

# EGYPTIAN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

## STUDIES IN HONOUR OF NAGUIB KANAWATI



Preface by

ZAHİ HAWASS

Edited by

ALEXANDRA WOODS  
ANN MCFARLANE  
SUSANNE BINDER



VOLUME I

# **EGYPTIAN CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

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SUPPLÉMENT AUX ANNALES DU SERVICE  
DES ANTIQUITÉS DE L'ÉGYPTE

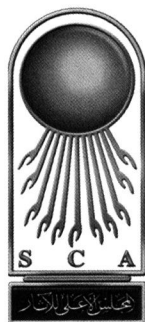
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### VOLUME I

Preface by  
**ZAHY HAWASS**

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**ALEXANDRA WOODS**  
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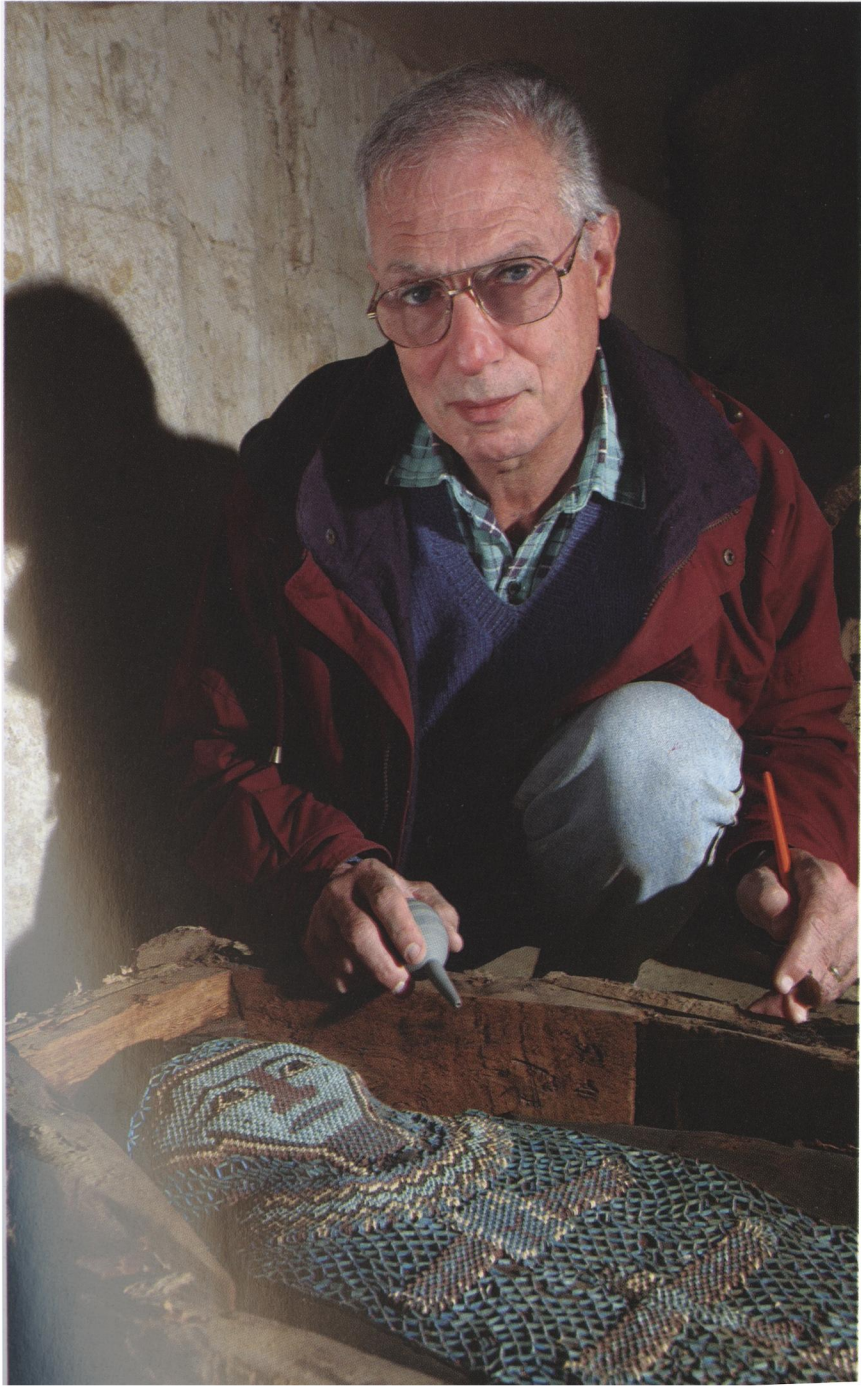
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Presented to

NAGUIB KANAWATI AM FAHA

*Professor, Macquarie University, Sydney*  
*Member of the Order of Australia*  
*Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities*

by his  
Colleagues, Friends, and Students



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## DEFINING THE POSITION OF DANCERS WITHIN PERFORMANCE INSTITUTIONS IN THE OLD KINGDOM\*

Lesley J. Kinney  
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*The scope of performance vocations and the array of titles held by performers in the Old Kingdom is established by piecing together evidence from depictions of performance, titles listed in biographies and embedded in wall scenes, letters, and excerpts from texts such as the Story of Sinuhe and the Westcar Papyrus. Performance Institutions are identified and investigated, leading to an in-depth understanding of the nature of the *hnr*, *šndt* (Acacia House), and the court of the king, reached through consideration of gender of participants, function, titles and vocation(s) both openly broadcast and covert. Titles are examined to reconstruct an impression of the hierarchical structure in place within performance institutions and to ascertain the possible aspirations of dancers and other performers. Other issues explored are: the status of performers and the position of various institutions in society, gender and hierarchy and the place and function of freelance performers.*

This study was undertaken as part of my doctoral thesis under the supervision of Naguib Kanawati and resulted from targeting information regarding the roles and status of dancers in the Old Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Since a number of performance titles were shared by dancers as well as other performers, it has been necessary to expand the study to include titles, function and status of performers in general.

The material evidence regarding performers in their various roles in the Old Kingdom does not always specify the function of the individuals concerned. Key institutions such as the *hnr* and *šndt*, included cohorts of performers – amongst them dancers, rhythmists and musicians – but it is difficult to determine whether titles such as *hnrt* 'female member of the *hnr*', *shdt hnr* 'supervisor of the *hnr*' and *imyt-r hnr* 'overseer of the *hnr*' were held by dancers, or other performers. Scenes of dance also feature rhythmists and musicians, some of whom may also have participated as dancers, while some performance roles, such as those of ritualists (notably the *ih3bw*) and impersonators of deities, appear to have involved dance skills. Before exploring the specific duties of dancers then, it is necessary to identify and examine the institutions in which many performers functioned.

