



A QUESTION OF SUBSTANCE: INTERPRETING KINSHIP AND RELATEDNESS IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Leire Olabarria

The Queen's College/Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford

ABSTRACT

In recent years kinship theory has opened up innovative avenues of enquiry that contrast with the comparatively static nature of some previous analytical models. A prime example of these new interpretative frameworks is the field of so-called new kinship studies, which advocates against the reification of kinship, leaning towards the more encompassing and fluid notion of relatedness. Rather than being defined from an exclusively biological perspective, relatedness relies on alternative parameters such as personhood, gender, and substance, which allow for an understanding of kinship as a performative process. This article addresses how kinship theory may be used to better delineate an emic approach to relatedness in Middle Kingdom Egypt. As a case study, I explore to what extent the idea of substance may be a useful category to construe the way relatedness was represented and perpetuated in the primary sources. By taking kinship as a contextually bounded social representation, it may be possible to attain a more nuanced explanation of ancient Egyptian social fabric.

APPROACHING KINSHIP IN ANCIENT EGYPT

The interaction of Egyptology and anthropology could be characterized as a story of missed opportunities. During his inaugural lecture at the University of Oxford, Francis Llewellyn Griffith noted the inextricability of Egyptology and anthropology based on the view that

Egyptology is [...] a prolific branch of the great science of anthropology, probably destined to illuminate the general history of mankind more searchingly and powerfully than the anthropology of hundred other countries.¹

Indeed, the methods and theoretical models of anthropology and archaeology may provide original treatments for ancient Egyptian sources, which in turn constitute a rich dataset with implications that go beyond the narrow field of Egyptology. The cross-fertilizing nature of these disciplines was noted by many other authors after Griffith, with advances towards a potential intellectual exchange being cherished as fruitful. In the preface of *Egyptology and the Social Sciences*, Kent Weeks wrote:

We consider extremely encouraging the fact that Egyptologists are now, after half a century of reluctance, beginning to approach such fields as anthropology for ideas, while anthropologists are also beginning to realize that, beneath Egyptology's staid and sometimes formidable exterior, there lies a wealth of data of great value for their studies.²

However, in the almost 40 years since that publication, the dialogue Weeks hinted at has not been as dynamic as initially expected. Several publications overemphasize the impossibility of mutual understanding between Egyptology and anthropology, focusing repeatedly on what brings these disciplines apart instead of proposing ways of reconciliation. In this manner, the divergence of Egyptology and anthropology has become commonplace, and many methodological endeavors are rejected as unattainable. For example, Judith Lustig stated that anthropologists view Egyptology as an "antitheoretical, descriptive field,"³ in the same volume in which William Y. Adams ruled out the possibility of a total reconciliation between

Egyptology and anthropology in the following terms:

While there is at present some reconvergence of interest between Egyptology and anthropology, the basic personalities of the two disciplines remain far apart. I see no reason to expect that this will change; the two fields simply appeal to people with different backgrounds, different interests and different ideological commitments.⁴

Although many authors have successfully incorporated theoretical models from the social sciences into Egyptology,⁵ and a few acknowledge the influence of anthropology on their work explicitly,⁶ many others tend to remain silent about their academic inspiration,⁷ which contributes to perpetuating the view of Egyptology as a theory-free field. Furthermore, very few of those initiatives have crystallized in engaged discussions in the scholarly literature, and the development of theory continues to be a relatively niche approach within Egyptology.

The story of the study of kinship in Egyptology serves as an illustration of this lack of engagement with current anthropological trends. Specific aspects, such as kinship terminology,⁸ marriage and inheritance,⁹ the role of relatives in literary compositions,¹⁰ interaction with ancestors,¹¹ or the representation of family members in elite tomb decoration,¹² have received priority, instigating a compartmentalization of the analysis of ancient Egyptian social fabric.¹³ An interest in kinship already denotes some theoretical awareness, and a few of the authors cited in this paragraph make use of anthropological literature. However, those works are anchored in some interpretative frameworks that often go unmentioned and that necessarily affect the conclusions obtained. For instance, an attention to kinship terminology could be framed within the functionalist school, while the search for mythical models may be associated with structuralist concerns (see more on these approaches below). Since not a single theoretical approach should claim to have universal validity, it is intellectually stimulating to apply new paradigms to the sources in order to try and formulate new research questions that could lead to fresh insights into the primary sources

A genealogical understanding of kinship, rooted on the Western notion of blood, is the basis to many

of the aforementioned approaches to ancient Egyptian sources. As a result, authors may encounter difficulties to classify those relationships that are not strictly genealogical within the sources, which a broader understanding of kinship could help ease. Indeed, several anthropological models now turn away from essentialist definitions of kinship, proposing alternative models based on performative practices, and these have not yet permeated Egyptological writing on kinship. By favoring such theoretically-informed standpoints, it is possible to escape from fossilized treatments of kinship and construct a new method of interpretation of the social structure.

In this article I explore some recent theories within anthropology of kinship and discuss how these can be employed to productively analyze ancient Egyptian social fabric. The validity and development of those frameworks should be understood within the history of the discipline. The first section presents a brief introduction to anthropology of kinship to give a sound background to new kinship studies, which is the specific approach that I advocate. In order to illustrate how new kinship studies can be applied to the reading of ancient social structure, I focus on just one of the parameters that they consider as essential to relatedness, namely the notion of substance. This analytical category needs to be characterized within the context of ancient Egypt before being used as a tool to reassess primary sources through a new lens. The final section applies the category of substance to ancient Egyptian material, mainly from the Middle Kingdom, and proposes that an emic concept—the *ka*—could be heuristically interpreted as substance.

WHY KINSHIP MATTERS

Kinship has traditionally been considered one of the pillars of anthropological research. Indeed, it investigates how people relate to each other and the role that those relationships play in the organization of society. In this sense, kinship permeates virtually every aspect of social life. This is one of the reasons why some academics argue that anthropology as a discipline was initiated with the study of kinship. As eloquently defined by Robin Fox, “kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy or the nude is to art; it is the basic discipline of the subject.”¹⁴

From the very beginning of the academic practice of ethnography interpersonal relationships in general and genealogies in particular constituted an

explicit point of interest. The 1898 Torres Straits expedition is considered a seminal enterprise in the development of the discipline of anthropology.¹⁵ Over the course of seven months and under the auspices of the University of Cambridge, the group of scholars involved in this expedition contributed to the establishment of a number of field methodologies that would later become conventional. In the context of this innovative project W. H. R. Rivers devised a genealogical method based on interviews administered to the locals through a standardized questionnaire.¹⁶ He designed this technique to record issues concerning hereditary illnesses, but then it was repurposed when its potential for the investigation of kinship became apparent.¹⁷ The information was organized into “pedigrees” that condensed the genealogy of those individuals into diagrams.

It is remarkable that those diagrams—born from biological taxonomies—were based on the metaphor of the tree, an organic entity with emergent branches and roots sunk deep into the ground, hence immobile and permanent. Mary Bouquet has noted how the use of this mode of visual representation has led to an oversimplification of many so-called “primitive” kinship systems.¹⁸ Through Rivers’ project, kinship was directly linked with genealogies and hereditary features, stripping relatedness of any socio-cultural defining factors, and thus reducing kinship to genetic relationships. Such association, which to some extent remains today, is deconstructed in the third section of this article.

The mid-20th century is regarded as the classical period for the study of kinship, and two main approaches dominated and shaped the anthropological discourse at that time, namely functionalism and structuralism. They both had their origin in kinship, which was considered a point of departure to apprehend other issues.

On the one hand, functionalism claimed that any aspect of a culture had a purpose that contributed to the preservation and continuity of that culture as a whole. In this framework kinship played an essential role in the maintenance of the so-called politico-jural domain, which was regarded as opposed to the domestic sphere at that time.¹⁹ Their premise was that in order to achieve political stability stateless societies would require some kind of defined organization, and this was achieved through bounded groups that they characterized as unilineal descent groups.²⁰ Popular mainly among anthropologists of the British school such as B.

Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown or E. Evans-Pritchard, descent theory was considered a gateway to assessing political institutions. The attention to the politico-jural domain may be regarded as a residue of an early interest in developmental stages of political organization as devised by evolutionist scholars in the 19th century. This type of approach gained a new meaning in the context of colonial rule, as it embodied a desire to improve strategies of control and domination of the indigenous populations.²¹

On the other hand, structuralism focused on gauging the mechanisms by which the human mind constructed categories that reappear in most societies. In this sense, one could say that their ultimate interest was not to unravel how society works, but rather to explore cognitive processes. The recurring nature of the taboo of incest in most known societies was taken as a case study to analyze the leap from nature to culture.²² In this context C. Lévi-Strauss, inspired by the work of M. Mauss, centered on affinal relationships, that is, kinship relations established by marriage—what he called the “atom” of kinship—as the true expression of relations among groups, thus placing the emphasis on alliance rather than on descent.²³

The aims of functionalism and structuralism diverge from each other, but both these approaches share some common features. In particular, they both favor normativity to the detriment of historicity and contextualization. As a consequence, the preferred form of presentation of their results consists of formulae and diagrams that turned kinship into an increasingly obscure technical field not suitable for non-specialists. These methods received harsh criticisms from within anthropology at the time, when the excesses of formalism were accused of being dehumanizing and abstract. In the words of Malinowski,

The average anthropologist has his doubts whether the effort needed to master the bastard algebra of kinship is really worthwhile. He feels that, after all, kinship is a matter of flesh and blood, the result of sexual passion, and maternal affection, of long intimate daily life, and of a host of personal intimate interests.²⁴

In a context where kinship started to be considered unable to reflect the nuances of lived experience, some scholars reported further on the

futility of kinship studies. David Schneider's culturalist critique was arguably the most powerful voice in the dismissal of the discipline. His influential analysis of American kinship demonstrated the essential role that blood plays in the understanding of families and genealogies in that socio-cultural context.²⁵ Schneider's notion of blood is explored further below, but his characterization of it as a restricted cultural symbol needs to be emphasized here. Most ethnographic work on kinship, as I pointed out when discussing Rivers' methods, had been based on the principle that blood was not a symbol, but a universal tangible mark of human relations, something that he referred to as the "doctrine of genealogical unit of mankind."²⁶ According to Schneider, such strategy is fundamentally flawed because it extrapolated an essentially Western symbol to other cultures. This devastating critique led him to state that "kinship is a non-subject,"²⁷ joining previous questioning positions like that held by Rodney Needham, who had claimed before him that "there is no such thing as kinship, and it follows that there can be no such thing as kinship theory."²⁸

NEW KINSHIP STUDIES: A PERFORMATIVE PERCEPTION OF KINSHIP

Although many thought that kinship would never recover from the blow inflicted by its critics, it proved to be a phoenix rising out from its ashes, as Schneider himself acknowledged in an interview published shortly after his death in 1995.²⁹ In his view, this internal renovation was made possible through the abandonment of some old schemes that favored the study of fossilized institutions, as well as by the incorporation of new subjects of investigation that would reflect the ongoing challenging of the conventional categories of social analysis. In this manner, new interpretative frameworks were developed as an intellectual response to the excesses of abstraction, partially debunked by culturalist critiques.

