



## REVIEW

### **“PRAYER AND POWER”: PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE GOD’S WIVES OF AMUN IN EGYPT DURING THE FIRST MILLENNIUM BC**

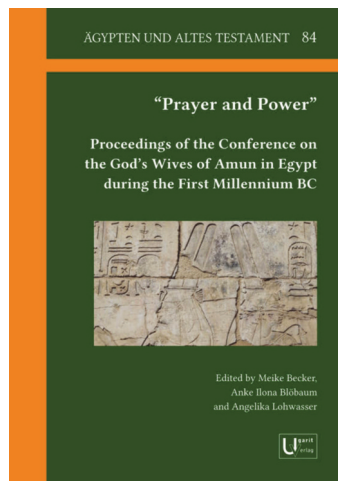
edited by M. Becker, A. I. Blöbaum, and A. Lohwasser  
Ugarit Verlag, Münster, 2017

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In June of 2015, scholars convened at the University of Münster for a conference entitled “Prayer and Power: The God’s Wives of Amun in Egypt during the First Millennium BC.” The published proceedings of that meeting are an impressive balance of chronological scope and thematic coherence. Early chapters address the theological basis of centralized feminine power at the end of the New Kingdom (El Hawary) and its political manifestations in the Third Intermediate Period (Becker, Meffre, Jurman), leading to several

contributions examining from documentary, art historical, and architectural perspectives the heyday of the God’s Wives during the Twenty-third, Twenty-fifth, and Twenty-sixth Dynasties (Ayad, Morkot, Lohwasser, Aufderhaar, Koch, and Ayad again, followed by Blöbaum, Hallmann, and Perdu). The result is a volume offering many new interpretations, some useful synopses of earlier research, and a productive dialogue between multiple chapters of the book.

The novelty of *Prayer and Power* stems in part from its timeliness, because recent publications have prompted Egyptologists to revisit fundamental aspects of the prosopography, chronology, and



political geography of the ninth through seventh centuries BCE. Joining Perdu’s 2010 study of Karnak Chapel J with his own examination of the same monument, Jurman now proposes that an unfinished female figure shown in relief with Osorkon II and oriented toward the interior of the chapel may depict the God’s Wife Karomama G as female agent of dynastic legitimacy and thus “a true precursor of Shepenwepet I” (pp. 80–81). Likewise, Payraudeau’s new reading of Kashta’s prenomen on a stela fragment from Karnak, combined with his and Meffre’s

retribution of three other monuments to Takeloth F, leads Meffre in this volume to downgrade the territorial extent of Osorkon III’s dominion (p. 48). By contrast, some of the novelty of Morkot’s chapter derives instead from his *rejection* of new interpretations: at a time when scholars have become increasingly open to placing Shabatako’s reign before that of Shabako, Morkot cautions that “a more detailed knowledge of the Libyan dynasts and Theban officials,” particularly from “the work of Nigel Strudwick, and of Elena Pischikova and their teams,” may undermine the newly devised chronology of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty (p. 108). A fuller exposition of this critique would be a most

welcome contribution from Morkot in the future. The Münster proceedings close with Perdu's thorough analysis of previously neglected evidence for theogamy beyond Thebes: the ushabti of Merytnebes, a daughter of Psamtik II and God's Wife of Heryshef at Herakleopolis (pp. 223–243).

*Prayer and Power* is just as innovative when reassessing more familiar evidence and much older interpretations. Blöbaum's contribution generates profound new political insight through a close structural analysis of the Nitocris Adoption Stela, a text that had already been scrutinized by Egyptologists for more than a century; Blöbaum demonstrates that the stela can be understood not merely as an account of the Saïte annexation of Upper Egypt, but equally as a statement of Psamtik I's unification of Lower Egypt (pp. 183–204). Lohwasser's essay merits similar commendation for proposing solutions to longstanding debates within the discipline. Firstly, she suggests that the Kushite kings may have followed in Egypt an Egyptian tradition of appointing their daughters to office, while retaining in Kush a Kushite practice of appointing their sisters—albeit there only as priestesses, not as God's Wives (p. 126). Secondly, Lohwasser highlights a pattern in the *damnatio memoriae* of Twenty-fifth Dynasty monuments in Egypt: later dynasties erased the recognizably Kushite names of Kushite kings in most contexts of public display, while often sparing those same names upon small objects or upon the hidden back pillars of large statuary; the *Egyptian* names of Kushite royals like Amenirdis I and Shepenwepet II were simultaneously exempted from *damnatio memoriae* regardless of location, because “it was their Egyptianess [*sic*] which saved them from annihilation” (p. 131). While these principles cannot be expected to account for every single example of erasure,<sup>1</sup> they do yield a coherent explanation of most known cases.

