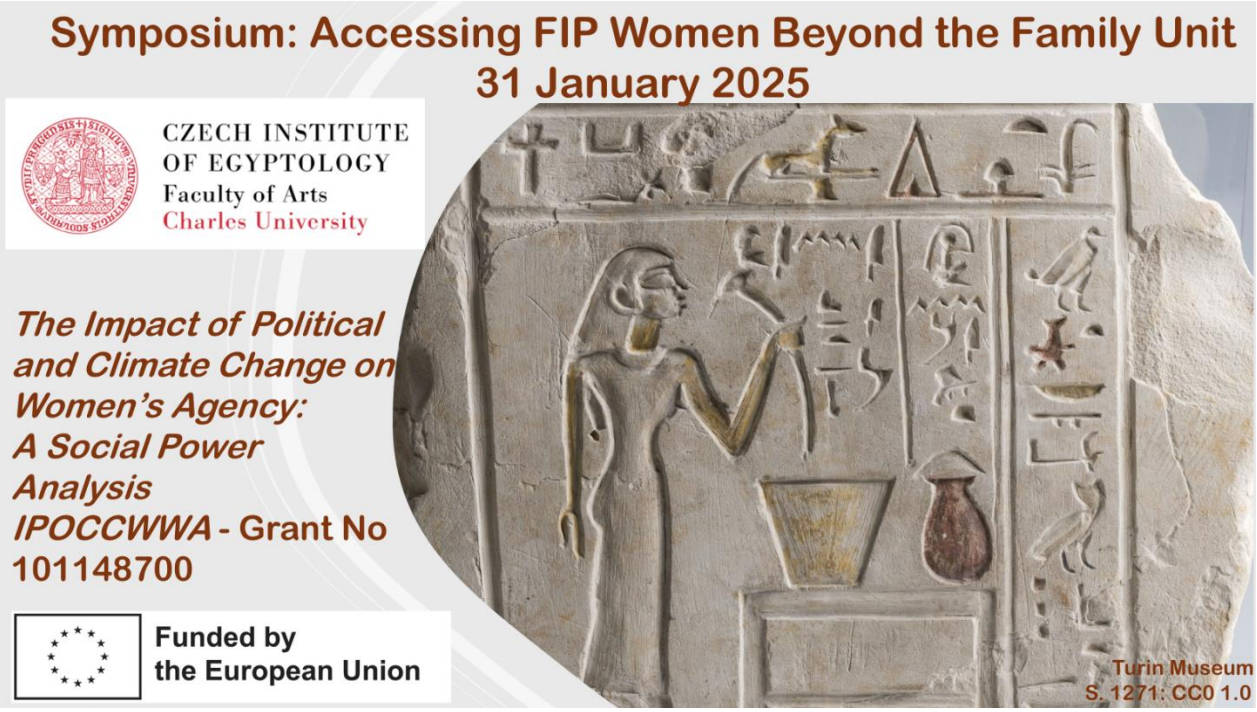
Accessing FIP Women Beyond the Family Unit

International Symposium

Czech Institute of Egyptology, Charles University

Prague – January 31, 2025

Book of Abstracts



Funded by
the European Union

Prof. Dr. Miroslav Bárta

Czech Institute of Egyptology, Director of the Abusir mission, Charles University

Opening Keynote Lecture:

Caught in between: gender, environment, and complexity change at the end of the Sixth Dynasty

There would be no more significant mistake than to think that the Old Kingdom of the Third - Sixth Dynasties can be characterised as a cultural and political continuum. Quite on the contrary, it was a period marked by sudden and profound changes that impacted all segments of the society. It was the events and processes that started at the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty that essentially marked the second half of the Old Kingdom. Women, especially high status women, started to exert both formal and informal influence and play a vital role in the politics inside the White Walls. During the talk I shall provide several examples from the Abusir pyramid field and North Saqqara excavation projects illustrating this particular dynamics.

Dr. Sue Kelly

Marie Curie Postdoc Fellow, Czech Institute of Egyptology, Charles University

Accessing FIP Women Beyond the Family Unit

Departing from methodologies that often analyse women in conjunction with their husbands' social standing and titles, my research prioritises individual women's agency and engagement, independent of their family units and social classes. While my non-traditional interdisciplinary approach proved successful in early Egyptian history; the purpose of this paper is to present this detailed methodology employed in my research on the FIP women in their distinct historical context and solicit feedback from my distinguished colleagues, as well as our learned audience. This

Funded by
the European Union

collaborative feedback will be invaluable in identifying potential risks and challenges associated with this approach. This symposium aims to foster interdisciplinary collaboration between Egyptologists and women's and gender studies scholars, facilitating the cross-pollination of ideas, methods, and data that will inform my project. This feedback will be instrumental in improving the project's success in developing a more nuanced understanding of FIP women, providing opportunities for knowledge exchange, constructive conversations, and helpful suggestions.

