.

---

[275] R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 54.
[276] *Wb* 1, 544–547.
R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 57.
[277] R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 67.
[278] R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 57–58.
[279] R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, p. 62.

7. Myth, ritual and embodiment: How to interpret the material concerning birth?

7.1. MYTH AND RITUAL

Questions arise from the presented material. What is the relationship between birth and rebirth in the funerary context? What are the roles of the feminine and masculine principles in creation? To answer them, theories of two anthropologists studying the role of symbols in rituals, Obeyesekere and Turner, are used. Their theories go hand in hand with the theory of metaphors presented in Chapter *3.3.*[280]

Two basic categories must be differentiated: myth and ritual. Myth and ritual are interconnected, but have to be distinguished for analytic purposes. The constitutive elements to myth and ritual are metaphors and symbols. Metaphors are embodied and so are symbols. Symbols are formed by different metaphors that are interconnected and refer to each other. The studied myths are mainly the Osirian cycle and the rebirth of the sun from Nut.

Mythology is studied through iconographic material in this thesis because it provides information about mythological imagery not in a linear, narrative way (which is absent in the Egyptian context until the New Kingdom), but shows key symbols or metaphors significant for the particular context. It is a necessity to know these myths in their narrative form to understand the iconographic material. The rituals are actions performed using magical objects that refer to these mythical narratives. The ritual acts are the use of the birth brick during labour, placing of a birth brick in the tomb or the use of a magical amulet protecting the pregnant woman.

The studied myths were well known and probably shared by all Egyptians and can be interpreted in various ways. The myth of Isis, Horus and Osiris can be understood as a myth of regeneration and fertility with Isis helping her husband to regenerate, a healing myth with Isis magically protecting her son, an initiation myth of a young man becoming king, or a myth of kingship. The Osirian cycle refers mostly to anthropomorphic actors as a family, in contrast to the myth of Nut; its connotations are mainly cosmic. In ritual practice and mythological depictions, these levels of myths (the personal level related to family, the level of kingship and its legitimacy, or the cosmic level concerning the explanation of the world) are very much interconnected.

The myths and their symbols are public, shared by the community. They also have a private aspect. They are meaningful for individual people and they do not exist in isolation. The discussion of anthropologists of religion about the relationship of public and private symbols has been going on for decades.[281] The fact that the myths and symbols are public does not mean they could not have a private meaning, claims Obeyesekere, which is also the premise of his study.[282]

---

[280] G. Obeyesekere, "Medusa's Hair".
V. Turner, *Forest of Symbols.*
[281] G. Obeyesekere, "Medusa's Hair", p. 385.
[282] G. Obeyesekere, "Medusa's Hair", p. 388.

7.2. SYMBOLS AND METAPHORS CONCERNING BIRTH

Obeyesekere distinguishes three aspects of symbols: (1) their origin and genesis, (2) their personal meaning and (3) their socio-cultural message.[283] The argument this thesis makes is that the (1) origins of the symbols or metaphors connected with birth was the physical and social experience they stemmed from; the embodied experience of birth and the family. In this sense, symbols have an "unconscious" origin, as Obeyesekere argues. It would be too strong a claim to say what lies at the origin of a myth and it is not the intention of the thesis. However, an important element in the constitution of a symbol, or of a myth, is an embodied and social experience. The symbol's (2) personal meaning was imbued into it each time the magical object was made and used during a ritual circumstance. The symbol was thus regenerated again and again, each time with similar shared connotations, but each individual attributed them his own meaning stemming from his own personal experience. The private meaning of symbols in Egyptian religion are almost impossible to uncover, due to the lack of material. The (3) socio-cultural message of the symbols and myths is most accessible to us and is studied in the next chapter.

What do the myths tell us about metaphors concerning birth? In the Osirian cycle, Isis gives birth to Horus through her womb, obviously being based on an embodied experience. This sexual way of birth is metaphorically conveyed in many other myths or symbolic representations: in the manner in which the sun is born and reborn, in the manner in which deceased is reborn in the sarcophagus or in his or her wish to produce offspring even after his death.[284]

The first gods were *not* born in this fashion, but by self-development. These gods often came to life via bodily fluids, which were studied in Chapter 3.2.3. Shu and Tefnut, representing air and moisture, were created by Atum's masturbation.[285] Another way of Atum's creation of Shu and Tefnut was by spitting and sneezing, as mentioned in Chapter 3.2.2.[286] Atum had the ability to create by his masculine creative power residing in the bodily fluid, never needing the feminine aspect, as he was alone in the primordial world. Although the birth from a woman does not exist in the case of the first divinities, birth from a woman is very prominent in mythological thought. How and why?