Yet Lohwasser's most brilliant contribution is arguably her analysis of the *sn.t nsw dw<sup>3</sup>.t ntr n Imn-R<sup>c</sup> nsw ntr.w n w<sup>3</sup>s.t* whose name was erased from the list of Aspelta's ancestresses upon his Enthronement Stela. In 2015, I critiqued the popular identification of this woman as Amenirdis II, because no monument titles the latter as *dw<sup>3</sup>.t ntr*, and because a statuette in Hannover credits Amenirdis II with no position higher than that of “Great Chantress of the Residence of Amun”; I therefore postulated the *dw<sup>3</sup>.t ntr* Shepenwepet II as the erased name upon Aspelta's stela.<sup>2</sup> Lohwasser's new analysis concurs

that Amenirdis II is an “impossible candidate” (p. 132),<sup>3</sup> but she then perceptively identifies key details of the stela that I and others had overlooked: the phrase *dw<sup>3</sup>.t ntr* is written on the stela with an orthography characteristic of the Divine Adoratrice's *deputy*, but never of the Divine Adoratrice herself, and its specific extension on Aspelta's stela with *W<sup>3</sup>s.t*, “Thebes” (rather than *Ip.t-sw.t*, “Karnak”), is nowhere attested in the titularies of the God's Wives. In light of these discrepancies, Lohwasser proposes that Aspelta's ancestress was a mere priestess, a Kushite worshipper of the god (*dw<sup>3</sup>.t ntr*) in Thebes, but not the more prominent Divine Adoratrice and God's Wife at Karnak (p. 129). I would like to offer here one additional reason to favor Lohwasser's new explanation over the one that I suggested in 2015. My hypothesis that Aspelta had named Shepenwepet II as an ancestress was motivated in part by an examination of James Van Rensselaer's photographs of Nitocris I's unpublished sarcophagus, one of which seemed to confirm Gauthier's transcription of the surprising title *hm.t nsw* for Shepenwepet II upon that monument;<sup>4</sup> if she were described even this once as a “king's wife,” I reasoned, then her celibacy should not be assumed. However, an unpublished photograph of the same sarcophagus taken in 2015 by Claus Jurman at closer range from an oblique angle (Fig. 1) clearly reveals that the marks that I (and presumably Gauthier) mistook for the lower leaves of a sedge plant (M 23) are nothing more than flecks in the granite at the base of a different vertical hieroglyph (the folded cloth: S 29), and the horizontal line that Gauthier and I both read as a bolt-*s* beneath the vulture (G 14) is simply an elongation of the bird's forward foot.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, I no longer see any reason to entertain the title of *hm.t nsw* for Shepenwepet II, and I encourage readers to consider Lohwasser's new explanation of Aspelta's genealogy as an alternative quite superior to my own.

Beyond its many novel interpretations, *Prayer and Power* also provides useful synopses of earlier research. Becker's essay places the God's Wife of Amun within a broader context of female influence in the early Third Intermediate Period by examining the published evidence for a group of women who “seem to be much more influential than the GWAs” during the Twenty-first Dynasty—namely, the wives of the High Priest of Amun in Thebes (p. 21). After weighing the possibility of Ramesside influence against ethnographic accounts of modern Tuareg women, Becker concludes that “the Libyan cultural