### *hnr*

From the literature examined in the course of this study, no writer has been able to settle on an exact English equivalent that can convey all of the aspects inherent in the Egyptian term *hnr*, including gender, institution and vocation. Perhaps it is the

broad scope of functions of the *hnr* that makes a suitable translation so difficult to find.

The term *hnr* first appeared in dance scenes in the Fifth Dynasty tomb of *Iy-mry* (G6020)<sup>2</sup> and occurred frequently in this context throughout the Old Kingdom. Despite the fact that many titles and phrases identify performers as part of the *hnr*, it is still difficult to reach a precise definition for the term. Superficially, it was a body of ritual performers consisting primarily of musicians, rhythmists and dancers, but also ritualists, mourners and impersonators of deities and their administrative entourage.

### Gender of the *hnr*

Because *hnrt* is defined in the *Wörterbuch* as haremswoman or concubine,<sup>3</sup> until recently the word *hnr* has been commonly translated as 'harem'. The assumption is understandable because the majority of members of the *hnr* appear to have been women and the word 'harem' conveys the concept of an institution made up of females, albeit with assumed connotations. In the Old Kingdom, the temples employing a *hnr* were those of exclusively female deities, making the interpretation of 'harem' most unlikely. It was not until after the Old Kingdom that *hnr(w)* were attached to the temples of gods.<sup>4</sup>

While instances of women are more commonly attested, there is evidence to suggest that the *hnr* consisted of both sexes. In the Sixth Dynasty tombs of *Hni* and *K3i-ḥp* at El-Hawawish, two male dancers are depicted amongst the performers in scenes whose captions include the term *hnr*.<sup>5</sup> Another Sixth Dynasty example occurs in the tomb of *Dꜣw* at Deir el-Gebrawi (Figure 1), where the same dances, performed by both female and male dancers, are captioned *ḥbt in hnr(w)t šmꜥ in šmꜥw...* 'dancing by the chorus, clapping (or music) by the musicians...'. The caption occurs between two registers, female dancers in the upper and male dancers and rhythmists in the lower. As none of the figures in the upper register are clapping and there is no other caption for the lower register of male dancers and rhythmists, the single caption appears to include in the *hnr* the dancers of both sexes depicted in the upper and lower registers and the exclusively male rhythmists in the lower.

Indeed, some men held titles associated with the *hnr* in the Old Kingdom and are depicted as being attached to it. Whether men shown overseeing dancers and rhythmists from the *hnr*, who appear to hold the title *sb3* 'instructor', can be considered a part of the *hnr* itself or separate, merely playing a supportive role, is not clear. A man presiding over *hnr* performers in the tomb of *Nb-k3w-ḥr* is titled *sb3*.<sup>6</sup> A similarly positioned male *sb3* presiding over dancers and rhythmists of the *hnr* in the tomb of *Ni-ꜥnh-Hnmw* has the title *sb3 hnr* 'instructor of the *hnr*'.<sup>7</sup> This implies that the duties of the *sb3* would be those of an overseer of sorts. Similarly

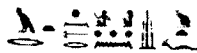
placed men without this title appear in the dance scenes in the tombs of *Dbh-n.i* and *Pth-htp*.<sup>8</sup>

Yet certain Old Kingdom male titles, directly associated with performance, do include the word *hnr*. While the title *imy-r hnr* 'male overseer of the *hnr*' is disputed for the Old Kingdom, the title *imy-r hnrwt nfrwt* 'male overseer of the novices of the *hnr*' is attested for that period and argues for the inclusion of men in the *hnr*.<sup>9</sup>

At that time, *hnrw* were only rarely attached to the private apartments of the king, being more often found associated with the temples of female deities. One title, *st' hnrw* 'one who ushers in the *hnr*', was held by *Th?*,<sup>10</sup> who also was in charge of the *ipt nzw* 'private quarters of the palace', perhaps the harem of the king.<sup>11</sup> *Nfr.s-rs*, a high ranking titleholder of the *hnr*, did organise leisure activities on the king's behalf and her titles indicate that she was also a concubine of the king.<sup>12</sup> There is no indication, however, that other members of the *hnr* she supervised were sexually available to the king, nor is there any substantial evidence even in instances where the *hnr* was associated with the private apartments of the palace. Rather, dancers and singers of the *hnr* attached to the court may have had religious affiliations due to the divine status of kingship.<sup>13</sup>

Looking beyond the royal compound to the ranks of the elite, it has not been established that private tomb owners from the Old Kingdom had harems or were even polygamous. There is evidence that a small number of individuals did have multiple wives in this period,<sup>14</sup> but conceivably it could be explained by serial monogamy resulting from death<sup>15</sup> and/or divorce. However, while there is no explicit evidence attesting the existence of polygamy amongst private individuals at this time, neither is there evidence confirming that this practice was not in place in the Old Kingdom and, since most of the king's privileges passed on to the elite in the Old Kingdom, it is likely that this practice did also. Private harems are not attested until the First Intermediate Period and even then are restricted to a handful of noblemen.<sup>16</sup>

Both male and female determinatives are used with the word *hnr* in the title



*imy-t-r hnrw Tw-n-mwt.f* 'overseer of the *hnr* of *Tw-n-mwt.f* on the coffin of *Int.i/Int* from Akhmim, now dated to the Sixth Dynasty.<sup>17</sup> This example is accepted as attesting that both men and women were attached to the *hnr* by Nord<sup>18</sup> and McFarlane.<sup>19</sup> However, it has been considered a scribal error by Fischer, who suggests a female determinative was intended and takes it as implying that the *hnr* consisted of only women.<sup>20</sup>

By the Middle Kingdom, however, there is clear evidence that men belonged quite unambiguously to the *hnr* as *hsw(t)* 'performers'.<sup>21</sup> The word *hnr*, with both male and female determinatives, is attested several times in Middle Kingdom letters




from Lahun<sup>22</sup> and on a Twelfth Dynasty stela.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it is unlikely that married women would belong to an institution perceived to be a harem. The title *imyt-r hnrwt n B3t* was held by *Nfr-B3t* and is recorded on the stela of her husband, *Isu*.<sup>24</sup>

### Function of the *hnr*

Apart from the issue of gender, the word 'harem' fails to address the most public function of the *hnr*, which appears to be performance. While primarily considered the provenance of females, evidence from as far back as the Old Kingdom shows that the *hnr* had both male and female members, as outlined above, who held a number of positions at various levels within its vocational hierarchy. The list of titles attached to the *hnr* reinforces the opinion of other writers who have challenged the established interpretation of the *hnr* as 'harem'<sup>25</sup> and offered alternative interpretations which emphasize the aspect of performance rather than gender (see below). It seems logical, therefore, to accept that the term be associated with both female and male performers.