In my work I rely on "new kinship studies," a fresh approach that arose from the questioning of traditional kinship theories and that propounds that social phenomena are culturally constructed. One of its main advocates is Janet Carsten, Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh and fellow of the British Academy.

Carsten did fieldwork on Langkawi, an island in Malaysia, where she investigated relatedness from the point of view of commensality. Her research

showed that the repeated sharing of rice within a domestic space creates shared substance, which may be the basis for kinship in that local culture.³⁰ Initially she was not interested in kinship, hoping to focus only on the role of women in a fishing community. However, being in the field she realized to what extent "being kin" was embedded in everyday life for Malay actors.

Methodologically, new kinship studies are firmly anchored in ethnographic practice, as it is by being in the field and observing the nuances and flexibility of lived experience that one realizes that kinship cannot be characterized by any single conventional approach, such as one based on biological links. For this reason, Carsten coined the term "relatedness" to serve as a flexible and inclusive category of analysis.³¹ In her own words, relatedness should provide "an indigenous idiom for theorizing about what holds people together."³² It is thus impossible to give a universal definition to relatedness, as this concept needs to be contextualized and given meaning within every socio-cultural setting. For instance, Carsten has studied a number of subjects throughout her career that could contribute to the construction of relatedness in different contexts, including houses,³³ memory,³⁴ and blood.³⁵

The culturalist critique in anthropology had a strong influence on new kinship studies, especially the work of Clifford Geertz, who stated that the study of culture must be based on the search for meaning.³⁶ For him, culture is made of symbols that need to be interpreted and explained in their own context. Following this premise, kinship cannot be defined in essentialist terms, but only described from an emic perspective in a given context and at a given moment.

Relatedness is also marked by a radical anti-dualism that rejects conventional dichotomies such as biology/culture. In a conventional understanding, kinship is about descent and procreation, and biologicist approaches have been popular.³⁷ However, they tend to disregard that biology is also culturally driven. Moreover, the dichotomies private/public and domestic/political, which were at the heart of the politico-jural domain propounded by functionalism, are also harshly criticized by new kinship studies. The latter do not envisage kinship simply as a tool to explain political organization, but as a method to understand the construction of relationships among people. Issues that were previously relegated to the private sphere—such as personhood, procreation, or domesticity—are now

brought to the forefront, being perceived as definers of relatedness.

Such parameters, however, lack the allegedly fixed foundation of the biological interpretation of kinship that was proposed by traditional kinship theory. Instead, they are flexible and prone to changing during the lifecycle of the individual and the group. In this new light, new kinship studies present relatedness as an eminently processual phenomenon, that is, as something that is constructed and reconstructed throughout one's life. Placing an emphasis on what people do characterizes relatedness as a performative practice. Therefore, there can be no more discussions about what kinship "really is," but rather about what kinship does and what it means to the actors involved. This focus on performativity was probably inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of *habitus*,³⁸ but also by the work of feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler, who has long argued that gender identity is essentially enacted.³⁹

In a nutshell, new kinship studies advocate against the reification of kinship, leaning towards the more encompassing and fluid view of relatedness. Following from the dissolution of conventional dichotomies and categories of analysis, relatedness is no longer defined from an exclusively biological standpoint; instead, it relies on alternative interrelated parameters such as personhood, gender, and substance, which allow for a reading of kinship as a performative process.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE? ON BLOOD, CODE, AND MUTABILITY

Rather than perpetuating a dichotomic approach to society, new kinship studies are built upon a number of categories that need to be explained from an emic perspective in order to be useful in social analysis. In this section I pay attention to one of those parameters, namely substance, as a case study to test the suitability of an investigation based on relatedness for ancient Egypt.⁴⁰ In particular, I am interested in showing how substance could be a useful analytical category to model the way relatedness was displayed and perpetuated in ancient Egyptian monuments. In order to do that, however, it is first necessary to determine what we refer to when we speak of substance from an anthropological viewpoint.

Substance is a complex term because it may mean several different things. The *Oxford English Dictionary* registers a total of 18 definitions of this

word, most of which entail ideas of essence, matter, or significance. This variability in the usage of the term has affected its meaning within anthropological vocabulary, since substance has also been interpreted differently in diverse contexts.

The use of substance as an analytical category was popularized by David Schneider in his study of American kinship.⁴¹ According to the popular imagery of social relations in that culture, kinship consists of both blood and a code for conduct; he identified the former as intrinsic and immutable while the latter can be acquired. In his own words,

The blood relationship is thus a relationship of substance, of shared biogenetic material. The degree to which such material is shared can be measured and is called *distance*. The fact that the relationship of blood cannot be ended or altered and that it is a state of almost mystical commonality and identity is also quite explicit in American culture.⁴²

In addition, Schneider stated how substance carried more weight in the characterization of kinship, particularly when accompanied by appropriate behavior: "substance has the highest value, code for conduct less value, but the two together (that is, the 'blood' relatives) have the highest value of all."⁴³ This impression is reproduced in typically Western formulations of biological kinship, where individuals are meant to consist of 50% biogenetic material from each parent, favoring a purely biogenicist perspective of kinship. In this context, blood is a biological metaphor identified with that biogenetic material and hence given a cultural meaning as the embodiment of a relationship that cannot be terminated. While many would probably agree with this description of blood as substance, Janet Carsten advised against taking the meaning of blood for granted, as it may be representative only of our Western cultural milieu:

But we are all too quick to think that we know what we're talking about when we talk about blood. Blood is a symbol and perhaps one of the core symbols of kinship, but of course in not every culture is blood a very elaborated set of ideas.⁴⁴

Indeed, the distinction between substance and code is reminiscent of the dichotomies that govern

the Western interpretation of social phenomena, perpetuating a separation between biology and culture. New kinship studies, however, support the dissolution of the nature/nurture divide, which may lead to the suggestion that they should also abandon the notion of substance altogether, as it is anchored in a biological image of kinship. However, it is still possible to defend the usefulness of substance as a category of analysis within a processual model if it is described from an emic perspective.

While in the Western context substance was equated to blood—understood as unchangeable biogenetic material—the characterization of substance in other regions may be mediated by mutable parameters. Therefore, ethnographies present divergent explanations of substance, which can be based not only on the transmission of blood, but also on the sharing of food and water, co-residence, sexual intercourse, or contact with bodily fluids. Andrew Strathern has referred to this joint construction of substance as co-substantiality.⁴⁵ It is indeed impossible to discuss substance without bringing together other themes such as procreation, personhood, gender, feeding, and conceptions of the body, which is the reason why Carsten suggested that substance—and relatedness—is tied to embodiment.⁴⁶

Ethnographies such as that of Langkawi in Malaysia (mentioned above) serve as an illustration of the various constructions of substance. In that fishing community substance was reportedly created by the repeated sharing of food, particularly rice, within a domestic unit.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, the Nuer of southern Sudan believe in blood as a substance, but only insofar as food is transformed into blood.⁴⁸ In that culture, this transformation is continually taking place, thus illustrating a processual model of relatedness. According to this ethnographic account, other factors could be introduced into the Nuer's equation of kinship—for example, paper, guns, and money—which could all contribute to creating or severing social relationships. This may serve to exemplify the transformability of substance in certain cultural contexts.⁴⁹

It may be debatable whether “substance” can be used successfully in all these disparate societies. Janet Carsten traced the usage of substance as a category in anthropology in ethnographies from America to India and then Melanesia noting its transformations. First, in David Schneider's work substance referred to the unchangeable nature of biogenetic material. When trying to apply this

category to India, Marriott resolved that it would be more appropriate to speak of substance-code, since both Schneiderian aspects are interrelated and cannot be torn apart in the Indian world.⁵⁰ Eventually, the concept was borrowed by scholars studying Melanesia, where any reference to code was dropped, and substance was defined as something inherently transmissible and malleable; effectively the opposite to how it was originally devised for in American kinship.⁵¹ From substance as something unchangeable, the category eventually turned out to comprise “mutability, transferability, vitality, essence, content.”⁵²

It may seem that the initial meaning of the category as postulated by Schneider was misinterpreted by anthropologists leading to a use that is far from what it was originally intended for, but this is not the case. Instead, the value of substance as an analytical category lies precisely in the fact that it is flexible. In effect, substance is whatever links people by relatedness in a given society, and the nature of that substance may vary from one place to another. Others may prefer to call it “social binds,” or “sense of belonging,” but, as Marshall Sahlins has defined it, “common substance is better understood as a culturally perceived hypostasis of common being.”⁵³ Following the performative and processual approach that I advocate here, the essence of the notion—be it blood, food, bodily fluids, or other criteria—does not matter as much as what it does to people, namely it connects them through relatedness; it is for this reason that Carsten states that substance is “inherently relational.”⁵⁴ Substance is an etic category that encompasses what brings people together in different cultural contexts.