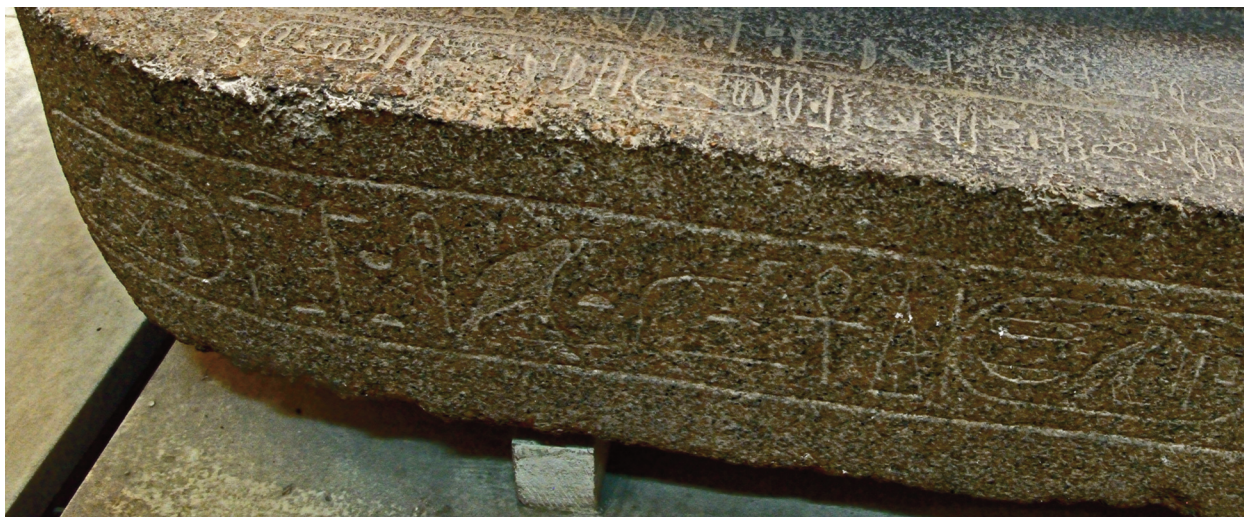


FIGURE 1: Detail of Nitocris I's sarcophagus (Cairo TR 6/2/21/1) (photograph courtesy of Claus Jurman; used with permission of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo).

influence on the status of women could be the crucial point in the development of the office of the GWA" (p. 41). Ayad (pp. 89–106) gives an overview of the principal scholarly debates about the God's Wives at the height of their power—the possibility that they employed their own regnal dates, the disputed mechanism of their adoption, the political significance of their participation in royal rituals, and the question of their relationship to the High Priesthood of Amun, while Morkot (pp. 107–119) approaches many of the same questions from the vantage point of distinctly chronological debates and the related problem of artistic "archaism." Aufderhaar contributes an art historical and inscriptional study of two sphinxes of Shepenwepet II and their known comparanda, proposing that these served to "regenerate her own—sacral—rulership parallel to the kingship of Taharqa" (p. 145). An essay by Koch reaffirms in the light of recent research a theory that she presented first at a conference in 2009 and then published in 2012: that the chapels of the God's Wives at Medinet Habu were not burial places but rather "temples-of-millions-of-years or memorial chapels... to host a statue-cult of the deceased God's Wife as well as to affirm the role of the officiating God's Wife as the highest representative of the king in Thebes" (p. 162). Koch's analysis of the Medinet Habu chapels is followed by a second chapter from Ayad focusing specifically upon the chapel dedicated to Amenirdis

I: Ayad distills into fifteen pages (pp. 167–181) the main insights of her widely-consulted 2003 dissertation analyzing the monument's textual content, orientation, accompanying scenes, and architectural layout. Hallmann's chapter should likewise prove invaluable to scholars of the period, as she clarifies art historical and chronological patterns across a varied and complex array of images depicting Ankhnesneferibre in the Osiris chapels at Karnak (pp. 205–222). The essay by Hallmann is also a high point for one of the book's particular strengths: several chapters provide rarely seen images (e.g., Meffre p. 52, Jurman p. 81, Hallmann pp. 206–217, Perdu pp. 223, 238), and others integrate lucid charts that synthesize data (Becker pp. 23–35, Jurman p. 64) and diagram important sequences and relationships (Meffre p. 55, Jurman pp. 72–74, Ayad p. 176, Blöbaum pp. 184–198).