A second, less articulated vocation for the *hnr* is suggested in the Westcar Papyrus.<sup>26</sup> In the story relating the birth of the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty, a group of deities disguise themselves as performers to gain access to the birthing chamber in order to preside over the birth. When the distraught expectant husband sees them, he immediately asks them to assist his wife who is in labour. Since his request is not prompted, this suggests that it was commonly acknowledged that performers could act in this capacity. When the deities reply that they are skilled in this practice, it is accepted without question. While they are not specified as belonging to a *hnr*, their acceptance, indeed the anticipation by the characters in the story that these performers are experienced in the practice of midwifery, implies that it was common practice for performers, who are often associated with the *hnr*, to double as midwives. There is also the implication that the deities chose this disguise because it was the most likely to inspire the confidence of the other characters in the story in their ability to act in this capacity.

Compelling evidence, both archaeological and etymological, presented by Roth, argues for more emphasis to be credited to this aspect of the *hnr*.<sup>27</sup> Her assertion is based around a new interpretation of the sign  (U31), which she proposes may have been derived from the knife used to cut the umbilical cord after birth. The origin of this obscure sign, used to determine the word *hnr* has been disputed. Gardiner notes the resemblance to the utensils used in baking bread and the use of the sign in the words for bread and baking.<sup>28</sup> Bryan puts forward an argument for the sign representing the two curved clappers held by rhythmists, assuming that the word is etymologically associated with the stem *hn* to clap or make rhythm.<sup>29</sup> Roth points out that the sign is not used in this capacity elsewhere for the word 'clap'.<sup>30</sup> One late Sixth Dynasty example has this appearance, *imyt-r hnrwt n B3t*<sup>31</sup> but the sign more closely resembles the U20 sign for two adzes.

Problematically, the sign is also used to determine the word *hnr* 'prison' from the First Intermediate Period. It is this word, emphasising confinement, which has chiefly led to the interpretation of the word *hnr* as 'harem', yet, the mandatory confinement of a woman after birth for 14 days is documented<sup>32</sup> and this may explain the use of the determinative for prison, another instance of imposed confinement. Even today the term confinement is frequently substituted for childbirth. If the skills base of the *hnrwt* is understood to encompass midwifery, then the association with confinement and the predominance of women in this institution becomes explicable.

The most compelling evidence presented by Roth for this vocation of the *hnr* is the depiction of dance on the north wall of chamber B3 in *W<sup>c</sup>tt-ht-hr*'s chapel in the Sixth Dynasty mastaba of *Mrrw-k3.i* at Saqqara,<sup>33</sup> which she interprets as a danced chronicle of the mysteries of childbirth and a treatise on the practices of the *hnr* in their capacity as midwives. If this is so, then this wall offers an insight into the birthing customs of the period and an understanding of the (*W*)*nwn* Dance performed by women at funerals throughout the pharaonic period.<sup>34</sup> This metaphoric, choreographed record of birthing is suggestive of an association between the birth of a child and the rituals surrounding the rebirth of an individual into the hereafter at the funeral.

It is no coincidence then, that the *hnr* is often depicted performing dance as an integral part of the funerary ritual providing an analogy for rebirth. One of the dance genres most commonly performed at the funeral is the Diamond Dance,<sup>35</sup> the form of which is reminiscent of the bucranium. The close resemblance of the bucranium to the uterus has been revealed by Cameron,<sup>36</sup> suggesting that this is a fecundity dance performed by the women of the *hnr* as a metaphor for the (re)birth vehicle.

The midwifery aspect, though important, appears to have kept a low profile, probably because birth is messy with bodily efflux, requiring a period of confinement for purification and because it was private to women. This closet attitude suggests that dance was a vehicle for euphemistically advertising this skill and the U31 determinative may have been employed in the writing of the word *hnr* as a discrete icon of trade.

### **The Institutional Aspect of the *hnr***

Since the word 'harem', and all the implications it carries, can no longer be accurately applied to the *hnr*, a modern equivalent needs to be found that is a gender-non-specific noun, which can be applied to performers. Discounting the gender orientation, other writers have offered alternative interpretations which emphasize the performance aspect, including 'musical performers',<sup>37</sup> 'musical troupes'<sup>38</sup> and 'entertainers'.<sup>39</sup> However, none of these successfully conveys the aspect of institution that is implied by the contexts in which the *hnr* appears. That

the *hnr* is attached to the temple cult of Hathor is attested in captions accompanying scenes in private tombs which associate dances performed by the *hnr* with the cult of Hathor. This is best illustrated by the dance scene in the *W<sup>c</sup>tt-ht-hr* chapel<sup>40</sup> in which pair dancers perform a dance step captioned *mk itt nbw* 'behold presenting the Golden One' (the Golden One is of course Hathor). The *hnr* is also associated with other cults including *B3t*<sup>41</sup> and the temples of *Twn-mwt.f* (Horus) both attested during the Sixth Dynasty;<sup>42</sup> attached to other institutions such as the *šndt* (further elaborated below); depicted in dance scenes in the tombs of individuals in which they are shown participating in presentation scenes and funerary ritual as part of the *pr-dt* 'funerary estate';<sup>43</sup> and associated with the court or the king. For example, *Nfr.s-rs* held a number of titles attesting the attachment of a *hnr* to the court. *Nfr.s-rs* was *imyt-r hnr n nzwt* 'overseer of the *hnr* of the king,' *imyt-r ib3w n nzwt* 'overseer of the dancers of the king' and *imyt-r šhmh-ib nb nfr n nzwt* 'overseer of all fine entertainment of the king'.<sup>44</sup>

Even Ward, who disagrees with the institutional aspect of the word *hnr*, gives an example that supports this notion. He cites a Middle Kingdom letter from Lahun in which the spelling 𓆎𓅓 for *hnrt* appears, which is similar to the spelling 𓆎𓅓 normally used for *hnrt* meaning 'prison'. Since the context makes it clear that this is not a prison, Ward concludes that it must allude to the institution in which the *hnrwt* lived, probably within the confines of a temple.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, it appears that the *hnr* was a body of performers, predominantly but not exclusively made up of women, with various affiliated men and women who held titles related to the organization and support of the performers.