THE EGYPTIAN KA AS SUBSTANCE

As mentioned in the previous section, some of the words that have been employed to define substance include mutability, transferability, vitality, essence, and content. These terms encompass fairly divergent connotations because substance is a difficult idea to grasp. As a category, it should be regarded as inherently flexible, reliant on its relational quality. Any such etic category needs to be assessed within the specific context in which it is going to be applied; in that manner, we should look into the ancient Egyptian evidence to determine whether that etic concept can be given some emic content. A search through the sources shows that there is indeed an ancient Egyptian notion that is often defined in

equally vague terms due to its elusiveness: the *ka*. My premise is that it is possible to interpret the ancient Egyptian *ka* within the theoretical framework of substance in order to determine what role the *ka* played in the construction of relatedness.

The *ka* is a widely researched concept that has received multiple definitions in the literature. In fact, it has been rendered as a double, an identical copy, even a twin, as well as a vital force, essence, or personality and “the self” of the individual. The work of Andrey Bolshakov features a comprehensive review of the historiography of concepts of the *ka* until the 1990s.⁵⁵ He discusses the many ways in which the *ka* has been examined, distinguishing four sequential stages in the investigation of this term. For him, those four trends are characterized respectively by an ontological approach, ethnographic comparison, eclecticism, and, finally, a reluctance to tackle the topic at all due to its complexity. Instead of a chronological approach to the research history of the *ka*, a stimulating article by Rune Nyord offers a new literature review on the topic, conveniently grouping the contributions into three thematic subheadings.⁵⁶ First, the identification of the *ka* as a double or an image of the individual, as proposed by G. Maspero,⁵⁷ P. Le Page Renouf,⁵⁸ or A. Bolshakov himself. Second, the understanding of the *ka* as an aspect of one’s personality or the self, present in the works of H. Goedicke,⁵⁹ F. Junge,⁶⁰ and G. Borioni.⁶¹ Third, the *ka* as a vital force or life force, as suggested by A. Erman⁶² and H. Frankfort.⁶³ These three schools are analyzed by Nyord in detail, pointing out their advantages as well as their interpretative problems.

According to Nyord, the main difficulty that scholars face to study the *ka* derives from the selective use of primary sources to support potential definitions. In fact, all the interpretations mentioned in the previous paragraph—namely double, personality, and vital force—may be appropriate in a particular context, but they are hardly compatible, thus preventing an integrated understanding of the *ka*.

For example, the *ka* is often associated with the dead in funerary sources. The well-known expression “to go to one’s *ka*” is frequently used with the meaning “to die.”⁶⁴ This may lead to think that the *ka*, and the contexts in which it appears, should be associated mainly with the afterlife. However, the sources also state that any person had a *ka* during his or her lifetime, and not only after death. Some

temple scenes portraying the royal birth show Khnum giving shape to the king together with his *ka* on his potter’s wheel while Heqet blows the breath of life on them.⁶⁵ Teodor Lekov collects a number of sources that highlight the relevance of the *ka* during the process of birth, emphasizing its mythological and cosmological connotations.⁶⁶ One of them, an Eighteenth Dynasty magical spell for the protection of mother and child during birth, states how the goddess Meskhenet would fashion the *ka* of the child in the womb of his mother: *ir=t k3 n hrd-pn imy ht n st-tn*, “may you create the *ka* of this child, which is in the womb of this woman.”⁶⁷ Among the living, the *ka* is also said to be the origin of behavior and the source of certain wishes and commands, as shown in a passage of the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* where the *ka* is described as the force that prompts a nobleman to distribute provisions among his dependents (see below).⁶⁸

In addition to the divergent functions of the *ka* of the living and the *ka* of the dead identified in the sources, there are also some marked differences between the *ka* of the royals and the non-royals, so many of the attributes of the former should not be uncritically extrapolated to the latter.⁶⁹ In this article I center as much as possible on sources concerning the non-royal *ka*, which is mainly approached from funerary literature. Studying relatedness through these sources is problematic due to the formulaic nature of funerary inscriptions, but this corpus of literature can be used successfully to reconstruct aspects of social practice, as demonstrated for instance by Harco Willems.⁷⁰

Nyord’s investigation of the *ka* attempts to address the drawbacks of previous studies of this notion by conveniently testing his hypothesis in all types of evidence where the *ka* is mentioned and inserting it into a methodological framework that is based on emic conceptions of personhood, particularly on the ideas of “becoming” and “actualizing.” This gives way to his convincing interpretation of the *ka* as a “meta-person” or “condition of possibility” of a person. In order to assess the *ka* within this emic framework, Nyord scrutinizes the primary sources to extract nine interrelated roles that the *ka* plays in life and death. This approach contextualizes the notion of *ka*, anchoring it into its apparent practical functions rather than focusing on definitions that rely on a Western understanding of the aspects of the self. The explanation proposed by Nyord is compatible with the reading of *ka* as a source of relatedness that I advocate, because that “condition

of possibility” can have a cross-generational dimension. As such, I do not offer an alternative to Nyord’s well-documented features, but some supplementary observations addressing the role of kinship links in the creation and maintenance of one’s *ka*.

In contrast to Nyord’s performative and relational approach to the *ka*, many authors tried to define what the *ka* was for the Egyptians precisely in terms of a characterization of its “substance.” For example, Maspero said that the *ka* is an exact material copy of a man, made “dans le même temps et de la même matière” and that the *ka* and the individual were “coévaux et consubstantiels” to each other.⁷¹ Bolshakov dismisses the discussion on the substance of the *ka* altogether because “an ancient man could not conceive the immaterial, so all the objects in the world were substantially of equal worth for him.”⁷² Leaving the ethnocentric assumption of this statement aside, the question that I tackle in this article is not whether it is possible to define the constituent elements of the *ka*, but whether it can be interpreted within the anthropological framework of substance, and to what extent this theoretical model can contribute to a nuanced understanding of ancient Egyptian social structure.

Given that the role of blood has not been widely questioned in the Egyptological literature, the *ka* has not been proposed as an alternative basis for relatedness in studies about the social structure of ancient Egypt. Conversely, scholars focusing on religion have long emphasized the fundamental role of the *ka* as a generative force that is linked to kinship. Jan Assmann, for example, has argued that the *ka* is an essential concept to understand the role and portrayal of the father in funerary sources.⁷³ In his words, the *ka* is “der Inbegriff der Paternalität,”⁷⁴ and the real substance through which reproduction of the parental line is actualized. These ideas have a cosmological and mythical foundation in religious literature (see below), but here I argue that the understanding of the *ka* that they propound may be echoed in daily lived experience.

Assmann referred to the *ka* elsewhere as “a paternal, dynastic principle,”⁷⁵ since it is considered to be transferred within the family, but the precise mechanisms of how that happens are not entirely clear. The etymology of the term *ka* is uncertain, although Bolshakov has speculated about a possible root **k3* that would carry the sense of plurality and reproduction.⁷⁶ Some of the terms that could be potentially associated with *ka* comprise indeed

connotations of potency and fertility, such as *k3*, “bull”;⁷⁷ *k3t*, “vagina”;⁷⁸ or *sk3*, “to cultivate.”⁷⁹ If this imagery is correct, it comes as no surprise that the *ka* might have been recognized as a familial life force that could be reproduced over and over for generations, making it an ideal candidate to explore indigenous conceptions of relatedness.

Most sources concerning the *ka* place an emphasis on paterno-filial relations, apparently disregarding other types of kin relations. A prime example for this may be the passage from the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* (further discussed below) where the son is said to be the “seed of the *ka*” of the father. In this context, the father is probably regarded as the bearer of a sexually potent *ka* that he would pass along to his son so that he may in turn live and reproduce himself. The son has also some reciprocal duties towards his father. As Osiris states in a Coffin Text spell addressed to Horus, the role of the son involves making firm the *kas* of his deceased father while he is alive: *ink pw hm it=k mstiw=i tp t3 smn=k k3w=i*, “I am indeed your father, o my children upon earth. May you make my *kas* firm.”⁸⁰ This probably comprises maintaining his memory and sustaining his cult, although it may have more practical implications. A son would acquire the responsibilities of his predecessor upon the latter’s death, so that would entail taking care of his father’s dependents—possibly referred here as *kas*—who would now become his own.

An inscription from the Twenty-fifth Dynasty tomb of Harwa (TT37) offers a remarkable example of the idea of paternal transmission of the *ka*. The tomb is still being excavated and many of its inscriptions remain unpublished. However, the online Digitalisiertes Zettelarchiv (DZA) keeps a scan of a card with an uncollated transcription apparently made by A. Erman.⁸¹ On this note part of the self-presentation inscription of Harwa is transcribed, in which the virtues of the tomb owner are extolled, presenting him as a man of impeccable behavior. As such, he is said to (presumably, as the verb is lost) take care of *nḥmw iwty it*, “the orphan who does not have a father.” Instead of the usual seated man, the determinative that accompanies the term *it* (father) is the rare sign A188 :



a striding man who presents a *ka* sign on his hand.

Lekov interprets this as the father handing the *ka* down to his sons, a graphic illustration of that transmission.⁸² Furthermore, the context of this self-laudatory phrase implies that the role of a father would be to care for his children, which acknowledges the performative dimension of kinship. However, the transcription has not been collated and this source must be taken with caution.