7.3. FEMININE AND MASCULINE SYMBOLS OF FERTILITY

Mythological creative principles in the Egyptian context are masculine. Feminine principles of nurture and nourishment play important roles in them. Turner considered symbols as having two sides which he called "polarization of meaning". Symbols have an "ideological pole", the public one. This pole bears elements understood by all and is politically or socially utilitarian. This ideological pole carries the socio-cultural message Obeyesekere advocates.

---

[283] G. Obeyesekere, "Medusa's Hair", p. 385.
[284] R. Nyord, Breathing Flesh, p. 424–441. See also Chapter 3.2.3.
[285] *PT* 527, *Pyr.* 1248a–d.
J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 13.
[286] *PT* 600, *Pyr.* 1652c.
J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, p. 13. Other forms of creation include the Ptah's creation of the world through utterance, or the birth of Re from Apophis' umbilical cord.

The other pole of symbols is the "sensory pole", the emotional value symbols have.[287] The feminine principle of nurture and nourishment in symbols, metaphors, rituals and mythology discussed in this paper seems to constitute the sensory pole, "unconscious" and embodied in nature, as opposed to the "conscious", socio-cultural, male-dominated discourse of the ideological pole. The feminine principle appears in the mythological world of birth and rebirth, despite this world was a male-dominated one.

The Osirian cycle provides an example of this dichotomy. From the side of the ideological pole, the myth is a story of royal succession and defeat of the enemy and familial loyalty. The myth presents two kings and their male enemy. The intermediary, through which the relationship between these three male figures is played out, is a woman. Without her, it wouldn't be a cycle. Seth would have killed Osiris and here the story would have ended. The protection and magic of Isis moves the story further and provides a solution. How come a solution is provided by a female intermediary, helping to make an impotent figure a potent one? Horus, the god and king, weak and sick, relied his entire childhood on his mother, his father being dead. Isis was the one who carried the story further, healed, protected and nurtured, while all the masculine figures were absent. This is precisely why she was so important in healing, protective and funerary rituals.

What constitutes the sensory pole in the Osirian cycle? The creation of Horus, his birth and the period in Khemnis is the liminal part of the myth with which women identified in their protective and healing rituals, but also the deceased in his funerary rites. The liminal period is heavily based on real physical, social and emotional experiences of families in ancient Egypt. The pregnant mother was in danger, as well as her child, until the child grew stronger, and was off immediate danger. This part of the myth is based on basic emotional and social experiences, it is the "unconscious" part of the myth. The fact that one king succeeded another and helped the latter to regain his power is a consciously constructed narrative, bearing the ideological message. The myth legitimizes the succession of the father and his son and the succession of the new king with his predecessors. The story has yet another message, the importance of the protection of Isis towards her husband and child.

The funerary ritual served to reinforce the social status of the deceased, as it was a matter of importance in the judgement in the netherworld, and it presented what was important in the male-dominated public sphere. How does the sensory pole apply to this myth in funerary rites? The love of Isis towards her husband, which eventually led to his creative regeneration, and the protection Isis gave to her child (or to the deceased), are emotionally loaded. The affection of the son towards his father, a key moment in funerary rites led by the *sem* priest representing Horus in the action of reviving Osiris,[288] also constitute the sensory pole. The idea of familial love is emotional and at the core of the power of this myth, animating the "de-personalised" idea of kingship. The importance of family loyalty stands on the ideological pole and the embodied experience of nourishment and protection constitute the sensory pole. Furthermore, isn't this feminine care and protection, expressed in Nut's images on sarcophaguses embracing the deceased?

---

[287] V. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, p. 38.
[288] H. Hays, "Funerary Rituals (Pharaonic Period)", p. 8.

Applying these notions on the concept of fertility in myths permits us to understand the gender difference. Feminine fertility is enabled by the male, as well as the fertility of the earth by Osiris or other male gods, such as Hapi, the male "fertility figure" par excellence. Such was the dominant discourse, apparent from the handling of feminine metaphors in myths. Nut does not create the sun, she merely gives birth to it. The real-life experience of the importance of women for the life of children, diminished in the official discourse, nonetheless enters into the imagery of birth in all its aspects: in healing rituals connected with birth, in the iconography of birth of the sun and in funerary rituals, as well as in religious texts. Creation is on the one hand provided by Khnum, via the relationship of the potter's wheel with the horizon, *ȝḫ.t*. The *ȝḫ.t*, on the other hand, symbolises the vulva of Nut, the mother of the sun. Meanings of masculine and feminine symbols are a matter of context.