### ***šndt* (Acacia House)**

The term *šndt* first appears in the Fourth Dynasty tomb of *Dbhn.i* (LG 90)<sup>46</sup> and the last known appearance in the Old Kingdom occurs in the Sixth Dynasty tomb of *Q3r* (G7101).<sup>47</sup> Edel suggests, and with good reason, that the *šndt* is related to the goddess Sekhmet and, therefore, can be considered an institution rather like a temple.<sup>48</sup> It follows then, that the *hnr n šndt* depicted in the tomb of *Dbh-n.i* can be taken as the earliest known attachment of a *hnr* to a temple.<sup>49</sup>

There are three apparent functions of the *šndt*, namely the slaughter of animals, music and dance, and libationary ritual all of which were performed during funerary ritual.<sup>50</sup> *Sšmty n šndt* 'butchers of the Acacia House' may seem an unlikely designation for a performance vocation, yet it may have extended to some titleholders who at first glance appear to be associates of performers rather than being performers themselves. A number of sources suggest an association between dance, butchery and the *šndt* in the context of funerary ritual.

#### *a) In Pictures*

In a scene from the mastaba of *Mrrw-k3.i* (Figure 2) dancers perform directly behind a woman designated *šndt* 'female member of the Acacia House', who is



The inclusion of both dance and butchery could also explain why queens held the title of *hrpt ššmt(yw) šndt* 'directress of the butchers of the Acacia House' in an otherwise necessarily male-dominated field. Presumably, because the act of bringing down cattle of suitable size for slaughter in this ritual required considerable strength, and was outside the realms of expected behaviour for a queen, the directress of butchers may have been required to direct or choreograph the butchers in their role in the proceedings rather than act as a butcher herself and the direction, in turn, implies there is a performance aspect to the butchery ritual.

This may be a factor influencing the placement of butchery scenes immediately under registers featuring performances of dance, music and pantomime in presentation scenes.<sup>61</sup> While ostensibly, the intention is to depict a bountiful supply of food for the tomb owner's banquet and abundant provision for the afterlife, the association of butchery and performance may not have been lost on the viewer. In the tomb of *Nb-k3w-hr* the tomb owner is captioned *m33 šmḥ-ib* 'viewing entertainments', one register of which is the slaughter and butchery of cattle.<sup>62</sup>

The similarly placed bread-baking scenes<sup>63</sup> may have alluded to the ritual baking of *snw* bread used as a sacrament in Hathoric ritual. Celebrants offering 'the *snw* bread of Hathor' and the tongs used to remove it from the oven draped over their forearms are depicted in Middle Kingdom scenes of Hathoric ritual at Meir.<sup>64</sup>

Considering the activities of the *šndt*, it is logical that Sekhmet, the powerful, darker side of the goddess so associated with the West, should preside over the slaughter of animals in the funerary ritual. Yet perhaps *šndt* activities such as dance should be associated with the lighter side, Hathor, goddess of song and dance. The two goddesses are so closely associated that they are featured interchangeably in the myth of the destruction of mankind, in which either goddess is cast as the Eye of Re, depending on the version. There are other indications that the *šndt* may also have been associated with Hathor. Although differently determined, the word for kilt is also *šndt* and from the Middle Kingdom, the kilt was one of the most characteristic manifestations of Hathor, a connection which dates back to the Pyramid Texts<sup>65</sup> and the Narmer Palette.<sup>66</sup> It is possible that the connection with Hathor is conveyed through the use of a play on words, which was a popular ancient Egyptian practice.

Such a duality is even hinted at in the funerary scene from the tomb of Q3r,<sup>67</sup> in which the word is spelt in the dual form *šndty* (the two Acacias). Edel suggests this may indicate the dual nature of Sekhmet as the one who gave birth to the Horus (Pyramid Text 262b<sup>68</sup>) who came forth from the Acacia (Pyramid Text 436a<sup>69</sup>) and also the goddess who presides over combat and slaughter.<sup>70</sup> From these references in the Pyramid Texts, the king's death can be seen as a second birth out of the Acacia and into a new life, thus Sekhmet has the two aspects of the 'destroyer' and the 'giver of life', while the repetition of 'who came forth from the Acacia' in Pyramid Text 436a reinforces the nature of duality. The king 'comes forth from the

Acacia (dies), comes forth from the Acacia (is reborn)'. Another tantalising quote, 'there should have been a holy Acacia which enclosed life and death', appears in *Urk.* 120.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the *šndt* can be perceived as a 'House of Death' and similarly the *hnr* could have been viewed as a 'House of Birth', especially considering the possibility of midwifery as a function of the *hnr*. This would give new meaning to the caption *hnr n šndt* in the tomb of *Pth-htp* as 'midwives of the House of Death', truly a metaphor for rebirth. If Sekhmet assumes the role of the destructive, devourer goddess, who is also associated with healing and the birth of kings, she is most appropriately attached to the *šndt* as a 'House of Death and Rebirth'.

### Court Musicians

The incidence of titles with components such as *n pr-ꜥ3* 'of the great house', *n nzwt* 'of the king' or *n nb.f m* 'of/for his lord' indicate that many performers were attached to the court or the king. While some court performers held vocations within the *hnr* attached to the court, other specific performance designations outside the *hnr* are evident such as *zb pr-ꜥ3* 'flautist of the Great House',<sup>72</sup> *hs(w) n hft-hr nzwt*<sup>73</sup> 'royal singer in the presence/king's personal singer' and *imyt-r šmḥ-ib nb nfr n nzwt*<sup>74</sup> 'overseer of all fine entertainment of the king'. At the upper echelon of this cohort were those performers who earned particular favour with the king. Most intriguing are the string of titles *šmḥ-ib n nb.f m ḥst nfrt rꜥ nb*<sup>75</sup> 'one who delights the heart of his lord by beautiful singing every day' and *šmḥ-ib n nb.f m ḥst nfrt m-hnw pr-ꜥ3*<sup>76</sup> 'one who delights the heart of his lord by beautiful singing in the interior of the great house' which suggest a high level of accomplishment amongst court singers as well as the existence of an appreciative audience.

Roth notes a high incidence of scenes of music in the tombs of the *hntyw-š* 'palace attendants' or 'personal attendants of the king' at Giza and that some holders of the title *hnty-š* also held performance titles.<sup>77</sup> Musical scenes appear in all but two of the tombs of palace attendants she excavated in the G2000 Cemetery at Giza.