Other sources are also indicative of an association between the *ka* and kinship. Despite the difficulty inherent in translating and interpreting personal names, which is further discussed below, it is worth noting here that some of them refer to the recurrence of the *ka*. For example, the name $k^3(=i)-w\dot{h}m$ can be translated as “my *ka* has repeated itself,”⁸³ which may be a reference to the replication of a father’s *ka* in his children. Even more explicit, the name $k^3(=i)-m\dot{s}w(=i)$, “my *ka* are my children,”⁸⁴ identifies the offspring with one’s *ka*. Along the same lines, the Eleventh Dynasty stela of Abkau records an otherwise unattested epithet: $\dot{i}nk\ h\dot{s}ky\ w\dot{h}m\ k^3=f\ \dot{s}p\dot{s}i\ w^c\ h^3\dot{t}y^c\ s\dot{r}w\ r\dot{h}-\dot{h}t\ n-wnt\ s\dot{n}w=f$, “I was a *hskw*-priest(?) who repeats his *ka*, a noble one, a unique one, governor of the officials, one who knows things, one who has no equal.”⁸⁵ Nyord has suggested that this “repetition of *kas*” could refer to a manifestation of the *ka* of this official through appropriate behavior or perhaps through his offspring.⁸⁶ The latter option ties in with the idea of transmission of the *ka* within the family. Perhaps a similar sense is implied epithets like $wrt\ m\ k^3w=t$, “a great one of her *kas*,” said by Rediukhnum of the lady Nereukayet under whom he served during the reign of Intef II.⁸⁷ The “making the *kas* of the father firm” of Coffin Text Spell 313,⁸⁸ which I interpret above as asking the son to take care of the deceased father’s dependents, would also fit in with the readings proposed in this paragraph.

Although the texts discuss the relationship of father and son as the primary one in the transmission of the *ka*—not least due to the prevalence of Osiris and Horus in mortuary literature—it must have been a much more socially universal phenomenon than the sources show. For example, a mother could be thought to also have some implication in the creation of the *ka* of her offspring. In the magical spell for the protection of woman and child during childbirth mentioned above, the *ka* is granted by the gods to a child while it is still in the womb of the mother. Thus, she acts at least as a receptacle for that *ka*. In addition, some evidence from personal names cited below

demonstrates that both men and women would have a *ka* (e.g. “her *ka* is her father”), so the emphasis on the relationship of father and son does not rule out other possible routes of transmission. Textual sources are equally silent about the role of the *ka* within collaterals. However, if the father would pass on his *ka* to all his children, it then follows that siblings of the same father would share the same *ka* or manifestations thereof.⁸⁹ Furthermore, in keeping with the principles of new kinship studies outlined above, one could think that a conventionally understood biological transmission may not be the only possible way of passing on the *ka*; possible alternatives based on performance and practice are proposed in the next section of this article.

The idea of the continuity of the *ka* over generations probably derives from an Egyptological reinterpretation of religious texts, in particular, those concerning the relationship between Osiris and Horus. The word *ka* is written with a pair of outstretched arms (see Fig. 1) in a gesture of embracing, perhaps because it is conceived as a protective force. This is materialized in the funerary literature as the embrace of Atum to Shu and Tefnut in the Pyramid Texts (Utterance 600): $\dot{i}\dot{s}\dot{s}.n=k\ m\ \dot{s}w\ t\dot{f}n=k\ m\ t\dot{f}nt\ d\dot{i}.n=k\ ^cwy=k\ h^3=sn\ m^c\ k^3\ wn\ k^3=k\ im=sn$; “you spat Shu and you expectorated Tefnut; you have placed your arms around them as the arms of the *ka*, that your *ka* may be in them.”⁹⁰ In this funerary text Atum transfers his *ka* to his children by embracing them, establishing a mythical model for the transmission of the *ka* that goes in line with the graphic representation of the sign with outstretched arms.

A similar idea is reproduced in countless ritual texts, and perhaps more widely attested for Horus and Osiris, who may also replicate that mythical model of transmission of the *ka*. For instance, a fragment of a funerary liturgy in the tomb of Senenmut (TT 353) emphasizes the importance of the paterno-filial embrace in the context of mortuary rites: $h^3\ w\dot{s}ir\ s-n-mwt-pn\ \dot{i}w\ \dot{i}r=i\ n=k\ nw\ \dot{i}r.n\ \dot{h}r\ n\ \dot{i}t=f\ w\dot{s}ir\ h^3\ w\dot{s}ir\ s-n-mwt-pn\ \dot{i}w.n=i\ \dot{s}hn(=i)-tw$, “O Osiris Senenmut, come so that I do for you these things that Horus did for his father Osiris. O Osiris Senenmut, I have come so that (I) may embrace you.”⁹¹ While the *ka* is not explicitly mentioned in this example, the ritual action of embracing in a ritual context involving a son and his deceased father parallels the text discussed in the previous paragraph and, thus, may be interpreted as alluding to that transmission through embracing. The cosmological importance of

the paternal embrace and its specific association with the transmission of the *ka* from father to son in ritual texts has been explored by Assmann.⁹² In addition, the notion of Osiris being the source of the *ka* of Horus occurs often in Pyramid Texts, such as in Utterance 176, where Osiris is said to be the *ka* of his son: *wsir NN twt k3=f*, “O Osiris N, you are his *ka*.”⁹³

Other modes of transmission more relevant to the social identity of the individuals could be postulated. Naming may be a very powerful tool to assess social conventions and beliefs in the absence of other detailed sources, but it needs to be taken with care.⁹⁴ Names are notoriously hard to read—both in terms of their syntax and graphic rendering—and they are often decontextualized, which makes it difficult to link them to particular social trends. Ursula Schweitzer collects a number of personal names of mainly the Old and Middle Kingdoms that contain the term *ka* and uses them as a source to ascertain contemporary attitudes towards and conceptions of the *ka*.⁹⁵ It is often unclear whether a name is referring to the *ka* or of the name giver or of the name bearer due to the persistent lack of personal pronouns, especially the first person singular suffix pronoun.

Some personal names, however, point at an involvement or at least a connection of the *ka* of the father and that of the children. Examples of this paterno-filial links through the *ka* include *k3(=i)-n-it(=i)*, “my *ka* is that of my father,”⁹⁶ *k3=s-it=s*, “her *ka* is her father,”⁹⁷ *k3=s-hr-it=s*, “her *ka* is on her father,”⁹⁸ *k3(=i)-msw(=i)*, “my *ka* are my children.”⁹⁹ These names bear witness to a correlation between the *ka* and kinship. The fact that the *ka* of non-royals is sometimes explicitly identified with ancestors in the written sources seems to support this hypothesis: *ndr.ti ʿ=f in k3w=f in itw=f*, “may his hand be taken by his *kas*, namely by his forefathers.”¹⁰⁰ This reference to ancestors rather than just to the father supports the idea that the *ka* can be regarded as transgenerational although most of the evidence narrowly points at a lineal relationship.

Although the mechanism of transmission of the *ka* is not being described explicitly

in these examples, it is tempting to speculate about the role that naming practices may have played in the process.¹⁰¹ The recurrence of the names through generations within a family causes the ancestors to be ever present in the daily life of a social group, and perhaps to strengthen the sense of belonging to that group. Mark Smith has metaphorically referred to names as a kind of “genetic material” that is transmitted over generations.¹⁰² It is striking that he uses the same biological image previously employed by Schneider to describe blood in his study of American kinship. If this view is correct, names could be embodying the *ka* of the family, which acts as a transmissible substance that creates a common background among people. The *ka* was indeed sometimes mentioned in close association with the name, as in Pyramid Text Utterance 469: *NN-pn wd3 hnʿ iwʿ=f nʿf n NN-pn hnʿ rnʿ=f ʿnh NN-pn hnʿ k3=f*, “NN is complete with his flesh, it is good for NN with his name, NN lives with his *ka*.”¹⁰³ Since the Twenty-second Dynasty, and more frequently in the Greco-Roman period, the *ka* acquires the meaning of “name,”¹⁰⁴ possibly as a testimony to this intertwining between different aspects of the social persona of the individual. However, whether this semantic drift is evidence of an actual identification of *ka* and name in later times or a simple change in usage reflecting a shift in the understanding of the *ka* is difficult to determine.

FIGURE 1: Libation dish, 19.2.16, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York). <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543866> (accessed 30 October 2017).



The graphic appearance of the term *ka*, which remains stable throughout Egyptian history, may give further clues about the meaning and function of this term. Besides the paterno-filial embrace discussed above, the shape of outstretched arms could represent simultaneously the handing down and the reception of offerings. An early dynastic libation dish shows the *ka* arms embracing an ankh sign, thus materializing a graphic interplay between *ka*, life, and offerings (Fig. 1). The relationship of the *ka* with the presentation of offerings is further demonstrated by the gesture adopted by the statue of Idu as it emerges from a false door on the west wall of his mastaba tomb in Giza (G7102).¹⁰⁵ His arms are outstretched to the front in the same manner as a *ka* sign towards a slab in the shape of the hieroglyph *htp*, “offering.” The Book of the Dead features a spell for “satisfying the *ka*” (BD 105), which may include vignettes showing the *ka* hieroglyphs on an offering table receiving food and/or being purified with water or incense. One of such vignettes is preserved on the papyrus of Nesitanebisheru of the late Twenty-first or early Twenty-second Dynasty, kept at the British Museum.¹⁰⁶ This interpretation is particularly relevant because the term *ka* acquired the meaning of “food, nourishment” around the Middle Kingdom,¹⁰⁷ attesting to the relevance of this aspect of the cult of the deceased in which family members were involved.