Dr. Romane Betbeze
Alexander von Humboldt Post-doc Fellow, Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte Nordostafrikas, Institut für Archäologie, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

"She who takes care of the orphan": Some Remarks on Epithets of Women from the Sixth Dynasty to the FIP

A significant number of autonomous funerary monuments or objects belonging to women are known for the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period. However, very few of them are inscribed with so-called autobiographical texts or related formulas. Building up from a unique epithet found on one of these objects – the false-door of Nebet, in Saqqara – describing its female owner as "she who takes care of the orphan" (*smt-jb nmḥw*), this presentation aims to investigate the textual decorum associated to women in such periods, and to question the implications of this decorum when trying to assess their social agency. It will therefore be highlighted that such epithet is directly correlated with autobiographical *topoi* from the end of the 6th dynasty and FIP, expressing the contemporary elite ideal of care towards powerless people. Nevertheless, some specificities of this false-door (such as the choice of the word "orphan" (*nmḥw*)) and of other texts belonging to female members of the elite seem to constitute gendered adaptations based on autobiographies created for and by elite men. This presentation will thus examine to what extent and how the (yet very limited) access of elite women to such

Funded by
the European Union

prestigious textual resources underscores their ability to achieve social power in OK and FIP Ancient Egypt.

Prof. Dr. Danijela Stefanović

Professor of Egyptology / Ancient History, University of Belgrade

The Micro-Network of the Lady *dmj-sn* (Cairo CG 1651, CG 1654, and Kraków MNK-XI-999)

This paper explores the micro-network of lady *dmj-sn* through the analysis of three stelae (Cairo CG 1651, CG 1654, and Kraków MNK-XI-999), reconstructing three generations of two interconnected families during the First Intermediate Period. By utilizing prosopographic data—relational links between individuals—the study highlights the significance of female lineage and social networks of non-elite women. By tracing *dmj-sn*'s familial ties and titles, the research provides insights into the broader social framework of the period, demonstrating how microhistory can illuminate overlooked aspects of ancient Egyptian society, particularly the dynamics of women's networks and their impact on historical narratives.

Dr. Uroš Matic

Assistant Professor, Institute for Ancient History and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, University of Innsbruck

On the Frail and the Lame: Gender and Violence in First Intermediate Period Egypt

The intricate intersection of gender with various forms of violence—physical, symbolic, and structural—has attracted increasing scholarly attention in studies of past societies. Rather than focusing exclusively on physical evidence of violence when analyzing gender-based power asymmetries, recent works emphasize that physical traces of violence on human remains represent only the "tip of the iceberg" of broader issues. Furthermore, normative ideologies of asymmetrical gender-based power relations can also shape frameworks of violence and war. This

Funded by
the European Union

paper explores the intersection of gender and violence in First Intermediate Period Egypt by combining textual, iconographic, and bioarchaeological evidence. Bearing in mind that this period was marked by the political fragmentation of Egypt, with several competing regional powers engaged in open conflicts, there is general scholarly consensus that violence was endemic. However, this question has never been examined from a gender perspective, leaving it unclear whether the new political reality had any impact on gender relations and identities.

This paper draws on seminal theoretical works on symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu, structural violence by Johan Galtung and recent works of Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler and Jasbir Puar, rarely considered in Egyptology. It analyses physical evidence for gender-based asymmetries of power, which are not necessarily fully visible in the bioarchaeological record. Furthermore, the paper examines texts and images for the role of violence in constructing elite normative masculinity and the reliance of this construct on the feminization and debilitation of enemies.

Dr Georgia Barker

Curator: Egyptian Archaeology, Department of Egypt and Sudan, British Museum

Elite Military Representations from the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom and their Historical Significance

Representations of the military provide important sources of evidence for our understanding of how the instability of the civil war impacted the values and priorities of the ruling elite. This paper examines all of the known elite military wall scenes and funerary models from the First Intermediate Period and early Middle Kingdom by investigating their owners, content and locations in the tomb. Through an innovative comparative analysis, this paper identifies, for the first time, the distinguishing features between the two media in their portrayal of the military. It proposes reasons for their distinctive representations and what stimulated the appearance of the military theme among funerary models. By considering these artistic developments alongside the changing historical

Funded by
the European Union

circumstances, the analysis reveals that a period of instability in society impacted the ruling elite's preparation for the afterlife, increasing the desire to publicly promote their military leadership and to maintain eternal access to protection.