Further, tomb G 2088 has a representation of family members playing music in the presentation scene, which is unusual before the Sixth Dynasty, and Roth suggests this may indicate that the children of *hntyw-š* were being groomed to succeed their parents in positions requiring musical skills.<sup>78</sup> It is reasonable to imagine then, that personal attendants of the king may also have been responsible for his entertainment.

### Vocations and Hierarchy within the *hnr*

Members of the *hnr* without performance-specific designations had the title *hnr(t)* (plural *hnrwt*) 'chorister(s)' or 'troupe member(s)'. The musical abilities of the *hnrwt* were called upon during rituals; they were skilled rhythmists and dancers whose duties also included singing and shaking the sistrum. The *hnr* appears in presentation scenes and performing funerary ritual in Old Kingdom private tombs.<sup>79</sup> Whilst they participated in divine ritual musically and choreographically,

these performers did not serve in the capacity of *hmwt-ntr* 'priestesses' in the daily liturgy of clothing and feeding the deity.<sup>80</sup>

The *hnrwt* appear to have been divided into specialist groups: *šm<sup>c</sup>(wt)* 'musical performers',<sup>81</sup> *ib3(wt)* 'dancers', *hs(wt)* and *m3h(wt)* 'rhythmists', while *hnr(wt) n pr-dt* was the title held by members of the *hnr* who performed ritual funerary service for the funerary estate of individuals. This last group was further divided into *m3tr(wt)* 'mourners', *h3(wt)* 'funerary performers' and possibly *dryt* 'kites' (two women impersonating the goddesses Isis and Nephthys, representing the wife and sister of Osiris, lord of the dead),<sup>82</sup> although there is no evidence that the *dryt* were employed from the ranks of the *hnr*.

According to Gillam, there is a direct correlation between title elaboration and rank.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, it is to be expected that the title *ib3(t) n(t) hnr* was higher in rank than *hnr(t)*. This is logical when comparing the rank of titles in closely associated vocations. However, when comparing titles across differing areas of responsibility, title elaboration cannot be assumed to be more prestigious. Hence it is difficult to discern the ranking of titles such as *imy-r hmt hnrw* 'overseer of the sacred *hmt* cattle of the *hnr*' in relation to the title *imy-r hnrw* 'overseer of the *hnr*'.

Another specialist group among the chorus was the *nfrwt nt hnr*. Various interpretations have been suggested for the designation *nfrwt* held by members of the *šndt* and *hnr* and the term has been linked with youth,<sup>84</sup> beauty<sup>85</sup> and maidenhood,<sup>86</sup> but the equivalent male designation *nfr* is understood as 'recruit'.<sup>87</sup> This appears to be a more appropriate interpretation, while still suggesting the notions of youth and apprenticeship. It seems feasible that the term implies the women were recruits, as it does with the male version of the same title when attached to other institutions. Perhaps 'apprentice', 'novice' or 'initiate' are other possibilities. If *nfrw* were recruits of the *hnr*, then one would expect that this occupational designation was at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder, and that they would in time be promoted to the rank of *hnr(w)t*. However, as a specific group they may have ranked higher than those designated *hnrwt* due to their attributes (i.e. youth, beauty and maidenhood) rather than their acquired skills and experience.

This brings up the issue of rank versus seniority, which appears to be similarly differentiated in modern theatrical companies. Apart from any natural ability they may have, young performers have the attribute of youth, which is difficult for adult performers to imitate. Consequently, it is not unusual for children to have billing and payment which is superior to their seniors, who may have far greater talent and experience. Choristers of Opera Australia are often faced with the anonymous billing 'Artists of Opera Australia', whereas a child chorister will be named as an individual in both the programme and the playbill. This implies a specialist vocation of a relatively inexperienced junior compared with the less specialised or differentiated but none the less highly skilled vocation of an experienced senior. Therefore, despite



their young age, the *nfrw* of the *hnr* may have enjoyed a brief period in which they held a higher rank and associated privileges above unspecified members of the *hnr*.

The title *nfrt* is listed in Jones, *Index* but the example cited is a name incorrectly transcribed.<sup>88</sup> Yet the title's occurrence in combination with other elements in a number of titles attests it as a designation in its own right. For example, while the reading of *nfrt* in one example of the title *imy-r hnr(wt) nfr(wt)* 'overseer of the recruits of the house of performers' is uncertain,<sup>89</sup> the other occurrence is unambiguous<sup>90</sup> and attests the existence, not only of this performance group, but is an Old Kingdom example of an *imy-r* 'male overseer' attached to the *hnr*. The title *nfrt hnr*<sup>91</sup> 'recruit or novice of the chorus' appears to be a straightforward example. Fischer cautions this could be interpreted as an epithet of Hathor but it is just as likely to be read *nfrt hnr Hwt-hr*<sup>92</sup> 'novice of the chorus of Hathor', if honorific transposition is taken into account.

Members of the *šndt* were titled *šndt(w)t* and as holders of this title, they may have had specific attributes, which may have placed them higher than the *hnrwt* in the hierarchy of the *hnr*. Similarly, the acquisition of skills required to attain the titles of *ib3*, *hsw* and *m3ht* suggests a higher status than the less specific title *hnr(t)*.

Next in rank in the hierarchy of the *hnr* is the title *šhdt* 'supervisor.' It is difficult to ascertain whether the role of the *šhdt nt hnr* 'supervisor of the chorus' ranked above the *šhdt* in vocation-specific roles, such as *šhdt ib3w* 'supervisor of dancers'. In the tomb of *Mhw*,<sup>93</sup> the titles *šhdt nt hnr*, and the higher ranking title of *imyt-r nt hnr* 'overseer of the chorus' are both clearly held by dancers depicted performing the *layout* pose.<sup>94</sup> This suggests that in this case the duties of supervising and overseeing the *hnr* may have encompassed those expected of the *šhdt ib3w* 'supervisor of dancers' and the *imyt-r ib3w* 'overseer of dancers' and that the roles of *šhdt* and *imyt-r*, at least in this case, were performance oriented and not purely directorial or administrative. Both titles are held by surprisingly young women, their youth emphasized by the difficult and strenuous *layout* posture they are depicted performing. However, the age of the individual as depicted in the prime of youth may not necessarily correspond to the age at which they held their loftiest title. Tomb owners are often depicted at an age of physical ideal, not commensurate with the complete list of titles they had accomplished in their lifetime. Nonetheless, the example attests that overseers of the *hnr* could be drawn from the ranks of performers, including dancers.