The sources show that the *ka* may be a valid emic notion to investigate kinship. It is allotted to a child still in the mother’s womb, but the primary way of transmission of the *ka* as acknowledged in the sources is through a paternal embrace. The idea of the embrace is reminiscent of the shape of the graphic representation of the *ka* as a pair of outstretched arms. This posture is also widely recognized as a sign for receiving offerings, an aspect whose connection with kinship is further explored below. Evidence from mortuary texts and personal names also demonstrates that the *ka* was reproduced in one’s children. Moreover, the ancestors of a person are the embodiment of that person’s *ka*, bearing witness to the transgenerational qualities of this concept. The *ka* can thus be examined through the framework of substance because it seems to denote something—we could call it a force, a principle, a potentiality of being—that is transferred and that forms at least one of the bases of relatedness in the socio-cultural context of ancient Egypt.

THE OFFERING CULT AND THE PROVISIONING OF THE DEAD

It is noteworthy that throughout Egyptian history the *ka* always remained the recipient of the offerings in the context of the mortuary cult since as early as the First Dynasty.¹⁰⁸ In most texts where it appears, the non-royal *ka* tends to be linked to funerary offerings and to the maintenance of the memory of the deceased after death. For this reason, an offering scene—and occasionally an offering list—would be depicted on stelae or tomb scenes in order to ensure the eternal recurrence of this provisioning.¹⁰⁹ Funerary inscriptions that attest to this nurturing of the *ka* of the deceased are well known. For example, the Munich stela of the overseer of priests Wepwawetaa includes the following phrase: *ms.tw n=f wy hr htpt m-b3h ntr-3 m-ht htp k3=f im*, “may arms be extended to him carrying offerings in the presence of the great god after his *ka* is satisfied with it.”¹¹⁰ This passage confirms that outstretched arms are, as suggested above, an iconographic symbol of the offering ritual, be it for the presentation or the receipt of offerings.

In this context, the expression *n k3 n(y)*, “for the *ka* of”—followed by titles, personal name, and sometimes filiation—becomes a constituent part of the offering formula during the first decade of the reign of Senusret I.¹¹¹ The offering formula was regarded as a prerequisite for the enduring provision of the deceased as part of the mortuary cult. It was essentially an invocation formula that would be enacted by being uttered. In this sense, the question whether the presentation of offerings was “real” or “symbolic” is not relevant, because the ritual was based on a recitation that would actualize the offering by virtue of its performative quality. As a general rule, only the *ka* of the deceased person is invoked in these offering formulae, but some examples are known that refer to the *ka* of places, and even to the *ka* of groups of people that could be categorized as kin groups, that is, as groups linked by relatedness.¹¹²

Personal names, despite the analytical caveats mentioned above, may also serve as evidence to confirm this important correlation between the *ka* and provisioning. In particular, the name *df3=i-k3=i*, “my provisions are my *ka*”¹¹³ postulates that the *ka* may require those provisions to continue to exist. It is worth noting that the term *df3* is commonly used in the context of the presentation of offerings,¹¹⁴ and it is a constituent of the traditional offering formula together with *htp*.

The nurturing of the *ka* through the presentation of food offerings had special relevance during the mortuary cult, since the individual was meant to be kept alive through the nourishment that would ideally be presented at the tomb. Mortuary cult was often performed in front of a statue, and, since the offerings were said to be brought to satisfy the deceased's *ka*, the cult-statue and the notion of *ka* have become entangled in the literature since the times of Maspero.¹¹⁵ John Taylor claims that the *ka* has no concrete form, so it was "given substance" by being represented as a statue, where the *ka* was meant to dwell.¹¹⁶ The well-known representation of king Awibre-Hor in wood with a *ka* sign on its head (Cairo CG 259, Egyptian Museum) perhaps materializes a connection between statue and the *ka*,¹¹⁷ but it remains the only clear example of such correlation. Although a relationship between the *ka* and the cult-image has been postulated on the basis of inscriptional evidence of the early Middle Kingdom,¹¹⁸ the idea that the *ka* dwelled in a statue has been contested by Martin Fitzenreiter, who claims that the existence of *ka*-statue cannot be demonstrated with reference to ancient Egyptian sources.¹¹⁹ Be that as it may, family members played an essential role in those funerary rites, as they were responsible for ensuring eternal sustenance for their ancestors.

First, the eldest son is known to have had a duty to lead funerary rituals in the memory of his deceased father and to maintain the provisioning of the tomb.¹²⁰ Countless Middle Kingdom stelae show a son performing the appropriate rituals in honor of his deceased father (Fig. 2), including the recitation of invocation offerings and the presentation of produce. Funerary sources tend to emphasize this paterno-filial relationship, where the son is regarded as the successor of his father providing he performs the appropriate rites to ensure a successful passage to the afterlife and the maintenance of the memory of his predecessor. Coffin Text Spells 30–41 constitute a prime example of these reciprocal arrangements.¹²¹ The following passage of one spell of this group in which the son addresses his father is illustrative of their relationship:

*twt ʕ m t3 pw dsr nty=k im=f m mdw=i imy d3d3t
ntr isk-wi ʕ m t3-pn n ʕnhw m mdw=k imy d3d3t
rmt r iwt=i n=tn*

You are here in this sacred land where you are as my speaker who is in the tribunal of the god, whereas I am here in this land of

the living as your speaker who is in the tribunal of men, until I shall come to you.¹²²

The father is thus meant to watch over his son and speak on his behalf in front of a tribunal in the afterlife; equally the son should defend the interests of his father on the land of the living. This reciprocity is reminiscent of what is expected from deceased relatives as specified in letters to the dead (see below). In addition to this scene, the eldest son is also identified as the main ritual actor within what seems to be the description of a mortuary liturgy including a presentation of offerings for the deceased. In fact, an invocation offering performed by the son, in the role of his father's living *ba*, is explicitly mentioned in some variants of these spells: *ink b3=k ʕnh tp t3 irr n=k prt-hrw tp t3 m pr=k nt m iw nsrsr*, "I am your living *ba* upon earth, who performs for you an invocation offering upon earth in your tomb of the Island of Fire."¹²³ Other parts of the text have been identified by Willems with ritual activities such as slaughtering of cattle,¹²⁴ presentation of offerings,¹²⁵ and erection of offering tables for the funerary meal,¹²⁶ which should all be understood within the ritual provisioning of offerings for the deceased.

The duty to maintain and provide for deceased members of the family is not only described in the canonical corpora of funerary literature, but also in other types of texts. For example, lines 12–3 of the self-presentation inscription on the Middle Kingdom stela of Horemkhauef outline the importance of the provisioning duties of an eldest son for his deceased parents: *iw nw.n=i pr mnʕw=i krs sʕnh*, "I have looked after the *pr* of my nurturers, (they) being buried and revived."¹²⁷ I believe this text could be read in two different and complementary ways. First the term *pr* could refer to the tomb of his ancestors, thus placing the emphasis on an appropriate undertaking of the relevant provisioning duties toward the deceased.¹²⁸ Second, *pr* could also be the household,¹²⁹ then alluding to the transmission of the role of the head of the household to the eldest son who will in turn need to provide for those members of the household now under his tutelage. With these two readings, the text reproduces some of the ideas present in the spells mentioned in the previous paragraph and highlights the reciprocity inherent in the practice of relatedness.

It is probably due to his undeniable prominence in the performance of funerary rituals that the eldest son was often considered the keeper of the "essence"



FIGURE 2: Stela of Montuwoser, 12.184, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York). <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544320> (accessed 30 October 2017).

of the family. A well-known passage from the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* connects proper filial behavior with the *ka* explicitly:

*ir wnn=k m s ʾkr / ir=k s³ n sim³ ntr / ir mty=f
phr=f n kd=k / nw=f ht=k r st ʾry / ir n=f bw nb
nfr / s³=k is pw ny-sw sti k³=k / im=k iwd ib=k
r=f*

IF YOU ARE AN EXCELLENT MAN / you should produce a son in favour of the god. / If he is balanced and takes after your character, / and ties your things to their proper place, / do everything that is good for him, / for he is your son, he belongs to the seed of your *ka* / Do not withdraw your heart from him.¹³⁰

The maxim goes on to say that if the son does not behave appropriately (i.e. if he does not pay heed to his father’s advice, or if he disgraces his ancestors), then he should no longer be considered a son. The “seed of the *ka*” is linked with proper conduct, making the category of “son” a fluid one that is at least partially based on performance.¹³¹ It is his actions that identify someone as a son and make him worthy of the love and respect of his father. In this manner, this interpretation of some ancient Egyptian primary sources also helps us to question the dichotomy nature/nurture that new kinship studies categorically reject.

While the responsibility of providing for the deceased devolved upon the eldest son, some individuals made arrangements for the establishment of a funerary endowment that would ensure the continuation of their provisioning and for the appointment of some funerary priest who would then undertake the presentation of offerings.¹³² A contract inscribed on the Eleventh Dynasty stela of Intef (London, British Museum EA 1164) explicitly states how the main responsibilities of the *ka*-priest involved pouring libations and making offerings to a statue of the deceased.¹³³ Other mortuary priests performed complementary tasks during the liturgies—for example, reading the relevant ritual texts. However, it is

significant that the priest whose main duties involved taking care of the funerary offerings and administering the estate of the deceased was called “*ka*-priest,” hence highlighting how his actions were meant to preserve and nourish the *ka* of the deceased.

Not only the eldest son held duties linked to the mortuary cult of his deceased father, but other

people in his entourage may also have had to participate in the provision of offerings. Members of his kin group, for example, are alluded to in Coffin Text Spell 35, when the son claims to be the representative of the deceased man's household in the framework of those ritual actions.¹³⁴ The mortuary liturgy described in Spells 30–41 centers on the role of the son in the performance of funerary rites that would ensure the successful existence of the deceased father in the afterlife. The ritualist, in the role of the son, says: *isk fdt=fnt 'nh w3h hr wndwt=f im=i 'nht*, “now, his quartette of life endures upon his living dependants, who I am.”¹³⁵ This passage is difficult to interpret, but it seems that the speaker is identifying himself with a group of subordinates because he is assuming the responsibility over the household after the death of his father.¹³⁶ In this sense, he represents those dependents.¹³⁷ It is not clear what that “quartette” refers to, beyond it being something sought after and desired by the deceased. Given that this mortuary text describes a provisioning ritual for the deceased it is tempting to link it to the “quartet” of *kas* that is mentioned elsewhere in the Coffin Texts and that Nyord relates tentatively to the four *kas* of Ptah.¹³⁸ This connection, however, remains uncertain.

