

Revised Scripts: Family and Religion

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Artifact: Stela of Maya

<https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=102263&viewType=detailView>

Intro

In Egypt, family was important in maintaining social order and acted as the building blocks of society. Most importantly, family provided and allowed for social security and safety after death. In the following video we will examine the Stela of Maya and take a deeper look at the role family played in funerary rites.

Context (Alyssa)

Before we begin examining the stela, we must first contextualize the artifact. The stela of Maya was made during the New Kingdom, at the end of the 18th Dynasty, approximately from 1353-1292 BC. The New Kingdom was often referred to as ancient Egypt's golden age because it was a time of wealth, prosperity and power. Stela or plural: stelae, are stone or wooden slabs, generally taller than it is wide. They are erected for a variety of purposes, in this case funerary. Stela are often inscribed, carved, or painted.¹ By the end of the 18th Dynasty, stelae were increasingly inserted into the facades (the face of a building) of the tombs. Maya's Stela was found in tomb 338 at Deir el-Medina. Deir el-Medina is an **ancient Egyptian** village. The village is located on the outskirts of Thebes which acted as the capital of Egypt during the 18th Dynasty. It was near the Valley of Kings and Queens - the final resting place for royal elites, also considered a royal necropolis. Deir el-medina is the village that housed the artisans who built the Valley of Kings and Queens. Because Deir el-Medina was home to artisans and craftsmen, it is no surprise that many stelae were found there.² According to the hieroglyphics on Maya's Stela, Maya the man who owned the stela, was a draftsman. Draftsmen in ancient Egypt were scribes

¹Nicola Harington, *Living with the Dead : Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt*. (Oxford ; Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2013).

²Leonard H. Lesko, *Pharaoh's Workers : The Villagers of Deir El Medina*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

who specialized in drawing.³ He was a painter employed at the Theban Necropolis and lived at Deir el-Medina during the late 18th dynasty. (1min 5 sec)

Background (Ollie)

Now that we have determined that the Stela of Maya is a funerary stela based on the inscription and location, let's get a grasp on the background. As seen with this object, there are three registers separated by two horizontal lines, which results in a total of three separate scenes. In the upper register, we see Osiris accompanied by Hathor in seated positions, facing Maya and his wife, Tamyt. In the middle register Maya and his wife are seated, facing three of their children. Finally, in the bottom register, we see six more of their children. The stela's registers indicate a "decrease in importance from top to bottom", clearly defining status, which is why we see the divine figures in the upper register and the children figures in the lower register.⁴ The influence of the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten during part of the Amarna period, has greatly impacted art and the traditional art conventions that we have previously seen in ancient Egypt; this stela, created around the Amarna period, is particularly relevant to understanding the impact of Akhenaten directly within the images on the registers. His influence utterly reconceptualized traditional and established art conventions, favoring an egalitarian approach that presses the divine into the service of the familial.⁵

Before the Amarna period we have noticed that scale or size and skin color has denoted gender to represent women and men differently. By contrast, in this stela we observe that both men and women are given the same scale and the same skin colors; the difference in size is more to reflect the difference in age between the children. The smaller the child, the younger the audience can assume they are. This is attributed to the influence of the portrayal of Pharaoh Akhenaten's family, which brought new focus on casual domestic scenes. The female and male counterparts had almost identical figures, representing the king and queen in order to elevate the

³Kurt Pflüger, "The Private Funerary Stelae of the Middle Kingdom and Their Importance for the Study of Ancient Egyptian History." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 67 (2): (1947)

⁴ Gay Robins. "Chapter 8" in *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) 143.

⁵ Elsie McLaughlin. "The Art of the Amarna Period." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Ancient History Encyclopedia, September 22, 2017. <https://www.ancient.eu/article/11110/the-art-of-the-amarna-period/>.

queen's importance and their balance between each other.⁶ Akhenaten's more equal display between himself and his wife strongly impacted objects such as our stela during the Amarna period.

It is common in Egyptian art for the dominant position to be considered the right-facing figures on the left sides of the scenes. In the Old Kingdom the wife and husband were separated, with men in the dominant position.⁷ In the New Kingdom, they began to share the dominant position, as seen in the middle register; although the male figures stay in front of their female counterparts. The seated positions in the upper and middle register reiterate the symbolic meaning of dominance and power. As a result, Osiris, Hathor, Maya and Tamyt are depicted as seated to emphasize their status. The costumes and hairstyles in their art also depict age and gender. During the Amarna period, it was popular for women to wear dresses of transparent materials which emphasized their form and pubic triangle, while men would wear pleated skirts with the region over the genitals being opaque.⁸ In terms of hairstyles men generally had shorter hair than women and similarly children usually wore their hair short and above their shoulders. Women wore their hair long, meaning, below the shoulders, and as seen in the middle register with Maya's wife, the enveloping wig was worn by married women and completely covered the shoulders without any visible part.⁹ It was one out of two of the most popular wig styles during this period.