As outlined above, the title next in rank, moving upwards, was that of the overseer or *imy(t)-r*. Title elaboration further differentiates rank within the level of this title, hence *imyt-r hnr nswt mi-ḳd.f* 'overseer of the entire chorus of the king' would outrank *imyt-r hnr* 'overseer of the chorus'. Another high ranking title was *hrp(t)* 'director' which does not appear in the context of the *hnr* in the Old Kingdom but does occur for both genders in the institution of the *šndt*. It is difficult to ascertain the rank of this title relative to that of *imyt-r* for two reasons. Firstly, the two titles do not often cover exactly the same area of jurisdiction and secondly, even in the

few instances where such a comparison may be drawn, the two titles do not appear to have been held by the same individual, thus enabling a comparison through the examination of the individual's career.

There is one tantalizing exception, however. The two titles do occur in the career of the butcher *Ph-r-nfr*,<sup>95</sup> who has the title *imy-r sšmtyw šndt* 'overseer of the butchers of the Acacia House' engraved on his statue and the title *hrp sšmtyw šndt* 'director of the butchers of the Acacia House' on his offering basin, but unfortunately, because they do not appear together, their relative ranking cannot be examined. At the culmination of his career *Ph-r-nfr* appears to have held the title *hrp sšmtyw šndt* and also to have been the only non-royal to hold this particular title. The female equivalent of his title *hrp(t) sšmtyw šndt* was held by no fewer than six queens from the Fourth to the Fifth Dynasties,<sup>96</sup> further testament to the high rank of the title *hrp(t)*. Yet, when comparing the two titles *hrp* and *imy-r* in other contexts, it appears that *imy-r* still has the higher rank. The titles *hrp hrpw*<sup>97</sup> 'director of directors' and *imy-r hrpw*<sup>98</sup> 'overseer of directors' are listed by Jones, but there does not appear to be a single example of *hrp imyw-r* 'director of overseers' in any vocation, suggesting that a person holding the rank of *hrp* could not be placed in charge of titleholders as high as *imy-r*.

### Status of the *hnrwt*

A study of the prosopographies of women holding the title *hmwt-ntr* indicates that while in the Old Kingdom this profession was not open to the lower classes, by the New Kingdom priestesses were drawn from all levels of society.<sup>99</sup> However, a similar study does not appear to have been undertaken to determine the status of *hnrwt* in society in the Old Kingdom, probably because there is a paucity of biographical evidence extant concerning them. Yet there are some examples of *hnrwt* in which the status can be determined, such as the dancers of the *hnr* in the tomb of *Hni* at El-Hawawish, whose names are inscribed in front of them. Two of the male dancers are named *Tti* and the female dancers are called *Nfr-tntt*. Since both of these names frequently occur in *Hni*'s family, it is likely that these *hnr* performers are children of the tomb owner.<sup>100</sup> This suggests *hnr* performers could be drawn from among members of a nomarchic family.

An inscription in the tomb of the nomarch *Hty* at Asyut, dated to the Tenth Dynasty, suggests that a common vocation or association existed between *hnrwt* and *špswt* 'noble women'.<sup>101</sup> The inscription reads: *3w.wy ib n špswt.k hnr n wpw3wt m3w mnw.k m hwt-ntr*, which may be translated 'how happy are your noblewomen and the *hnr* of Wepwawet, who have seen your monuments in the temple' or 'how happy are your noblewomen, the *hnr* of Wepwawet, who have seen your monuments in the temple'.<sup>102</sup> From the second translation, it can be read that members of the *hnr* appear to have had the status of noblewomen but even considering the conjunctions in the first, the *hnr* was, at the very least, associated with the noblewomen of the area. While two First Intermediate Period titles from

Naga ed-Dêr also associate the two groups *imyt-wrt nt hnr* 'great one of the chorus' and *imyt-wrt m hry-ib špst* 'great one in the midst of noblewomen',<sup>103</sup> once again suggesting an association between noblewomen and the *hnr*, they cannot be taken as evidence that such connections existed in the Old Kingdom.

### Gender and Hierarchy

In the Old Kingdom, except for the title *imyt-r hnrwt nfrwt*, only women held titles as overseers within the *hnr*, but there are instances in performance scenes of male figures, that may be interpreted as being overseers or instructors. As shown above, in the tomb of *Nb-k3w-hr* one such figure is titled *sb3* 'instructor', whereas in the tombs of *Pth-htp* and *Dbhn.i* similarly placed figures are untitled, but may be similarly interpreted as instructors or overseers.

Many performers were attached to institutions such as the *hnr*, *šndt* or the *pr-ʿ3* and their titles within the particular institution can be assembled in order of rank. However, it is difficult to ascertain the relative hierarchies of titleholders between the different institutions. The titles *hst*, *hst n hnr*, *hst n pr-ʿ3* and *hst n šndt*, for example, may all be ranked at the level of *hst*, but it is difficult to ascertain the hierarchies of these institutions relative to one another. Were the *hnr* ranked higher than the *šndt*, this would influence the ranking of the title *hst n hnr* relative to that of *hst n šndt*.

### Conclusion

The *hnr* and *šndt* were dedicated performance institutions and performers were also attached to the court. While it is not possible to determine whether some title holders within the *hnr* were dancers, musicians or administrators, it is clear that high ranking titles such as *imyt-r hnr* were attainable to dancers. Some performance institutions appear to have been an umbrella for other vocations such as midwifery, associated with the *hnr*, and ritual slaughter, associated with the *šndt*. Conversely, some other vocational groups such as the *hntyw-š* appear to have doubled as court entertainers.

Moreover, it appears that some performers were freelance and travelled from place to place. This is implied in the Westcar Papyrus, which relates that a group of goddesses disguised as itinerant performers call to act as midwives to Reweddjedet. Since the other characters in the story are unaware of the disguise, their acceptance of the arrival of apparently itinerant performers as unremarkable, suggests that it was not unusual for performers to be freelance. That there existed an itinerant, multi-skilled cohort adds to the difficulty of ranking the titleholders with their colleagues who were attached to institutions such as the *hnr*. Itinerant performers may have been highly sought after soloists of particular renown or may have been social outcasts. That performers were attached to temples and the court suggests that there was some level of social standing associated with performance vocations, at least within these institutions.