The distinction between male and female fertility symbols and metaphors are sometimes unclear. Hapi's hanging breasts are an example of such an unclear distinction. Hapi was a masculine figure, despite having important female characteristics, namely hanging breasts, perhaps associated with lactation.[289] Likewise, other male gods were able to provide milk for the deceased. The gender roles were thus blended in several instances. Why did masculine fertility figures have feminine attributes? It was given by the paradigmatic nourishing role of women, which the masculine principle lacked, although it was creative. Feminine metaphors provided what was equally necessary for creation: a protected and nourishing environment.

7.4. Conclusion: Feminine and masculine roles in creation

The masculine principle was a complete one, creating life from itself. The child was created from a masculine principle and nourished by the environment provided by the woman. The woman was a "container" for the masculine principle. The female body imagery portrayed women's bodies as containers which carry life. The woman was, nevertheless, not merely a carrier. She was mainly the provider of the protection and nourishment to the child. This is apparent in myths and in the status of bodily liquids associated with women. Milk and menstrual blood were both sources of nourishment in different contexts. The masculine principle created new life, a homogenous principle, which needed the environment of this container for the child or the deceased to be nurtured. This idea was also apparent in the funerary cult. The deceased was the child in the womb of his mother, the solar child of Nut in the sarcophagus and the sun, reborn every day.

[289] J. Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, p. 94.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. AN OVERVIEW

Rites of passage are unattested in ancient Egyptian sources, except for those related to birth and rebirth. Van Gennep defined birth and death as rites of passage.[290] Van Gennep states that: "[i]t is the fact of living itself that necessitates successive passages from one specific society to another and from one social situation to another."[291] De Vries points out that birth and death are qualitatively different because the passage they bridge is ultimately transcendental.[292] Birth and death are not social passages as such; they are passages from non-existence to existence or vice versa. In our culture, rites of birth and death are social passages not so much for those directly concerned, but for everyone else. The Egyptian world was different. The funerary rites were performed for the deceased so that they could regenerate in the afterlife. Rituals of birth were performed to protect the mother and the child. Furthermore, these passages were directly associated with the notion of fertility. Perhaps it is for these two particular reasons that death and birth were so prominent in the ritualised passages: they were, in a sense, ultimate and related to fertility and rebirth. Neither virginity nor marriage were ritually important. Was it perhaps because they were not directly linked with fertility? Was it because they weren't considered as ultimate, transcendental?

The study of iconographical and textual material related to birth led to an overview of important sexual passages in the life of the ancient Egyptian women. Menstruation, pregnancy and birth were all related to mythology through metaphors, as medical spells and iconographical material show. The protection granted by magical spells or ritual actions was related to the importance of a closed space or body. This notion had to do with the understanding of protection as encirclement. Delimiting the boundaries of the body and space, by jewellery, magical wands and other means, was crucial for the health of the woman and her child. The same applied to the funerary context. The metaphor of the womb as a recipient and as a closed and protected space was the key to make certain connections concerning pregnancy and birth. This concept also provided a clue on how to understand bodily liquids related to fertility, their similarities and their differences.

A relationship was established between birth and rebirth in the afterlife. Certain ritual activities from the birth context were ritually enacted on the body of the deceased. The dead were protected by birth bricks or by magical wands, as well as the mother and child. Their mouth was opened by *psš-kf* knife, so that they could fully enjoy the afterlife, as well as the baby has to take his first breath to live. The fertility symbolism of the clay from the Nile was crucial for the imagery of fertility, birth and rebirth. The Abydos birth brick metaphorically mimics the *ȝḫ.t*, strengthening the already prominent relationship between creation and the earth.

---

[290] A. van Gennep, *Les rites de passage. Etude systématique des rites*, Paris: Emile Nourry, 1909, p. 4.
[291] Translation from the original: "C'est le fait même de vivre qui nécessite les passages successifs d'une société spéciale à une autre et d'une situation sociale à une autre". A. van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*, p. 13.
[292] R. G. de Vries, "Birth and Death", p. 1075.