Analysis (Vicky)

Now that we have historical context and information on the rules of art, we can apply that knowledge to analyze Maya's Stela and examine the role of family in funerary rites.

⁶ Gay Robins. "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 31 (January 1, 1994): 33–40.

⁷ Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional" 33.

⁸ Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1993) 184.

⁹ Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 184.

The translation of the hieroglyphics on the top register read: Osiris lord of eternity, great god, lord of Abydos 2) Hathor at the head of Thebes.”¹⁰ Maya and Tamyt give offerings to the gods to ask for protection in the afterlife.

The second register depicts three standing men on the viewer right giving offerings to two seated figures on the viewer left. The hieroglyphics read the “draftsman Maya” and his “sister, lady of the house Tamyt.” In Egypt, the word “sister” referred to any female person in a household. This includes: mother, sister, daughter, wife, etc...The title “lady of the house” however points to the seated woman as Maya’s wife, Tamyt. “Lady of the House” means a woman who was in charge of a household - typically a wife. As stated before, art clearly showed people’s status. In this case, the seated Tamyt takes a higher position than the boys, meaning she is either their mother, dead, or both.

The hieroglyphics name the three standing men as “your (Maya) son Parennefer, his son Ramose, his son Nebmose.”¹¹ By the side of the seated people is a small child. She is probably Tamyt’s daughter Irynofet. Strangely, Irynofet is named as “her daughter” possibly referring to Tamyt. This is odd since all the other children shown use “his” as a possessive except for Irynofet. What makes Irynofet special? She is the only figure in the stela still depicted as a juvenile, and she’s the only child on the side of greater importance. She may be a child brought from a different marriage by Tamyt - thus specifically “her” daughter. Or Irynofet might be deceased, justifying her position on the viewer left since the dead have dominance over the living.

The hieroglyphics in the middle register read: “Presenting incense and libations: pure, pure to you ka at the hands of your son.”¹² Egyptians believed that the “ka” was the spirit of a deceased person and traveled to the afterlife after death. This middle register shows that children were tasked with purifying and preparing the souls of their parents for the afterlife and ensuring parents got the proper offerings.¹³ Notice that there is no priest shown in the stela. The only

¹⁰ Mario Tosi, Alessandro Roccati, *Stele E Altre Epigrafi Di Deir El Medina: n 50001-n.50002*, (Torino: Edizioni d’arte Fratelli Pozzo: 1972) 41

¹¹ Tosi, Roccati *Stele e Altre* 41

¹² Tosi, Roccati *Stele e Altre* 42

¹³ Salima Ikram, “Chapter 2: Beliefs in the Afterlife” in *Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2015)

humans shown are Maya and his family. This shows how important family was in local religion and funerary rites. Children were the main people who interacted with the dead, not a religious leader. Children had direct access to their parents and they were the main givers and recipients of the dead.¹⁴

The final register names Maya's children from eldest to youngest.¹⁵ We know that age was hierarchical and Egyptians favored older children to take up social welfare. The 2nd register has Parennefer - meaning that he took on the main funerary duties. Notice the size differences on the third register, The male on the viewer left is the largest and the sizes decrease as it goes further right. Size in this stela shows age rather than status so it's safe to assume the order of the children is from eldest to youngest. All the children are shown with offerings for Maya and Tamyt. This means that every child was responsible for participating in funerary rites. While the oldest might've had the most duties, that does not exclude the other children from participating.

Other Objects (Mary Shamon)

In order to support our analysis of the stela, let us compare it with a similar object. The statue of *Kedamun and His Family* will allow us to compare and contrast a similar object.¹⁶ Maya's Stela was created in a limestone stela with different registers that included important Gods and lots of children whereas the Kedamun statue is depicted in a limestone sculpture with no Gods and only one grandchild alongside Kedamun and his wife Nebet-Yunet. Maya's stela was also found in Deir el-Medina and Kedamun's statue is thought to be from the Upper part of Egypt most likely Thebes. Although the material and location may be different they both contain important similarities. Both images are from The New Kingdom in the 18th century. Kedamun representing the earlier half (1550–1295 B.C.) and Maya representing the later half (1353-1292 BC).

¹⁴ Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 163-175

¹⁵ Douglas J. Brewer, Emily Teeter, "Marriage and the Family" 1999 Fathom Archive, <http://fathom.lib.uchicago.edu/2/21701778/>

¹⁶ Fig 1. Unknown, Statue of Kedamun and His Family. ca. 1551-1295 BC. Limestone and paint, 30 x 18.5 x 20.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547760?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&when=2000-1000+B.C.&where=Egypt&what=Statues&ao=on&showOnly=openAccess&ft=*&offset=160&am

In the top register of Maya's stela we see Maya and Tamyt giving praise to the God Osiris and the goddess Hathor. In the Statue of Kedadmun and his family we do not see these depictions of gods and goddesses but they still exist in the inscriptions and details. Kedadmun's wife, Nebet-Yunet, is named after the goddess Hathor and means "Lady of Dendera". Her dress also includes inscriptions that mention her wish to have a portion of the offers made to Hathor.¹⁷ Both male and female counterparts are also wearing long wigs with elaborate under curling at the neck. This practice was common in Ancient Egypt especially around the 18th century because it represented wealth and power through hairstyles especially the use of detailed wigs. When comparing clothing we can see that both the men are wearing long skirts but remain shirtless from the top half. The women are both wearing long dresses, Tamyt with sleeves and Nebet-Yunet with straps.