- \* I would like to thank Mary Hartley, Macquarie University, for her drawing of Figure 2.
- 1 This article is an abridged extract from my thesis, *Dance Dancers and the Performance Cohort in the Old Kingdom* (Oxford, 2008).
- 2 K. Weeks, *Mastabas of Cemetery G 6000. Including G 6010 (Neferbauphtah), G 6020 (Iymery), G 6030 (Ity), G 6040 (Shepseskafankh)* (Boston, 1994), fig. 37.
- 3 A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch Der ägyptischen Sprache*, 7 vols (repr. 1971, Leipzig, 1926-31), IV, 297:15.
- 4 A. Blackman, 'On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy', *JEA* 7 (1921), 16.
- 5 N. Kanawati, *The Rock Tombs of el-Hawawish. The Cemetery of Akhmim*, 10 vols. (Sydney, 1980-1992), II, 45, n.172; I, fig. 12; IX, fig. 37.
- 6 S. Hassan, *Excavations at Saqqara 1937-38, I. Mastaba of Neb-Kaw-Her* (Cairo, 1975), fig. 7.
- 7 A. Moussa and H. Altenmüller, *The Tomb of Nefer and Ka-Hay. Old Kingdom Tombs at the Causeway of King Unas at Saqqara* (Mainz, 1971), pl. 13A.
- 8 Respectively, E. Edel, *Das Akazienhaus und seine Rolle in den Begräbnisriten des alten Ägyptens* (Berlin, 1970), figs. 1, 4.
- 9 M. Spiedel, *Die Friseure des Ägyptischen Alten Reiches. Eine Historisch-Prosopographische Untersuchung zu Amt und Titel* (Zürich, 1990), 38(20), n.5, 190.
- 10 F. L. Griffith and P. E. Newberry, *El-Bersha*, II (London, 1895), pl. 21 (9)
- 11 D. Nord, 'The Term *hnr*: 'Harem' or 'Musical Performers'', in W. K. Simpson (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan. Essays in Honor of Dows Dunham on the Occasion of His 90th Birthday, June 1, 1980* (Boston, 1981), 143 n.59m, 144 n.78.
- 12 Hassan, *Excavations at Giza*, 10 vols. (Oxford, Cairo, 1929-1960), II, 204, 211.
- 13 Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 143f, n. 59.
- 14 N. Kanawati, 'Polygamy in the Old Kingdom of Egypt', *SAK* 4 (1976), 159.
- 15 Death due to childbirth was very prevalent in ancient Egypt and resulted in many men outliving their wives.
- 16 Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 137.
- 17 Kanawati, *El-Hawawish* IX, 59, fig. 32f.
- 18 Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 139 (uu), 143.
- 19 A. McFarlane, *The God Min to the End of the Old Kingdom* (Sydney, 1995), 303.
- 20 See Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 143-144, n. 68. The other possibility is acknowledged by H. G. Fischer, *Egyptian Studies*, I. *Varia* (New York, 1976), 71, n. 18.
- 21 W. A. Ward, *Essays on Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom and Related Subjects* (Beirut, 1982), 77.
- 22 Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 144, n. 72 and inscriptions listed on 138 (e) (Papyrus Berlin 10068, line 2) and (g) (pBerlin 10037, pl. 6 lines 14-15); also pBerlin 10072, vs. 14 in A. Scharff, 'Briefe aus Illahun', *ZÄS* 59 (1924), 22-3.
- 23 Lange and Schäfer, *Grab und Denkstein*, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1902-1925), I, 27 (line 7): CG. 20024.
- 24 Ward, *Feminine Titles*, 73. This stela is now dated to the Late Old Kingdom, see H. M. Stewart, *Egyptian Stelae, Reliefs and Paintings from the Petrie Collection, Part 2. Archaic Period to Second Intermediate Period* (Warminster, 1979), no. 47, pl. 9:3.
- 25 *Wb.* IV: 297, 15; R. Hannig, *Grosses Handwörterbuch Deutsch-Ägyptisch (2800-950 V. Chr.)*. *Die Sprache Der Pharaonen* (Mainz, 2000), 605.
- 26 pWestcar, 9.27-11.4; translation, J. Kaster, *The Wisdom of Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1995), 298.
- 27 A. M. Roth, 'The *Psš-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony: A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth', *JEA* 78 (1992), 113-147.

- 28 A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Oxford, 1996), 519.
- 29 B. Bryan, 'The Etymology of *hnr* 'Group of Musical Performers'', *BES* 4 (1982), 49-50.
- 30 Roth, *JEA* 78 (1992), 140, n. 131.
- 31 Bryan, *BES* 4 (1982), 50.
- 32 pWestcar, 11.18-19.
- 33 N. Kanawati and M. Abder-Raziq, *Mereruka and his Family*, Part II. *The Tomb of Waathethkethor* (Oxford, 2008), pl. 60.
- 34 In the Old Kingdom, the *Wnwn* Dance appears only in the tomb of *Pth-htp* and is possibly alluded to in the *W<sup>c</sup>tt-ht-hr* scene: see L. J. Kinney, 'The (*W*)*wnwn* Funerary Dance and its Relationship with the Dance of the *Mww*', in *Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> ICE Conference*, (forthcoming).
- 35 The term Diamond Dance has been applied to this dance to describe the position of the arms, which are held above the head in a diamond or lozenge shape. The dance dates from the Predynastic period and is still performed today by Beladi dancers in Egypt. For a full typology of dance forms for the Old Kingdom refer to Kinney, *Dance in the Old Kingdom*, 9-19.
- 36 D. Cameron, 'The Symbolism of the Ancestors', *ReVision* 20 (1998), 1.
- 37 Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 145.
- 38 G. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1993), 148.
- 39 Kanawati, *El-Hawawish* VIII, 25.
- 40 Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, *Mereruka and his Family* II, pl. 60.
- 41 Attested by the occurrence of the title *imyt-r hnr n B3t* 'overseer of the house of performers of *B3t*' (Stewart, *Egyptian Stelae* II, no. 47, pl. 9:3).
- 42 For the title *imyt-r hnrw Twtn-mwt.f*, see Kanawati, *El-Hawawish* IX, 59, fig. 32f, coffin of *Int.i/Int*.
- 43 E.g. Kanawati, *El-Hawawish* I, fig. 12; IX, fig. 37; Hassan, *Excavations at Saqqara* I, fig. 6.
- 44 Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* II, 204, 211.
- 45 Ward, *Feminine Titles*, 77-78, n. 23.
- 46 R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*, 12 Vols. (Berlin, 1849-59), II, 35-36.
- 47 W. K. Simpson, *The Mastabas of Qar and Idu. G7101 and 7102* (Boston, 1976), fig. 24.
- 48 Edel, *Akazienhaus*, 20-21, n. 8, cites examples that link Sekhmet with the Acacia House, notably the epithet *nbt šndty*.
- 49 Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 141.
- 50 L. J. Kinney, 'Six Butcher Queens of the 4th and 5th Dynasties; their association with the Acacia House and the role of butchers as ritual performers', in L. Evans (ed.), *Ancient Memphis. 'Enduring is the Perfection'. Proceedings of the International Conference held at Macquarie University, Sydney on August 14-15, 2008* (Leuven, forthcoming).
- 51 H. G. Fischer, 'The Butcher, *Phr-nfr*', *Orientalia* 29 (1960), 186.
- 52 Edel, *Akazienhaus*, fig. 1.
- 53 Edel, *Akazienhaus*, fig. 4.
- 54 Simpson, *Mastabas of Qar and Idu*, fig. 24.
- 55 Edel, *Akazienhaus*, 37; B. Grdseloff, 'Notes sur deux monuments inédits de l'ancien empire', *ASAE* 42 (1943), 115.
- 56 Kinney, in Evans, (ed.) *Ancient Memphis. 'Enduring is the Perfection'*, (forthcoming).
- 57 D. Jones, *An Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2000), 979 no. 3614.
- 58 Fischer, *Orientalia* 29 (1960), 183-85 lists five queens, and M. Verner, *Abusir, III. The Pyramid Complex of Khentikaus with Contributions by Paule Posener-Krieger and Peter Jánosi* (Prague, 1995), 63, 36/A/78 adds another.

