

2021

A FEMALE SCRIBE IN THE TWENTY SIXTH DYNASTY [IRETRAU]

Heba Maher

Lecturer at faculty of Arts, Mansoura University, Egypt., hebamahe45@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/jguaa>



Part of the [History Commons](#), and the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)


Recommended Citation

Maher, Heba (2021) "A FEMALE SCRIBE IN THE TWENTY SIXTH DYNASTY [IRETRAU]," *Journal of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists*: Vol. 6: Iss. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/jguaa/vol6/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Arab Journals Platform. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists* by an authorized editor. The journal is hosted on [Digital Commons](#), an Elsevier platform. For more information, please contact rakan@aar.edu.jo, marah@aar.edu.jo, u.murad@aar.edu.jo. Published by Arab Journals Platform, 2021.

A FEMALE SCRIBE IN THE TWENTY-SIXTH DYNASTY

[IRETRAU] 

By


Heba Maher Mahmoud

Lecturer at Faculty of Arts, Mansoura University, Egypt

ABSTRACT

This research studies Iretrau's '*ss-shm.t*', which was mentioned several times in her tomb. This is a clear reference to literacy. It is notable that Iretrau and her position as a scribe is one of the most complicated issues, due to the lack of texts written by her as a male scribe, as well as the absence of writing tools in her tomb. However, there are many other reasons for looking at Iretrau as a literate woman who held a scribal position with actual duties according to previous indications. The fact that Iretrau used the very plain title of scribe suggests that she was not involved directly in the administration of the institution or assigned certain tasks, such as holding a position in a specific office or bureau. She

depended solely on her professional status as a Scribe  and a Chief Attendant of the

God's Wife of Amen  '*sms.t 3.t n dw3t ntr*'. This reflects her role as the wife of a vizier and mother of a vizier. Undoubtedly, this independence was due to the power of the God's wife of Amun institution, which was also reflected. Iretrau seemed to be a great change-maker in the administration system, simply by being a female scribe, because the power structure of ancient Egypt was dominated by men entirely, whereas women were not allowed to be part of the governmental bodies or to occupy any governmental positions. On the contrary, Iretrau broke these rules by working outdoors, something which was not applicable to non-royal women. Iretrau's status as a Female Scribe and a Chief attendant was probably similar to the great Stewards of the God's Wife of Amen. Proof of this is the fact that she was buried in an exclusive tomb in Asasif like the great Stewards of the God's Wife of Amen. It is worth questioning the reason why Iretrau does not appear as a scribe in her tomb the same way the male scribes appear in their tombs. Could it be that the position of the male scribe was not appropriate for her, but at least it is imperative to see the tools of a scribe in her tomb, while countless scenes show male Scribe at work!

KEYWORDS: Iretrau, Naaes, Female Scribe, Elite, Psamtichus I, Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, Education, Female Literacy, Gender, TT 390.



I. INTRODUCTION

Titles and what they indicate about roles and status in ancient Egypt remain problematic to the modern scholar. Scholars translate the titles, but rarely have a detailed understanding of the functions of these titles, especially in the case of women. As indicated by titles, probable occupations are too often dismissed as honorific or purely ceremonial, not entailing any real responsibilities¹. Some occupations, such as the military, were only for men. Both women and men could be cultic singers, although women more often performed this role².

The occupation of a Scribe was one of the most important occupations in ancient Egypt. Those people who had successfully taken up the arduous task of learning to read and write. This was considered an elite class that has been instrumental in Egypt, especially when it came to the successful execution of their many famous monumental building projects. Scribes played a central role in the Egyptian administration and were universally held in high regard³.

There were occasional female scribes and administrators⁴, but there are few discussions regarding whether a female scribe had responsibilities different from those of a male scribe⁵. Also, there are far fewer indications of women participating in physical activity than showing men at work and play. While this may or may not mean that there were fewer activities in which women participated, it does suggest that the men had control over such things as tomb paintings, writing and so on⁶.

In the Late Periods, two women appeared as female scribes; «Iretrau» is referred to unambiguously as a female scribe in Twenty-Sixth Dynasty⁷. There was another woman called «Naaes» who bears the office of scribe on her stone stela provenance to Dra Abu'l-Naga. Unfortunately, the inscription is not clear but, the word «scribe» is legible⁸.

This research examines the case of «Iretrau» «the female scribe in Twenty-Sixth Dynasty», and plans to study the following:

- Iretrau's Identity.
- Her education; how she learned the basics of the scribal occupation?
- How she achieved this position in Thebes?
- Accepting her as a scribe with actual duties.

¹LI 2010: 26.

²MATIĆ 2016: 175.

³LOON 2014: 7.

⁴MATIĆ 2016: 175.

⁵SABBAHY 2013: 2.

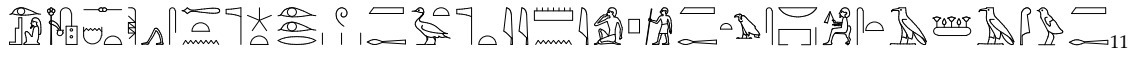
⁶BRIAN 1976: 5.

⁷HANSEN 1940: 38; ROBINS 1993: 111, 113; LI 2010: 36; BRUNNER 2011: 80; LI, 2017: 37.

⁸LI 2010: 36; LI 2017: 37-38.

II. IRETRAU'S IDENTITY

She has been identified as the mother of «Nespakashuty D», who was the vizier of «Psamtichus I», as was his father⁹, according to the texts in her tomb, her parents were the Divine Father «Ipwer» and «Tashaiu»¹⁰:



Wsir sš shm.t šms.t ʿ3.t n dw3.t ntr Ir-t-ir-w m3ʿ.t hrw s3.t it-ntr (n) Imn Ip-wr m3ʿ.t hrw mwt.s nb.t pr šps.t t3š-iw m3ʿ.t hrw.