The last chapter illustrated the importance of feminine imagery for creation. Although the feminine principle was not itself creative, it provided nurture, nourishment and protection to the mother, the child and the deceased. An embodied experience is the base for it. Women were thus in mythical imagery not only containers for the child, but more importantly carriers of protection for the living and the deceased. This is the reason why the feminine principle in mythical imagery related to creation is so prominent; this is illustrated in Hathor's name: the house of Horus.

8.2. Life of a woman in terms of magical protection

What did the life of a women in terms of protective rituals look like? When a mother was pregnant with her baby, she used protective amulets fabricated while reciting magical spells, wishing her womb would remain closed. She was under the protection of Isis, Hathor or Nut and she probably identified herself with Isis carrying Horus. During the birth itself, several amulets were used, probably birth bricks, Hathor's emblems, or magical wands, most of which were probably fabricated while reciting a spell. A magical circle was drawn around the mother. The girl born was thus identified in protective spells with Horus, a male god. In the mother's womb, she was Horus as well. After the birth, she was laid on a pillow of cloth and her umbilical cord was cut off. Next, a period of seclusion of the mother might have followed. It was a time when she and the child probably received gifts and went through a phase of purification. Healthy lactation was now the main interest.

Several years later, the girl menstruated. At this point, she would probably get married and give birth to her own children, as was described above. What she went through after her menopause, we don't know, nor do we know any protective rituals concerning this period. When she died, she probably experienced the same phases as when she was born: at least in part she identified herself with a male figure, this time with Osiris, but she was protected by the same female goddesses and by similar imagery as in birth rituals. Birth bricks and the knife for cutting the umbilical cord were present, Isis and Nephthys were protecting her from both sides, as well as Nut in the sarcophagus. She became the baby she once has been. This time, however, she wasn't lactated by her mother, but by a goddess, giving her the power to regenerate and to be reborn in the afterworld.

9. LIST OF FIGURES

10. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CT *Coffin Texts*

PT *Pyramid Texts*

Pyr. Numbering of *Pyramid Texts* according to K. Sethe, *Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrucken und Photographien des Berliner Museums*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, vol. 1–4, 1908–1922.

Wb. Erman, A., Grapow, W., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, vol. 1–5, Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1955.

11. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, J. P., *Genesis in Egypt. The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988.

Allen, J. P., *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Altenmüller, H., "Ein Zaubermesser des Mittleren Reiches", in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 13 (1986): 1–27.

Altenmüller, H., "Geburtsschrein und Geburthaus", in P. der Manuelian, *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, vol. 1, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1996, p. 27–37.

Arnette, M., "Purification du post-partum et rites des revailles dans l'Egypte ancienne", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 114.1 (2014): 19–71.

Backhouse, J., "Figured Ostraca from Deir el-Medina", in H. Abd El Gawad, N. Andrews, M. Correas-Amador, V. Tamorri, J. Taylor (eds.), *Current Research in Egyptology 2011. Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Symposium Which Took Place at Durham University, United Kingdom March 2011*, Oxford – Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2012, p. 25–39.

Bagnato, D., *The Westcar Papyrus. A Transliteration, Translation and Language Analysis*, Vienna: Edition Atelier, 2006.

Baines, J., *Fecundity Figures. Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre*, Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips; Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985.

Barb, A. A., "Bois du sang, Tantale", in *Syria* 29 (1952): 271–284.

Barb, A. A., "Diva Matrix. A Faked Gnostic Intaglio in the Possession of P. P. Rubens and the Iconology of a Symbol", in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes* 16.3/4 (1953): 193–238.

Barguet, P., "L'origine et la signification du cointrepoids du collier-menat", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 52 (1953): 101–113.

Bárta, M et al., *Abusir XXIII. The Tomb of the Sun Priest Neferinpu (AS 37)*, Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 2014.

Blackman, W. S., *Fellahin of Upper Egypt. Their Religious, Social and Industrial Life with Special Reference to Survivals from Ancient Times*, London: G. G. Harrap, 1927.

Bonner, C., "Amulets Chiefly in the British Museum", in *Hesperia* 20 (1951): 301–345.

Bonner, C., *Studies in Magical Amulets. Chiefly Greco-Roman*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1950.

Brunner, H., Die *Geburt des Gottkönigs. Studien zur Überlegung eines altägyptischen Mythos*, *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen* 10, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964.

Bruyère, B., *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh (1934 à 1935). Troisième partie, le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois*, fasc. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1939.

Bruyère, B., *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh (1935 à 1940)*, fasc. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1952.