A further achievement of the volume is its dialogic quality: many authors engage each other's contributions directly in a manner that enriches the whole. Thus, Becker draws parallels between the power exercised by Libyan women and Lohwasser's 2001 theory of gender complementarity in Napatan Kush: "Kingship is impossible without queenship" (p. 40). Ayad likewise invokes Lohwasser's proposal that the prominence of the God's Wife during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty may have been "an attempt to express Kushite queenship ideology in a manner acceptable to Egyptians" (p. 96). In her subsequent



essay on the Medinet Habu chapels, Ayad both acknowledges the thesis of Koch's chapter and considers its implications for her own analysis (p. 171). Only a few opportunities for such dialogue are missed in the volume: readers would do well to consult Meffre's (p. 48) and Lohwasser's (p. 125) discussions as a possible counterweight to Ayad's assertion that "there is no evidence for Kashta ever being in Egypt past Elephantine and, elsewhere, his name appears only in the filiation of his children" (p. 97). Similarly, Morkot's suggestion that the *dw<sup>3</sup>.t ntr* in Aspelta's genealogy "can only be Amenirdis (II)" (p. 114) should be compared to Lohwasser's analysis in the chapter that immediately follows (pp. 128, 132).

A collection of so many varied perspectives cannot reasonably be expected to deliver an overarching thesis about the God's Wives of Amun, but surprisingly one is attempted in the final sentence of the introductory chapter: "Their political role seems to have been passive, rather than active," as it "was probably only the high-ranking (male) officials who *actually exercised power*" (p. 5 emphasis added, with echoes on p. 3 and Morkot's p. 113). Following the work of Edwards, Fuller, and ultimately Geertz, I have taken a different view of the matter in my 2014 book on the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, suggesting that the distinction between ritual power and "actual" power is often illusory in a governmental system of ritual suzerainty, because the actions of a high priestess may prove no less effective than those of a bureaucrat in securing the allegiance of people and mobilizing their labor, expertise, and material resources for such varied purposes as a mining expedition to the Wadi Gasus, construction projects at Karnak and Medinet Habu, or even state-sponsored military action at Hermopolis, Herakleopolis, Memphis, and Eltekeh.<sup>6</sup> Yet the distance between my explanation and the one offered in this book's introduction is at least partly

semantic: there seems to be a consensus that the God's Wives exercised some meaningful form of power, but we disagree over what adjectives would best describe it. Regardless of the terminology used, this volume will advance the conversation significantly.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> E.g., Cairo CG 42203 in Georges Legrain, *Statues et statuettes de rois et de particuliers*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1925), 11–12, pl. VI.
- <sup>2</sup> Jeremy Pope, "Shepenwepet II and the Kingdom of Kush," in Kara Cooney and Richard Jasnow (eds.), *Joyful in Thebes: Egyptological Studies in Honor of Betsy Bryan* (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2015), 357–364.
- <sup>3</sup> It is therefore debatable whether Amenirdis II's name should be transcribed in a cartouche (cf. p. 122 Fig. 1), as it was not written with one upon surviving monuments—e.g., Cairo JE 36327, l. 16, in Ricardo A. Caminos, "Nitocris Adoption Stela," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 50 (1964): pl. IX.
- <sup>4</sup> Inv. Cairo TN 6/2/21/1 in Henri Gauthier, *Le livre des rois d'Égypte*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1915), 85 M.a.
- <sup>5</sup> See now Carola Koch, "The Sarcophagus of Nitocris (Inv. Cairo TN 6/2/21/1): Further Considerations about the God's Wives' Burial Places," in Alessia Amenta and Hélène Guichard (eds.), *Proceedings of the First Vatican Coffin Conference, 19–22 June 2013* (Vatican: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2017), 231–248 esp. 236, *sans* detailed photograph.
- <sup>6</sup> Jeremy Pope, *The Double Kingdom under Taharqa: Studies in the History of Kush and Egypt c. 690–664 BC* (Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill, 2014), 291.