Reinert Skumsnes

Associate Professor, UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Center for Women's and Gender Research

Egyptology, feminist theory and alternative body worlds

This paper reflects on some of the key findings from the postdoctoral project *EgFem—Egyptology, feminist theory and alternative worlds: body/sex/gender in New Kingdom Egypt, and their affective environments*. It examines the interdisciplinary potential between Egyptology and feminist theory: instead of being concerned with ready-made models, with social constructions (culture) as opposed to a biological baseline (nature), what came first, and what is the more appropriate of the concepts body, sex and gender, the concern of this paper is to unsettle what we think we know. Through case studies of the Turin satirical-erotic papyrus and the Middle and New Kingdom healing texts, this paper explores how historical bodies emerge, are shaped and conceptualized. The numerous interpretations reveal the inextricably interwoven relation between frontal and lateral comparisons, between source and original context (foreground relations), reconstructions, later beholders, and their multiple contexts and perspectives (background relations), in the end offering novel understandings of historical bodies, mundane resistance and alternative body worlds.

Assoc. Professor Antonio Morales

Universidad de Alcalá, Director of the Middle Kingdom Theban Project

Divine service, harem or coterie? Analyzing models of female agency in Mentuhotep II's mortuary complex

Funded by
the European Union

The excavations conducted at Deir el-Bahari by Édouard Naville (1903-1907) and Herbert E. Winlock (1920-1931) revealed the presence of an exceptional assemblage of female burials in the funerary temple of Mentuhotep II. These burials were disposed in four different clusters, namely i) the rear area of the upper colonnaded hall; ii) the western wall of the main colonnaded hall; iii) the northern extension of the same section; and iv) the northern triangular court. In addition, another female burial was discovered in a lavish rock-cut tomb over the limits of the temple northern precinct. Altogether, the king's funerary complex sheltered a company of around thirty women whose interments (i.e., tomb structure, funerary equipment, body treatment) denote different origins, roles, and status. In the Egyptological literature, some of these women were accurately presented as "royal wives" (*ḥmt-nswt*), such as Neferu and Tem. Regarding the other individuals, however, scholars did not agree on their status, function, and *raison-d'etrê* for the privilege of accompanying the deceased king. Hence, the existence of multiple titles related to these women (*ḥmt-nṯr ḥwt-ḥr, ḫkrt-nswt wʿtt, ḥnwt ḥmwt*) has encouraged Egyptologists to propose over the years numerous interpretations and translations, including "concubine", "musician", "priestess", "cultic wife", and even "(unchosen) candidate for royal marriage".

In this presentation, after summarising previous investigations on the various groups of women found in the temple (i.e. Winlock, Ward, Gillen, Sabbahy, Roehrig), the paper shall focus on new avenues of research by reassessing the role of these female members of the elite. Thus, it aims at presenting an elaborated interpretation that takes into consideration not only the complex dynamics of court politics and religion, but also the history of the local cults in the area, especially the patronage of Hathor therein. The existence of a revered worship to the goddess in this particular quarter of Western Thebes and the incorporation of traditional aspects of this cult into Mentuhotep's ideological apparatus should contribute to the clarification of the various models of agency attested here. Moreover, it should help to verify the inconsistency of the interpretations that did

Funded by
the European Union

not single out roles, ties, and duties, and tended to identify all individuals as part of the same body.

Dr. Věra Nováková

Czech Institute of Egyptology

Households and the representation of women within it in the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period

The Egyptian household during the Late Old Kingdom consisted of a few individuals but also of several dozen, mainly depending on the social status of the head of the family. From a primary source for this period that depicts family members, i.e. the tomb iconography, it is possible to ascertain the professions of individuals according to the titles, which are sometimes recorded in front of the recorded figures. The scenes in the tombs also present an interesting, if only partial, view of Egyptian society, in terms of the gender representation of the minor figures. Leaving aside wives and other family members, women are significantly underrepresented in tomb decoration.

The Ph.D. thesis of the present author focused on the development of Egyptian household during the Old Kingdom, with an emphasis put on the households of outstanding Egyptian officials and their male members. On the contrary, this paper emphasizes the female members of the households. It examines the titles attached to female figures, the way how women were depicted in the tomb iconography, and what this indicates about their social status. The talk will also reflect on the ratio of male and female members and discuss the typical occupations of each gender. This will be demonstrated in selected tombs of the Late Old Kingdom, with overlap into the First Intermediate Period.

Funded by
the European Union

Closing Keynote Address:

Mariam F. Ayad

First Intermediate Period Women – A Closer Look

The First Intermediate Period (FIP) is a probably one of the most challenging periods of Egyptian history to study and explain. The evidence is fragmented and is often poorly preserved. It defies linear narratives. It is little wonder then that scholarship on the FIP is characterized by intense debates and multiple competing theories. Yet, despite having archaeological and epigraphic evidence of women from the FIP, almost missing from all the discussions surrounding that period are the women who lived during this turbulent and obscure period. The wives, daughters, and other female members of the household staff feature very prominently in the Beni Hassan FIP tombs, for instance. This paper aims to outline the evidence we do have of FIP women as it interrogates the conventional categories of royal/elite/non-elite as they apply to the women of that period. It also highlights some of the more glaring examples of scholarly bias as it seeks to (re-)evaluate these women's roles and assess the extent of their social power and influence.

Funded by
the European Union