Budin, S. L., *Images of Woman and Child from the Bronze Age. Reconsidering Fertility, Maternity, and Gender in the Ancient World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Cannuyer, C., "Entre Cancer et Capricorne. Le scarabée de la tombe de Sennedjem à Deir el-Médineh", in *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 14 (2001): 45–52.

Chassinat, E., *Le temple de Dendara*, vol. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1935.

Cherpion, N., Corteggiani, J.-P., *La tombe d'Inherkhâouy (TT 359) à Deir el-Medina. Textes*, vol. 1, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2010.

Cherpion, N., Corteggiani, J.-P., *La tombe d'Inherkhâouy (TT 359) à Deir el-Medina. Planches*, vol. 2, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2010.

Colin, F., "Un espace réservé aux femmes dans l'habitat de l'Égypte hellénistique d'après des papyrus grecs et démotiques", in *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, Firenze 1998*, Florence: Instituto Papirologico 'G. Vitelli', 2001, p. 259–268.

Daressy, M. G., *Ostraca. Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée du Caire nos 25001-25384*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1901.

Dasen, V., "La métaphore du récipient", in V. Dasen, *Le sourire d'Omphale. Maternité et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 347–358.

Dasen, V., *Le sourire d'Omphale. Maternité et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015.

Daumas, F., "Sur trois représentations de Nout à Dendara", in *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Egypte*, tome 51, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1951, p. 373–400.

Delatte, A., "Etudes sur la magie grecque", in *Le Musée Belge* 18 (1914): 5–96.

Derchain, P., *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (B. M. 10051), Rituel pour la consérvation de la vie en Egypte*, fasc. I, Bruxelles: Palais des académies, 1965.

Derchain, P., *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (B. M. 10051), Rituel pour la consérvation de la vie en Egypte*, fasc. II, Bruxelles: Palais des académies, 1965.

Derchain-Urtel, M.-T., "Mesechenet", in W. Helck (ed.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 4, Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1983, p. 107.

Dorman, P. F., "Creation on the Potter's Wheel at the Eastern Horizon of Heaven", in E. Teeter, J. Larson (eds.), *Gold of Praise. Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1999, p. 83–100.

Douglas, M., *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, London – New York: Routledge, 2002.

Dow, J., "Universal Aspects of Symbolic Healing. A Theoretical Synthesis", in *American Anthropologist* 88 (1986): 56–69.

Dulíková, V., Odler, M., Havelková, P., "Archeologický výzkum hrobky lékaře Neferherptaha", in *Pražské egyptologické studie* 8 (2011): 9–16.

Dunand, F., Zivie-Coche, C., *Dieux et Hommes en Egypte 3 000 av. J.-C., 395 apr. J.-C.*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1991.

Erman, A., Grapow, W., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, vol. 1, Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1955.

Erman, A., Grapow, W., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, vol. 3, Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1955.

Erman, A., Grapow, W., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, vol. 5, Berlin: Academie-Verlag, 1955.

Faulkner, R. O., "The Pregnancy of Isis", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 54 (1968): 40–44.

Faulkner, R. O., *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. Spells 1–354*, vol. 1, Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1973.

Frandsen, P. J., "The Menstrual 'Taboo' in Ancient Egypt", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 66. 2 (2007): 81–106.

Frankfort, H., *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*, Chicago – London: Chicago University Press, 2nd edition, 1978.

Gardiner, A. H., "Umbilical Cord", in *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 66 (1931): 71.

van Gennep, A., *Les rites de passage. Etude systématique des rites*, Paris: Emile Nourry, 1909.

Goedicke, H., "Rudjet's Delivery", in *Varia Aegyptiaca* 1 (1985): 19–26.

Goedicke, H., "Anthropological Problems, Gynaecological questions", in H. Györi (ed.), *Mélanges offerts à Edith Varga. „le lotus qui sort de terre"*, Budapest: Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts, 2001, p. 113–122.

Gordon, A. H., Schwabe, C. W., *The Quick and the Dead. Biomedical Theory in Ancient Egypt*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Graves-Brown, C., "Emergent Flints", in K. Szapakowska (ed.), *Through a Glass Darkly. Magic, Dreams and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, Swansea: The Classical Press of Whales, 2006, p. 47–62.

Graves-Brown, C., *Dancing for Hathor*, London – New York: Continuum, 2010.

Greimas, A. J., Rastier, F, "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints", in *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 86–105.

Griffiths, J. G., *The Origin of Osiris and his Cult*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980.

Hellincks, B. R., "The Symbolic Assimilation of Head and Sun as Expressed by Headrests", in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 29 (2001): 61–95.