The social dimension of the provision of offerings for the deceased is visually present on stelae, tomb walls, and funerary equipment as well. Since the Old Kingdom, rows of offering bearers were represented on tomb walls, stelae, and as models as approaching the owner of the monument, perpetuating the cult of the deceased. These offering bearers are generally not named, and sometimes are only given a name and title but no kin filiation to the deceased.¹³⁹ Occasionally the captions may show that members of the family were involved in the presentation of offerings, as part of the mortuary liturgy in honor of the deceased. For instance, the late Middle Kingdom stela of Reniseneb (Fig. 3) shows a large party performing rites and providing produce for the stela owner and his wife. The Middle Kingdom stela of the overseer of the estate Intef is another excellent example of this, as it shows some of his children performing rites in the midst of a funerary procession of offering bearers.¹⁴⁰

Beside the provision of offerings, the sharing of food was also regarded as an essential part of those funerary duties. Banqueting scenes become ubiquitous in Eighteenth Dynasty tombs, where they commemorated the interaction of the living and the dead while embodying ideas of status, identity, and

social standing.¹⁴¹ Some Middle Kingdom stela could also represent comparable banquets, as they show family members, often captioned, opposite the stela owner while he is receiving and enjoying his funerary meal. The late Middle Kingdom stelae of the herald of the vizier Senusret from Abydos are an excellent illustration of such banquets.¹⁴² His three stelae now kept at the Musée du Louvre are probably all part of the same memorial chapel on the basis of style and prosopography. They depict a funerary feast encompassing a meal, preparation and presentation of offerings, and ritual libations. Stela Louvre C 17, for example, shows over twenty people partaking in the celebration, including a dancer and a harpist. Most of these people squat by a small laden offering table each while facing the stela owner, who is seated at the far right of the registers.

Other stelae could potentially also represent such banquets, even if the celebration is not depicted as clearly. People accompanying the stela owner on other stelae hold similar postures to those on the funerary scenes of Senusret (e.g., taking a hand to the chest and outstretching the other arm to the front, or holding a lotus flower to one's nose). However, those small individual tables laden with produce are often lacking, thus rendering the connection with funerary banquets less explicit. One of the stelae of Senusret, stela Louvre C 16, shows one man with no table in front of him in the midst of an unequivocal representation of a funerary banquet. Objects such as the stela of the chief of the district Dedusobek, now at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston,¹⁴³ and the stela of Horhernakht, at the Museo Egizio,¹⁴⁴ may hence comprise potential examples of such banquets because they keep a similar scene composition, posture, and context, even though some key elements of a funerary feast may be lacking.

The ritual obligations of members of the family toward the deceased could be interpreted not only as a religious obligation, but as a social strategy for strengthening kin ties. As I have shown above with the role of the eldest son, it may be possible to define relatives through what they do rather than through who they are. In this manner, funerary duties—including the commemoration of the deceased by means of invocation rituals and provision of offerings—would have been an important element in the characterization of kin groups.¹⁴⁵

The letters to the dead also attest to reciprocal relationships and interactions between the living and



FIGURE 3: Figure 3: Stela of Reniseneb, 63.154, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York). <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545503> (accessed 30-Oct-2017).

the dead. These types of documents are known since the late Old Kingdom, and in them living members of the kin group would ask their ancestors to intercede in ordinary matters regarding inheritance, health, or fertility. This highlights their role as carers and protectors of the kin group, and places them at

the heart of social interaction with living members of the family.

The Qau bowl is a remarkable source from the First Intermediate Period in which a man complains to his forebears about some problems with the acquisition of his inheritance. The bowl contains two letters; one, on the inside, to his father, and a second one, on the outside, to his mother. The latter section features the following passage: *in irr.ti r=i r-gs=ḫ ḫrdw=i špt n s³=ḫ im mr in-m rf stī=f n=ḫ mw*, “is it to your side that it is being done against me, my children being angry at your son [i.e. the writer] while I am ill? Who will make libations for you?”¹⁴⁶ The writer complains that his deceased family members are not interceding for him in a dispute against a certain Henu over the property of some fields.

The living members of a kin group were bound to their ancestors by having to provide for them and perform their funerary rites; but the deceased also had to fulfill their duty by ensuring the wellbeing of the household from the netherworld. The reference to libations and the continuation of the ritual provision of offerings in the Qau letter example is all the more relevant because many letters to the dead are jotted down on bowls that could have contained offerings for the deceased members of the family. Thus, satisfying the *ka* of the ancestors was also regarded as a

way of communicating with them, reminding them of their familial duties.

A reciprocal arrangement between the ancestors and the living was illustrated above with the Coffin Text spell that outlines how a father and a son would stand for each other in front of tribunals of the dead and the living respectively. In that same group of spells, there is a description of how the *ka* may serve the role of an advocate of a living person (i.e. the son of the deceased) in the tribunal of the netherworld.¹⁴⁷ In this context, it may be interesting to recall that the

ancestors may be identified explicitly as *kas* in the primary sources, such as in the aforementioned “may his hand be taken by his *kas*, namely by his forefathers.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, some roles of the ancestors and the *ka* of the deceased, who are meant to care for and protect the deceased in the netherworld, are comparable, if not identical.

The *ka* of the deceased is explicitly nurtured after his or her death by members of the family, but provisioning duties are also an important component of family relationships during life. For instance, the papers of Heqanakht show how an individual was in charge of the redistribution of rations within a group that worked as a corporate unit.¹⁴⁹ Similar attitudes towards dependent relatives are possibly outlined in Coffin Text Spell 313, mentioned above,¹⁵⁰ where it is stated that the duty of a son involves making the *kas* of a father firm upon earth. This could indeed imply duties of provisioning of dependents that a son was meant to continue after the passing of his father.

Some fragments from the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* may also be relevant in this context. Even though they deal with subordinates instead of with family members, the social relationships modeled in this didactic text are close to those exemplified, for example, in the letters of Heqanakht. A maxim dealing with etiquette may be revealing of the level of attention that is expected from a superior, as the guest is not meant to ask for food. Instead, the proper host will distribute appropriately by virtue of his elevated status in the hierarchy: *in k3 dwn ʿwy=f wr di=f n ph.n s*, “it is the *ka* that stretches out his hands; a great one gives without anyone exerting pressure.”¹⁵¹ The *ka* then guides the conduct of the host and plays an important role in distribution of rations. As argued by Nyord,¹⁵² this passage can be interpreted in tandem with maxim 22, where it says that: *k3-pw k3 n mty htpw im=f*, “the upright *ka* on account of whom people are satisfied is truly a *ka*.”¹⁵³ Thus, the *ka* is ultimately responsible for the (fair) redistribution of provisions of those higher in the hierarchy among their dependents, who are expected to show gratitude in return.

The content of these maxims mirrors the expected conduct of officials in idealized self-presentation inscriptions, which often reproduce the *topos* of the caring patron. This genre offers an opportunity for high officials to present themselves in the most favorable light, extolling their virtues and the rectitude of their actions. The moral quality of the individual is one of the main topics of self-

presentation texts since the Old Kingdom,¹⁵⁴ and some of the phrases, which eventually become standardized, concern provision of dependents. The Twelfth Dynasty stela of Heni includes a self-presentation text with the following lines, which make clear that the aim of these actions was to content those who are less fortunate: *iw rdi.n(=i) tʿ n hkr hbsw n h3y dr.n(=i) s3r n hr-iw*, “I gave bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked. I drove away need from the unfortunate one.”¹⁵⁵ The stela of Horemkhauef, mentioned above as an example of the provisioning duties that a son holds towards his deceased parents, features similar statements that present the stela owner as a truly caring individual. Although the *ka* is not mentioned in such examples, the parallelism with the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* is obvious, and highlights the higher virtue associated with those who distribute provisions.

The prominence of provision within the context of construction of relatedness in ancient Egypt can also be illustrated through the existence of annuity contracts. The documents called *sh n sʿnh*, also referred to as deeds of endowment,¹⁵⁶ have been considered as the equivalent of modern marriage contracts by some authors, but it is problematic to regard them as their ancient counterpart. They do not appear to be related to a specific marriage ceremony,¹⁵⁷ focusing instead on the economic aspects of a union, especially on provisioning duties. The first potential mention of a *sh n sʿnh* is on a letter from the Old Kingdom,¹⁵⁸ but then no other attestations of this type of document are known until the sixth century BCE.¹⁵⁹ For this reason, it is necessary to take possible implications of these contracts with caution for the period I am focusing on. These documents record the undertaking by a man to provide regular income for a woman, usually—though not always—his wife, in exchange for a payment contributed by her and that could be demanded back if the contract was not honored. Moreover, these documents are related to future children and their provisioning. Although they do not explicitly mention this, the implication is that that woman and her offspring would become the family of that man, who would then need to cater for them. This type of documents is remarkable because it provides an anchorage in the legal genre for the conclusions mentioned in the previous paragraphs, namely that provisioning could be seen as an essential aspect of group formation and, hence, relatedness among the living.