In both images we also see the wives, Tamyt and Nebet-Yunet, reaching out to grasp their male counterpart's arm. This act represents the power dynamic between the husband and wife and how the husband is seen as the protector and head of the household. Gay Robins elaborates on this idea and states that the forward position is the primary one, and this is occupied by the man, while his wife or mother take the subordinate position behind him.¹⁸ Considering that most statues and stelae were owned by men it is no surprise that the man took the prominent position on the sculpture and even in the household.

A big aspect in both images is the representation of small children placed by the wife and husband. The Statue of Kedadmun and His Family includes a small child in the middle of Kedadmun and Nebet-Yunet which represents their grandchild, Mut-Nefret daughter of Duat-Nefret. This practice is also represented in the stela of Maya and his wife where a small child is shown standing beneath Tamyt indicating that it is her daughter Irynofet. Barbara Watterson explains children in art as significant and almost always depicted in family stelae or statues. She describes how Children joined their parents on many social occasions. Various tomb-paintings depict these children at feasts, dressed as miniature adults, sitting quietly and always well behaved.¹⁹ And that is exactly what we see in both images. Kedadmun's grandchild is

¹⁷ Anne K. Capel, Glenn Markoe, Betsy M. Bryan, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt*. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996) 50-51

¹⁸ Robins, *Women in ancient Egypt*, 172

¹⁹ Barbara Watterson *Women In Ancient Egypt*. (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 1994).

seated between them with her arms politely resting on her knees representing a well behaved demeanor. Tamyt's daughter is also represented as a miniature adult standing still beside her mother.

Maya's stela and Kadamun's sculpture have a similar function because they were both created as funerary pieces and offerings to the Gods. The stela of Maya and his family depict Maya and his wife giving offerings and praise to the God Osiris who is the God of the underworld. Because Osiris is depicted we can use our analysis to determine that this stela was most likely created as an offering in the tomb. The statue of Kadamun, Nebet-Yunet, and their grandchild Mut-Nefret was also created as a funerary statue by Kadamun's daughter, Duat-Nefret. Duat-Nefret commissioned this statue as a royal offering to Gods Osiris and Amen. It was a common practice for children to immortalize their parents in art so that they could continue in the next life. After comparing these images we can better understand the family dynamic in Ancient Egypt. There are specific elements of analysis such as the placement of the wife and child, the similarities between clothing as well as the references to important Gods and goddesses.

Conclusion

Family in Egypt was incredibly important. We can see from the stela how children played a role in their parents funerary rites. We see patterns of family connections throughout Egypt. Kadamun's statue backs up the evidence provided by Maya's stela and display how family was integral to the religious rites. Family acted as a cohesive unit which provided for and cared for each other in life and afterlife.

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Images:

Fig 1. Unknown, Stela of Maya. ca 1353-1292 AC. Limestone and paint, Unknown dimensions, Museo Egizio, Turin, Italy. From: Museo Egizio,

<https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/moduleContextFunctionBar.viewType&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SelementList&sp=0&sp=0&sp=999&sp=SdetailView&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=SdetailView>

Fig 2. Unknown, Statue of Kedadun and His Family. ca. 1551-1295 BC. Limestone and paint, 30 x 18.5 x 20.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547760?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&when=2000-1000+B.C.&where=Egypt&what=Statues&ao=on&showOnly=openAccess&ft=* &offset=160&am

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Let's get a grasp on the background of this stela. In ancient Egypt, stelae were slabs of either stone or wood (in this case limestone) with some sort of decoration (inscriptions, paintings, etc), which we acknowledge as upright monuments. These monuments can have either text, images, or both, and the purpose of them was most commonly to commemorate someone or something or to act as objects through which to access the dead or divine.²⁰ The time period that the Stela of Maya was created has been dated back to the New Kingdom during the end of the 18th dynasty (1353-1292 BC). - ollie

²⁰ Jen Thum, Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology. "Stelae: Ancient Egypt's Versatile Monumental Form." ARCE. American Research Center In Egypt.

<https://www.arce.org/resource/stelae-ancient-egypts-versatile-monumental-form>.

¹⁸Harrington, Nicola. 2013. *Living with the Dead : Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt*. Oxford ; Oakville: Oxbow Books.

¹⁹Lesko, Leonard H. 1994. *Pharaoh's Workers : The Villagers of Deir El Medina*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

²⁰Pflüger, Kurt, and Kurt Pflüger. 1947. "The Private Funerary Stelae of the Middle Kingdom and Their Importance for the Study of Ancient Egyptian History." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 67 (2): 127.

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Link to Mary's object