- 59 Jones, *Index*, 747, no. 2727; Fischer, *Orientalia* 29 (1960), 169 (i).  
 60 Edel, *Akazienhaus*, 30-31, n. 22.  
 61 E.g., Weeks, *Mastabas of Cemetery G 6000*, fig. 37; H. Junker, *Grabungen auf dem Friedhof des Alten Reiches bei den Pyramiden von Giza*, 12 vols. (Vienna, 1929-1955), X, fig. 44; N. Kanawati, *Tombs at Giza, I. Kaemankh (G4561) and Seshemnefer I (G4940)* (Warminster, 2001), pl. 35.  
 62 S. Hassan, *Excavations at Saqqara I*, 17, figs. 2-3.  
 63 E.g., D. Dunham and W. K. Simpson, *Queen Mersyankh III* (Boston, 1974), fig. 11; A. El-Khouli, and N. Kanawati, *The Old Kingdom Tombs of El-Hammamiya* (Sydney, 1990), pls. 51, 67.  
 64 A. M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, 6 vols. (London, 1914-1924), I, pl. 2; II, pl. 15.  
 65 K. Sethe, *Die Altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, I (Leipzig, 1910), Pyramid Text 546b šndwt.f hr.f m Iwt-hr šwt.f m šwt bik 'his kilt which is on him is Hathor, his feather is a falcon's feather'.  
 66 The verso of which shows the B3t head, a form later absorbed into the iconography of Hathor, on the kilt of Narmer (C. M. Firth and J. E. Quibell, *Excavations At Saqqara; the Step Pyramid*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1935), I, pl. 59).  
 67 Simpson, *Mastabas of Qar and Idu*, fig. 24.  
 68 'The king was conceived by Sekhmet and it was Sekhmet who bore the king' (R. G. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969), 60).  
 69 'I am Horus who came forth from the acacia, who came forth from the acacia' (Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 88).  
 70 Edel, *Akazienhaus*, 20.  
 71 Edel, *Akazienhaus*, 19f.  
 72 Jones, *Index*, 829-30 no. 3029.  
 73 Jones, *Index*, 662 no. 2424.  
 74 Jones, *Index*, 305 no. 1112.  
 75 Jones, *Index*, 972 no. 3589.  
 76 Jones, *Index*, 972-73 no. 3590.  
 77 A. M. Roth, *A Cemetery of Palace Attendants Including G2084-2099, G2230+2231 and G2240* (Boston, 1995), 42.  
 78 Roth, *A Cemetery of Palace Attendants*, 42, n. 25.  
 79 E.g. LD II, 101b (Pth-htp).  
 80 R. A. Gillam, 'Priestesses of Hathor: Their Function, Decline and Disappearance', *JARCE* 32 (1995), 212.  
 81 Davies, *Deir el Gebrâwi* II, pl. 7; Kanawati, *El-Hawawish* VIII, fig. 10.  
 82 An Old Kingdom example of the title *dryt wrt* occurs in the tomb of Pth-htp (LD II, 101b).  
 83 Gillam, *JARCE* 32 (1995), 222.  
 84 H. G. Fischer, 'A Daughter of the Overlords', *JNES* 76 (1956), 106-107.  
 85 E. Brunner-Traut, *Der Tanz im alten Ägypten* (Glückstadt-Hamburg-New York, 1958), 31.  
 86 Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 144.  
 87 Jones, *Index*, 483 nos. 1807, 1808.  
 88 Jones, *Index*, 483 no. 1808.  
 89 The title in question 𓆎𓅓𓏏𓏏𓏏𓏏 𓏏𓏏𓏏𓏏 (W. G. Fraser, 'El-Kab and Gebelên', *PSBA* 15 (1893), 494-500, pl. 9) could also be taken as *imy-r hnrwt*, although it is then difficult to interpret the hieroglyphs following the word *hnr*. Jones reports this as *imy-r hnrwt nfrwt* (*Index*, 188 no. 706) but the reading of the figure *nfrwt* is uncertain in the hieroglyphs accompanying the Fraser article.  
 90 Spiedel, *Friseure*, 38(20), n. 5, 190, n. 9.

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- <sup>91</sup> Not listed in Jones, *Index*, but discussed by Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 144, 139 (jjj).
- <sup>92</sup> Fischer, *JAOS* 76 (1956) 106, nos. 4 and 5.
- <sup>93</sup> H. Altenmüller, *Die Wanddarstellung im Grab des Mehu* (Mainz am Rhein, 1998), pl. 50.
- <sup>94</sup> *Layout* is the Modern Ballet term describing the high kick of a leg to the front while the torso is thrown backwards.
- <sup>95</sup> Fischer, *Orientalia* 29, 169.
- <sup>96</sup> See n. 58 above.
- <sup>97</sup> Jones, *Index*, 225 nos. 2676-2677.
- <sup>98</sup> Jones, *Index*, 190-91 nos. 713-716.
- <sup>99</sup> B. Watterson, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1994), 39.
- <sup>100</sup> Kanawati *El-Hawawish* IX, 63, fig 37a.
- <sup>101</sup> Fischer, *JAOS* 76, (1956), 106 no. 4, 106-10, no. 6.
- <sup>102</sup> Nord, in Simpson (ed.), *Dunham Studies*, 145, nn. 89-90.
- <sup>103</sup> Fischer, *JAOS* 76 (1956), 106 nos. 3-4, n. 52.