As a summary, the *ka* was a vital essence of the

living and the dead, and its transmission through a kin group may be postulated because it was meant to be passed through generations. It was essential that funerary rituals in which the *ka* is nurtured and sustained be performed—or at least sanctioned—by some members of the kin group, usually the eldest son, who may have been regarded as main keeper of the familial essence in this context. Bearing all this evidence in mind, food can be regarded as an important facet of the sustenance of kinship and the perpetuation of relatedness. In keeping with the understanding of kinship advocated by new kinship studies, “being related” is culturally constructed. In the case of ancient Egypt, one of the elements that could determine membership to a group was the provision for the *ka* of the deceased as well as the provision for living members of the family. Nourishment may have been regarded as key to the sustenance of common kinship. There exist many ethnographic parallels for this mechanism of construction of relatedness through the sharing of food. The case study from Malaysia developed by Janet Carsten—and that I discuss above—constitutes a relevant example of a flexible construction of relatedness through the communal sharing of rice. The importance of the presentation of offerings may be informed by a comparable symbolism.

FINAL REMARKS: THE TREE AND THE CLOUD

Employing substance as an analytical category for the study of kinship in ancient Egypt may be regarded as problematic. Indeed, definitions of substance are not interchangeable between different socio-cultural contexts, but this issue is minimized if we focus on how it functions. The description of substance always needs to be mediated by its context. In this sense, substance is an etic notion that needs to be given emic content based on the available sources.

In this article, exploring relatedness through provision and nurturing has led me to propose that the *ka*, often defined as a “vital force” of the individual, could be interpreted within the framework of “substance” developed in kinship studies. No one-to-one correspondence should be expected, though, especially since the roles of the *ka* are many and disparate, so understanding it as “substance” presents only a complementary explanation. In this possible reading, the *ka* would be heuristically analogous to the idea of “blood” in modern Euroamerican society, as postulated by David Schneider. Kinship pertains to the way people

create differences or similarities between themselves and others and the *ka*, like blood, would be one of the symbols that hold people together in ancient Egypt. This suggestion is tentative, but it could contribute to explaining why funerary duties, particularly those involving provision of offerings, are considered essential in the practice of kinship. At the same time, it accounts for the flexibility inherent in the ancient Egyptian kinship system, in which, from a processual perspective, an individual could belong to different groups simultaneously, and membership to a group could be actively sought and constructed.¹⁶⁰

This fluidity of the system makes kinship appear as pervasive and not bounded. When discussing these ideas, I have been asked whether there was anyone in Egypt who was not a relative. This, in my opinion, illustrates the rigidity of some Western notions of kinship. Not everyone was part of the same kin group, and groups could not be extended *ad infinitum* in lived experience, but the possibility of change and fluctuation existed, and this was based on performativity and practice.

In order to understand this, perhaps we should no longer see kinship through the metaphor of a tree with deep roots, as proposed by ethnographers since the times of Rivers. Maybe a cloud would be more appropriate a symbol, because it is always shifting place, changing shape, and allowing for adaptation. Analyzing *ka* as substance contributes to a processual definition of kinship that highlights the performative aspect of relatedness. If relatedness was indeed based on practice, at times there could be a negotiation with fixed structures (the “given”) in order to incorporate further components of subjectivity and choice (the “made”) in Egyptian kinship. And the clouds will keep moving.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CT = de Buck, Adriaan. 1935–1961. *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

PN = Ranke, Hermann. 1935–1977. *Die ägyptischen*

- Personennamen*. Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin.
- Pyr.* = Sethe, Kurt. 1908–1910. *Die altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrucken und Photographien des Berliner Museums I–II*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs.
- Urk. I* = Sethe, Kurt. 1933 [1903]. *Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums I: Urkunden des Alten Reichs*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs.
- Wb.* = Erman, Adolf, and Hermann Grapow. 1926–1931. *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs.
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- ³ See Lustig (ed.) 1997, 7.
⁴ Adams 1997, 32.
⁵ Baines 2011, 576–578. See also Bussmann 2015, especially section "Disciplinary perspectives." For a commentary on the use of theory in Egyptology, see Olabarria Forthcoming a, chapter 1.
⁶ For instance, see Meskell 1999; Nyord 2009; Bussmann 2010.
⁷ Barry Kemp and Lana Troy are cited as examples of this trend in O'Connor 1997, 19–20. Bussmann 2015 adds other authors, such as Harco Willems, to the list.
⁸ Franke 1983. Detlef Franke's doctoral thesis, which relies on a comprehensive collection of written data from the Middle Kingdom, is one of the most systematic approaches to kinship. Other works in terminology of kinship include Robins 1979; Bierbrier 1980; Willems 1983; Revez 2003.
⁹ Eyre 1992; Eyre 2007.
¹⁰ Campagno 2004; Pehal Forthcoming.
¹¹ Fitzenreiter 2005; Moreno García 2010.
¹² Whale 1989; Lustig 1997b; Roth 1999; McCorquodale 2013.
¹³ An extensive literature review on this topic is beyond the scope of this article, but see Olabarria Forthcoming a, chapter 1 for a more detailed examination of the role of Egyptology within social and cultural anthropology in general, and within kinship studies in particular.
¹⁴ Fox 1983 [1967], 10.
¹⁵ Herle and Rouse 1998, 15–8.
¹⁶ Rivers 1910, 1–12.
¹⁷ Herle and Rouse 1998, 17.
¹⁸ Bouquet 1996.
¹⁹ Fortes 1958, 2.
²⁰ Carsten 2012.
²¹ For a nuanced view of the role of anthropology within colonial rule and the recognition of diverse "colonial situations," see the essays in Stocking 1991.
²² Fox 1983 [1967], 54–76.
²³ Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949].
²⁴ Malinowski 1930, 19.

NOTES

¹ Griffith 1901, 9.

² Weeks (ed.) 1979, v.

- 25 Schneider 1968.
- 26 Schneider 1984, 119–120.
- 27 Schneider 1972, 51.
- 28 Needham 1971, 5.
- 29 Schneider 1995, 193.
- 30 Carsten 1995; Carsten 1997.
- 31 Carsten 2000a; Carsten 2004.
- 32 Carsten 2014, 225.
- 33 Carsten and Hugh-Jones (eds.) 1995.
- 34 Carsten (ed.) 2007.
- 35 Carsten (ed.) 2013.
- 36 Geertz 1973, 5.
- 37 A clear example of this preference for biological approaches and neo-evolutionary kinship theory is Fox 1983 [1967], whose work draws heavily on ethology.
- 38 Bourdieu 1977, 79–86.
- 39 Butler 2014 [1990].
- 40 I have explored the relationship between kinship and gender for the construction of relatedness elsewhere: Olabarria Forthcoming b.
- 41 Schneider 1968.
- 42 Schneider 1968, 25.
- 43 Schneider 1968, 63.
- 44 See transcript of an interview with Janet Carsten in Edmonds and Warburton 2016.
- 45 Strathern and Stewart 2011, 50.
- 46 Carsten 2001, 48.
- 47 Carsten 1995; 1997.
- 48 Hutchinson 2000.
- 49 Carsten 2000b, 24.
- 50 Carsten 2001, 34–38.
- 51 Carsten 2001, 38. In fact, many ethnographic works ended up associating the idea of substance exclusively with non-Western societies, taken for granted that “others” had substance while the West had blood. However, the concept of blood itself is acquiring new meanings in Euroamerican context, with many examples of kinship by choice being present in popular culture. See selection of essays in Carsten 2013.
- 52 Carsten 2004, 131.
- 53 Sahlins 2013, 28. In his work, Sahlins prefers to use the expression “mutuality of being” instead of substance because he feels the latter is saturated with ideas of materiality, which are not a requirement for a definition of relatedness.
- 54 Carsten 2001, 44.
- 55 Bolshakov 1997, 123–132.
- 56 Nyord Forthcoming a. I am grateful to Nyord for giving me access to this unpublished article.
- 57 Maspero 1893.
- 58 Renouf 1878.
- 59 Goedicke 2002.
- 60 Junge 2003.
- 61 Borioni 2005.
- 62 Erman 1907 [1904], 86–87.
- 63 Frankfort 1948, 61–78.
- 64 For instance, see the fragmentary stela of Intef (Boston MFA 25.680, line 3): [*n k³ n...*] *ḥ=f r ḥrt-ntr sbi n k³=f m htp r ḥ³st imntt*, “[for the *ka* of...], whose spirit is [equipped] for the necropolis and who had gone in peace to his *ka* to the western desert,” in Fischer 1964, 106-11, pl. xxxvi right. See Nyord Forthcoming a, section 2a for a note on this expression, the different verbs and prepositions used with it, as well as further attestations.
- 65 A well-known example is the scene of the royal birth of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari; see Naville 1894, pls. xlvi–lv. It is interesting to note how the arms of Khnum in this scene are in the exact same position of a *ka*-embrace.
- 66 Lekov 2015.
- 67 Papyrus Berlin 3027, Spell F, 5,10: Yamazaki 2003, 24, pl. 7. Geb is also mentioned in this spell as being involved in the creation of the *ka* of the child.
- 68 See some examples conveniently collected by Nyord Forthcoming a, section 1a.
- 69 Papazian 2008, 61–63.
- 70 Willems 2014; Willems 2015.
- 71 Maspero 1913, 129.
- 72 Bolshakov 1997, 153.
- 73 Assmann 1976, esp. 46–49.
- 74 Assmann 1976, 49. He bases his ideas particularly on a side by side comparison of the “Kamutef-constellation” and the “father-son constellation,” inspired by the relationship