Hornung, E., *Tal der Könige. Die Ruhestätte der Pharaonen*, Zürich – München: Artemis, 1982.

van der Horst, P. W., *Chaeremon. Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984.

Hussein, M. I., "Anatomy of the Egyptian Tomb. The Egyptian Tomb as a Womb", in *Discussions in Egyptology* 49 (2001): 25–33.

Iversen, E, "Papyrus Carlsberg No. VIII with Some Remarks on the Egyptian Origin of Some Popular Birth Prognosis", in *Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser* 26.5 (1939): 20–22.

Jakobson, R., "Two aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances", in R. Jakobson, M. Halle (eds.), *Fundamentals of Language*, The Hague: Mouton, 1956, p. 115–133.

Jakobson, R., *On Language*, Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Janák, J., *Staroegyptské náboženství. Život a úděl člověka*, vol. 2, Praha: Oikúmené, 2012.

Jonckheere, F., "La durée de la gestation dans les textes égyptiens", in *Chronique d'Égypte* 30 (1955): 19–45.

Jørgensen, J. B., "Myths, Menarche and the Return of the Goddess", in R. Nyord, K. Ryholt (eds.), *Lotus and Laurel. Studies on Egyptian Language and Religion in Honor of Paul John Frandsen*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2015, p. 133–164.

Kettel, J., "Canopes, rdw.w d'Osiris et Osiris-canope", in *Hommages à Jean, Etudes Isiaques, Institut français d'archéologie orientale*, vol. 3, *Bulletin d'Egyptologie* 106.3 (1993): 315–330.

King, H., *Hippocrates' Woman*, Florence: Routledge, 2002.

Koemoth, P. P., "Du chat à l'uraeus 'qui délimite' l'arbre de l'horizon oriental pour Rê et pour Osiris", in *Varia Aegyptiaca* 9 (1993): 19–31.

Koleva-Ivanov, E., "Osiris et les briques sacrées", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 112 (2012): 215–223.

Lacan, J., "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud", in *Psychanalyse et sciences de l'homme* 3 (1957): 47–81.

Lakoff, G., Johnson, M., *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980.

Lakoff, G., *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, Chicago – London: Chicago University Press, 1987.

Landgráfová, R., Navrátilová, H., *Sex and the Golden Goddess. Ancient Egyptian Love Songs in Context*, vol. 1, Prague: Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, 2009.

Leclant, J, "Le rôle du lait et de l'allaitement d'après les Textes des Pyramides", in *Journal of Near Eastern Archaeology* 10.2 (1951): 123–127.

Lesko, B. S., *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

Lichtheim, M., *Ancient Egyptian Literature. The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, vol. 1, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2nd edition, 2006.

Loose, J., "Laborious 'Rites de Passage'. Birth Crisis in this World and in the Beyond, in *VI Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia Atti*, vol. 2, Turin: International Association of Egyptologists, 1993, p. 285–290.

Manniche, L., "In the Womb", in *The Bulletin of the Australian centre for Egyptology* 17 (2006): 97–112.

Marshall, A., *Maternité et petite enfance en Egypte ancienne*, Monaco: Groupe Artège, 2015.

Meeks, D., *Mythes du Delta d'après le papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.84*, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2006.

Michel, S., *Die Magischen Gemmen. Zu Bildernund Zauberformeln auf geschnitteten Steinen der Antike und Neuzeit*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004.

Müller, M., "Niltöchter, Nymphen und die Nilbraut. Weibliche Wassergenien in Ägypten 2000 v.Chr. bis 2000 n.Chr.", in *Imago Aegypti* 3 (2010): 91–151.

Nyord, R., *Breathing Flesh. Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009.

Nyord, R., "The 'CONTAINER schema'", in R. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh. Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009, p. 68–78.

Obeyesekere, G., "Medusa's Hair. An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience", in M. Lambek (ed.), *A Reader in Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002, p. 382–397.

Oestigaard, T., Firew, G. A., *The Source of the Blue Nile. Water Rituals and Traditions in the Lake Tana Region*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Petrie, W. M. F., *Researches in Sinai*, London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, W., 1906.

Pinch, G., *Votive Offerings to Hathor*, Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1993.

Pinch, G., "Magical Techniques", in *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, London: The British Museum Press, 2nd edition, 2006, p. 76–89.

Quack, J. F., "Die Geburt eines Gottes? Papyrus Berlin 15765 a", in R. Nyord and K. Ryholt (eds.), *Lotus and Laurel. Studies on Egyptian Language and Religion in Honour of Paul John Frandsen*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2015, p. 317–328.