- between Osiris and Horus. He concludes that the son should be seen as the embodiment of his father, who is perceived as a mentor and creator that lives on in his son.
- ⁷⁵ Assmann 2005 [2001], 101.
- ⁷⁶ Bolshakov 1997, 157–165. For the suggestion that *ka* derives from the root of the verb *k3i*, “to think,” see Assmann 2005 [2001], 100.
- ⁷⁷ *Wb.* 5, 94–98.
- ⁷⁸ *Wb.* 5, 93–94.
- ⁷⁹ *Wb.* 5, 315–316.
- ⁸⁰ *CT IV*, 88b–c [313].
- ⁸¹ This note corresponds to the term *nḥmw* (orphan), see *Belegstellen* for *Wb.* 2, 268–268. For the digital scan of the note see: <http://aew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/DzaBrowser?START.x=26&START.y=143&newpid=DZA+25.122.390&dispscale=100&set=EM&wn=84370&lastpid=25122390&wid=0>, accessed 17 January 2018 (note: login required).
- ⁸² Lekov 2015, 36.
- ⁸³ *PN I* 83.23; Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 695, no. 3435.
- ⁸⁴ Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 702, no. 3475.
- ⁸⁵ Stela Louvre C 15, line x+5: Boreux 1932, 151–153, pl. XVII.
- ⁸⁶ Nyord Forthcoming a, section 1b.
- ⁸⁷ Stela Cairo CG 20543: Lange and Schäfer 1908, 164–167.
- ⁸⁸ *CT IV*, 88b–c [313].
- ⁸⁹ In the exposition of his methodological framework, Nyord (Forthcoming a, n. [49]) touches upon the question of the number of the *kas* suggesting that “a single entity could be the *ka* of multiple persons.”
- ⁹⁰ *Pyr.* 1652c–1653a [PT 600]. See discussion in Assmann 2005 [2001], 44 and Lekov 2015, 32–33.
- ⁹¹ Dorman 1991, 110. This text is an extended version of *Coffin Text Spell* 834.
- ⁹² Assmann 1969, 103–105.
- ⁹³ *Pyr.*, 102b [PT 176]. Nyord (Forthcoming a) also finds a parallelism between *PT* 600 and the embrace of Horus and Osiris.
- ⁹⁴ For a discussion of the transmission of the “life force” through names of deities, see Helck 1954; Hornung 1982 [1971], 49.
- ⁹⁵ Schweitzer 1956, 30–39. For a more recent treatment of the Old Kingdom onomastic material with additional examples, see Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 101–107.
- ⁹⁶ Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 702, no. 3476.
- ⁹⁷ *PN II* 321.18; Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 711, no. 3525.
- ⁹⁸ *PN II* 321.17; Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 711, no. 3526.
- ⁹⁹ Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 702, no. 3475.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Urk.* I, 189,14 and 190,10; Lekov 2005, 27. On the reading of the term ϵ as arm instead of document, see Nyord Forthcoming a, n. [148].
- ¹⁰¹ P. Kaplony first pointed out that naming practices may be replicating the transmission of the *ka*, but he did not offer any supporting evidence to substantiate his claim; Kaplony 1980, 275–276; see also Bolshakov 1997, 154–157. Some of the most recent studies on naming are Vittmann 2013; Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 19–52.
- ¹⁰² Smith 2009, 6.
- ¹⁰³ *Pyr.* 908a–908b [PT 469].
- ¹⁰⁴ *Wb.* 5, 92.17–23.
- ¹⁰⁵ Simpson 1976, pl. xxix.
- ¹⁰⁶ EA 10554,17: Taylor 2010, 163–164.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Wb.* 5, 91–2.
- ¹⁰⁸ Papazian 2008, 65. This evidence pertains to the royal *ḥwt-k3*, that is, foundations to provide for the *ka* of the king. Inscriptional evidence for the provision of offerings for the *ka* of non-royals is known from the Sixth Dynasty (see Schweitzer 1956, 81). However, Bolshakov (1997, 196) argues that the existence of false doors and stelae already in the First Dynasty is pointing out at an incipient funerary cult of the *ka*.
- ¹⁰⁹ Robins 2016.
- ¹¹⁰ Munich Gl. WAF 35, line 10 = Dyroff and Pörtner 1904, pl. i; see Lichtheim 1988, 77–79.
- ¹¹¹ Franke 2003, 54.
- ¹¹² Olabarria Forthcoming c.
- ¹¹³ *PN I* 406.18; Scheele-Schweitzer 2014, 755, no. 3860.
- ¹¹⁴ *Wb.* 5, 569.11.
- ¹¹⁵ Maspero 1893.
- ¹¹⁶ Taylor 2001, 19.

- ¹¹⁷ Borchardt 1914, I, 166, pl. 56.
- ¹¹⁸ Demidchik 2015, 29–30. However, see criticism of Demidchik’s hypothesis in Nyord Forthcoming a, n. [21].
- ¹¹⁹ Fitzenreiter 2001, I, 545–548.
- ¹²⁰ Willems 2014, esp. 199–201.
- ¹²¹ Willems 2001. See also Willems 2014, 187–190.
- ¹²² CT I 176d–g [40]; Willems 2014, 187.
- ¹²³ CT I 129d–g [35]; Willems 2001, 292 identifies that Island of Fire with the tomb chapel in the context of this particular spell.
- ¹²⁴ CT I 123b [34]; *šsmw hr ns³w=f m irw=f n nḫd*, “Shesmu at his winepress(?) in his form of slaughterer.”
- ¹²⁵ CT I 125b [34]; *sšm=f htpw n im³hw*, “while he presents offerings to the venerated ones.”
- ¹²⁶ CT I 126b [34]; *sgrg=s wdhw ḥᶜ.ti hr tpy ht*, “while she has offering tables prepared, standing ready for the start of the meal.”
- ¹²⁷ Stela New York MMA 35.7.55: Hayes 1947.
- ¹²⁸ A clear example of this rendering of *pr* appears in *Coffin Text* 35, discussed in the previous paragraph. In that passage the son is meant to perform an invocation offering at his father’s tomb (CT I 129d–g [35]). The term *pr* is sometimes used in conjunction with *nḫḫ* (“eternity”), which makes this meaning of tomb even more explicit. In his self-presentation inscription at Beni Hasan, Khnumhotep II mentions how his father built and decorated a beautiful tomb where his name will be remembered *hr is=f n hrt-nṯr m pr=f mnḫ n nḫḫ st=f n dt*, “at his tomb of the necropolis, in his excellent house of eternity, his place of everlastingness.” See columns 180–182 of the so-called Great Inscription at the tomb of Khnumhotep II (tomb 3), Newberry 1893, 65, pl. xxvi.
- ¹²⁹ Perhaps some of the better-known attestations of this usage are to be found in the early Middle Kingdom letters of Heqanakht, in which he often refers to all the members of his household by employing *pr* as a collective noun. For example, see letter 2, rto 25 (= Papyrus New York MMA 22.3.517): *mṯn pr r-ḡr=f m-mitt hrḏw=i*, “look, the *pr* in its entirety is like my children.” See Allen 2002, 7, 17, pls. 10, 30–31.
- ¹³⁰ Papyrus Prisse 7,10–8,2: Žába 1956, 31–32, nos 197–199 and 202–205. Another version of this text includes two extra lines (nos 200 and 201) describing further qualities of the son: he should be attentive to his father’s advice, and take care of domestic matters. This passage is also analyzed in relation to the paterno-filial relationship in Nyord Forthcoming b.
- ¹³¹ Other literary texts in ancient Egypt also explore the latent tension between expected behaviour of relatives and genealogical kinship as a narrative *topos*, such as the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* or the *Tale of the Two Brothers* (see Pehal Forthcoming).
- ¹³² Sánchez Casado 2017, 984.
- ¹³³ Russo 2007, 205.
- ¹³⁴ Willems 2001, 359.
- ¹³⁵ CT I 128b [34]; Willems 2001, 285–286. I adopt here the reading of the phrase *im=i* as “who I am” following Willems 2001, n. [138].
- ¹³⁶ Willems 2001, 291–292.
- ¹³⁷ On *wndwt* as a term used for a group of dependants including family members, see Franke 1983, 289–295; Olabarria Forthcoming a, chapter 3.
- ¹³⁸ CT VI 333m [701]. See Nyord Forthcoming a, n. [210].
- ¹³⁹ See stela New York MMA 57.95: Adela Oppenheim et al. (eds.) 2015, 58–60, no. 10.
- ¹⁴⁰ See stela Louvre C 167: Simpson 1974, pl. 10 (ANOC 4.1).
- ¹⁴¹ Harrington 2016.
- ¹⁴² See stelae Louvre C 16, C 17 and C 18: Simpson 1974, pls. 70–71 (ANOC 52.1, 52.2 and 52.3); Oppenheim et al. (eds.) 2015, 260–261, no. 195.
- ¹⁴³ Stela MFA 2015.2159: Clère 1985.
- ¹⁴⁴ Stela Turin Cat. 1613: Rosati Castellucci 1988, 113.

- ¹⁴⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Olabarria Forthcoming a, chapter 7.
- ¹⁴⁶ Gardiner and Sethe 1928, pls. ii–iii; Donnat Beauquier 2014, 35–41.
- ¹⁴⁷ *CT I*, 166a–168c [39]; Willems 2001, 330–44; see Nyord Forthcoming a, section 2c.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Urk. I*, 189,14 and 190,10.
- ¹⁴⁹ For a detailed study of these documents, see Allen 2002; for the implications of redistribution of rations in group formation, see Olabarria Forthcoming a, chapter 4.
- ¹⁵⁰ *CT IV*, 88b–c [313].
- ¹⁵¹ Papyrus Prisse 7,2: Žába 1956, 37, nos 139–140.
- ¹⁵² Nyord Forthcoming a, section 1d.
- ¹⁵³ Papyrus Prisse 11,3: Žába 1956, 43, nos 344.
- ¹⁵⁴ Lichtheim 1988, 6–7.
- ¹⁵⁵ Simpson 2001.
- ¹⁵⁶ Pestman 1961, esp. 37–50.
- ¹⁵⁷ Pestman 1961, 43; see also Eyre 2007, 234.
- ¹⁵⁸ Baer 1966.
- ¹⁵⁹ Johnson 1994.
- ¹⁶⁰ All these ideas are further developed in Olabarria Forthcoming a, chapter 4.