Raven, M., "Papyrus Sheaths and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris Statues", in *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* 59–60 (1982): 251–296.

Raven, M. J., "Egyptian Concepts on the Orientation of the Human Body", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 91 (2005): 37–53.

Reeves, N., "A Rare Mechanical Figure from Ancient Egypt", in *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 50 (2015): 43–61.

Refai, H., "Überlegungen zur Baumgöttin", in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 100 (2000): 383–392.

Renggli, F., "The Sunrise as the Birth of a Baby. The Prenatal Key to Egyptian Mythology", in *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 16.3 (2002): 215–236.

Ritner, R. K., "A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 30.3 (1984): 209–221.

Ritner, R. K., *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 4th edition, 2008.

Roberts, A. M., *Hathor Rising. The Secret Power of Ancient Egypt*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditons, 1997.

Robins, G. *Women in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Robins, G., "Women and Children in Peril. Pregnancy, Birth and Infant Mortality in Ancient Egypt", in *KMT* 5.4 (1994-1995): 24–35.

Rochholz, M., *Schöpfung, Feindvernichtung, Regeneration. Untersuchung zum Symbolgehalt der machtgeladenen Zahl 7 im alten Ägypten*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002.

Roth, A. M., "The *psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony. A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth", in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992): 113–147.

Roth, A. M., "Fingers, Stars, and the 'Opening of the Mouth'. The Nature and Function of the *nṯrwj* Blades", in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79 (1993): 57–79.

Roth, A. M., "Father Earth, Mother Sky. Ancient Egyptian Beliefs about Conception and Fertility", in A. E. Rautmann (ed.), *Reading the Body. Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, p. 187–201.

Roth, A. M., Roehrig, C. H., "Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth", in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 88 (2002): 121–139.

Rusch, A., "Die Entwicklung der Himmelsgöttin Nut zu einer Totengottheit", in *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch(-Ägyptisch)en Gesellschaft* 1 (1922): 18–22.

Sauneron, G., "Copte ⲕⲁⲗⲁϩⲏ", in *Mélanges Maspéro*, vol. 1, fasc. 4, Cairo: Institut francais d'archeologie orientale, 1961, p. 113–120.

Schulman, A. R., "A Birth Scene (?) from Memphis", in *Journal of American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985): 97–103.

Sethe, K., *Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrucken und Photographien des Berliner Museums*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, vol. 1–4, 1908–1922.

Speiser, C., "L'eau et la régénération des morts d'après les représentations tombes thébaines du Nouvel Empire", in *Chronique d'Egypte* 144 (1997): 211–228.

Speiser, C., "Femmes et divinités enceintes dans l'Egypte du Nouvel Empire", in V. Dasen (ed.), *Naissance et petite enfance dans l'antiquité. Actes du Colloque de Frigourg, 28 novembre au 1er décembre 2001*, Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg; Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004, p. 55–70.

Speiser, C., "De l'embryon humain à l'embryon divin en Egypte ancienne", in V. Dasen, *L'embryon humain à travers l'histoire. Images, savoirs et rites*, Fribourg: Infolio, 2007, p. 23–39.

Stricker, B. H., *De geboorte van Horus*, vol. 3, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975.

Stricker, B. H., *De geboorte van Horus*, vol. 4, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989.

Strouhal, E., Vachala, B., Vymazalová, H., *The Medicine of the Ancient Egyptians. Surgery, Gynecology, Obstetrics, and Pediatrics*, vol. 1, Cairo – New York: The American University in Cairo University Press, 2014.

Thomas, E., "The Four Niches and Amuletic Figures in Theban Royal Tombs", in *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 3 (1964): 71–78.

Tilley, C., *Metaphor and Material Culture*, Oxford; Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Toivari-Viitala, J., *Women at Deir el-Medina. A Study of the Status and Roles of the Female Inhabitants in the Workmen's Community during the Ramesside Period*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor her nabije oosten, 2001.

Tooley, A. M. J., "Osiris Bricks", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 82 (1996): 167–179.

Töpfer, S., "The Physical Activity of Parturition in Ancient Egypt. Textual and Epigraphical Sources", in *Dynamis* 34.2 (2014): 317–335.

Tower Hollis, S., "Women of Ancient Egypt and the Sky Goddess", in *The Journal of American Folklore* 100.398 (1987): 496–503.

Turner, V., *Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970.

Vandier D'Abbadie, J., *Catalogue des ostraca figurés de Deir el-Medineh nos 2256-2722. Documents de fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire*, tome 2, fasc. 3, Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale,1946.

te Velde, H., *Seth. God of Confusion*, Leiden: Brill, 1967.

te Velde, H., "The Cat as Sacred Animal of the Goddess Mut", in *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982, p. 127–139.

de Vries, R. G., "Birth and Death. Social Construction at the Poles of Existence", in *Social Forces* 59.4 (1981): 1074–1093.

Vymazalová, H., Coppens, F., *Moudrost svitků boha Thovta. Vědecké poznání za vlády faraonů*, Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Filozofická fakulta, 2011.

Vymazalová, H., "Skalní hrobky v hrobovém komplexu princezny Šeretnebtej (AS 68). Výzkum šachet a pohřebních komor", in *Pražské egyptologické studie* 12 (2014): 10–19.

Wegner, J. "A Decorated Birth Brick from South Abydos. New Evidence on Childbirth and Birth Magic in the Middle Kingdom" in D. P. Silverman, W. K. Simpson, J. Wegner (eds.), *Archaism and Innovation. Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, New Haven: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilisations, Yale University; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2009, p. 447–496.

Westendorf, W., "Das Isisblut-Symbol", in *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 92 (1966): 144-154.

Westendorf, W., "Isisknoten" in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 3, 1980, p. 204.

Wilfong, T. G., "Menstrual Synchrony and the 'Place of Women' in Ancient Egypt", in E. Teeter, J. Larson (eds.), *Gold of Praise. Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1999, p. 419–434.

Willeke, W., "Entangled, Connected or Protected? The Power of Knots and Knotting in Ancient Egypt", in K. Szpakowska (ed.), *Through a Glass Darkly. Magic, Dreams and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006, p. 243–270.

Winkler, A., "The Efflux that Issued from Osiris. A Study on the *rḏw* in the Pyramid Texts", in *Göttinger Miszellen* 211 (2006): 125–139.

Winlock, H. E., *Excavations at Deir el-Bahari. 1911-1931*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1942.

Wreszinski, W., *Atlas zur altaegyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, vol. 3, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1936.

Yamazaki, N., *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind*, *Achet* 2, Berlin: Achet Verlag, 2003.

11.1. ONLINE SOURCES CITED

British Museum. Collection online. *British Museum*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/

Camacho, K., *Head or Foot, Right or Left. Analyzing the Positions of Isis and Nephthys on Coffins and Sarcophagi from the Old Kingdom (2663-2160 BC) through Ptolemaic-Roman Periods (332BC-395 AD)*, PhD dissertation, American University in Cairo, 2014, esp. p. 134. Digital Archive and Research Depository. *American University in Cairo*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23].

Accessible at: http://dar.aucegypt.edu/handle/10526/3939

Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at: http://classics.mfab.hu/talismans/object/list.

Cooney, K. M., "Scarab", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2008. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/13v7v5gd

Emerit, S., "Music and Musicians", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2013. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at:

http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6x587846

Hays, H., "Funerary Rituals (Pharaonic Period)", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2010. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at:

http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1r32g9zn

Herbert, L., *Tools for Text and Image Analysis. An Introduction to Applied Semiotics*, Signo. Site internet des théories sémiotiques, [online], 10.5.2016 [cit. 2016-05-10]. Accessible at: http://www.signosemio.com/documents/Louis-Hebert-Tools-for-Texts-and-Images.pdf

Ivanovna, M., *Milk in Ancient Egyptian Religion*, independent thesis, Uppsala: Uppsala University. Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2009. Uppsala University Publications. *University of Uppsala*. [online]. 1.5.2016 [cit. 2016-05-01]. Accessible at:

http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A713303&dswid=-6202

Kockelmann, H., "Birth House (Mammisi)", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2011. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 10.5.2016 [cit. 2016-05-10]. Accessible at:

http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8xj4k0ww#

Smith, M., "Osiris and the Deceased", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2008.

UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at:

http://escholarship.org/uc/item/29r70244

Sweeney, D., "Sex and Gender", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2011. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23].

Accessible at: http://eprints.cdlib.org/uc/item/3rv0t4np

Toivari-Viitala, J., "Marriage and Divorce", in W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 2013. UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology. *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. [online]. 23.3.2016 [cit. 2016-03-23]. Accessible at:

https://www.academia.edu/2971079/Marriage_and_Divorce