[The deceased, Female Scribe, Chief Attendant of Divine Wife «Iretrau», Justified, Daughter of Divine Father of Amun «Ipwer» Justified, her mother, Mistress of the House, Noblewoman, «Tashaiu», Justified]¹³.

III. IRETRAU AS A FEMALE SCRIBE «'sš shm.t'» AND HER EDUCATION

Iretrau's title of the scribe is mentioned numerous times in her tomb¹⁴, which means that Iretrau appeared as a shred of clear evidence for female literacy¹⁵. She probably arrived at Thebes in 656 BC, when Nitocris was installed in her Theban office¹⁶; she was probably associated with the God's Wife of Amun-Re and held true bureaucratic responsibilities¹⁷.

However, we must wonder about her education and how she learned the basics of the scribal occupation, especially since it is very rare to find female scribes throughout ancient Egyptian history. However, we cannot decide that women in ancient Egypt were illiterate, especially in cases of queens who had political roles, God's Wives, female priests, and the female goddess «Seshat», goddess of writing, who held the title of female scribe¹⁸. The ambitions of the ancient Egyptian elite for their sons centered

⁹LI 2010: 123; For the Vizier Nespakashuty, See: PISCHIKOVA 1998: 57-101.

¹⁰PM I, 440.

¹¹CHAMPOLLION 1929: 511 (A), (B); LD. vol.3, 271 N^{rs}. a, b, 272 N^r. b.

¹²PN I, 42.

¹³PM I, 440 identifies her parents as the Divine Father Ipwer and Tashaiu, citing Lepsius' description in the LD. However, there seems to be some confusion. In the published sketch in the LD. 3 (289), Iretrau seems to be the daughter of the God's Father (Divine Father) Iy (possibly read Ipwer) who was the son of the God's Father, Djedhor. Djedhor's wife was 'the Lady of the House and Noblewoman, Iretrau.' There is room for two possible translations. Then 'Jean Li' suggested that the tomb owner would be identified as the daughter of man x and woman x, in which case, Iretrau would be the daughter of Iretrau. Since PM I, 440 identifies Iretrau's mother as Tashaiu, the other Iretrau may refer to the wife of Djedhor. Thus Iretrau, the owner of TT 390, was named after her grandmother. Since this appears to be a fragment of inscription from TT390, there is no way to determine which interpretations are correct. Finally, 'Jean Li' inclined to follow Porter and Moss; LI 2010: 123 note 116.

¹⁴HANSEN 1940: 38; BRUNNER 2011: 80-81; LI 2017: 37.

¹⁵ZINN 2012: 3.

¹⁶[Http://www.southasasif.com/History-of-the-Tomb.html](http://www.southasasif.com/History-of-the-Tomb.html). Accessed April 25, 2018.

¹⁷LI 2010: 37; LI 2017: 38.

¹⁸BRUNNER 2011: 81-82. We should assume that it was certainly an extensive study to be qualified in everything. In a scene from the Eleventh Dynasty, the director of the dance appears with at least four of



around giving them proper scribal training and setting their feet on the bureaucratic ladder, the ideal being that the son should inherit the office of his father.

On the other hand, women were excluded from the official bureaucratic structure, boys were sent to school and encouraged to devote their efforts to become scribes. Since women could not join the bureaucracy, they did not need the skills of literacy, and therefore no need for formal training to them¹⁹.

Nevertheless, they may learn directly; by communicating with their parents and brothers who learned indirectly in schools.²¹ Then those daughters who grew up in literate families could pass on their knowledge to their daughters²².

In elite families, while women could never hope to hold office, they might have been able to write letters to each other, keep household and business accounts, and read or copy literacy texts²³.

There were many literate women in the ancient Egyptian civilization, although their number was much lower than literate men²⁴. For example, we have letters written by women. The earliest came from the Old Kingdom [Sixth Dynasty, Cairo Linen CG 25975] and was written about a dispute by a wife concerning her deceased husband²⁵. One Twentieth Dynasty letter tells the recipient, «and you shall see this daughter of Khonsmose and have her write a letter and send it to me». Perhaps, she really had written by her own hand²⁶. Therefore, we must assume exceptional cases of women who became qualified to be scribes, and if we apply this via Iretrau it means she learned, and became a literate woman by communicating with some member of her family, especially that she was from an elite family [a wife and a mother of viziers], which qualified her to be a female scribe in the institute of God's Wife.

her students. There is also an incomplete scene of a man, from his tomb in (Kom Al-Hisn in Delta), with ten girls. He was teaching them how to play music with a tool in each of his hands while girls held one tool, then he appeared with female singers. The matter here relates more to religious education than religious performance because, in the many pictures of the temples, no man participated as a conductor of the orchestra. These scenes were about teaching musical education See, BRUNNER 2011: 82-85, Pls. 3- 4.

¹⁹ROBINS 1993: 111.

²¹BRUNNER 2011: 85.

²²ROBINS 1993: 113.

²³ROBINS 1993: 113.

²⁴ZINN 2012: 3.

²⁵BRYAN 1984: 17–32; ZINN 2012: 3.

²⁶ROBINS 1993: 113. We cannot say if these women were really literate, and unfortunately, there is no firm evidence one way or another. No document was surely written or read directly by women.. With letters sent to and from women, we must always reckon with the possibility that they were written by a male scribe or read out by one to the recipient. In addition, the apparent exclusion of women from scribal activities in the Old Kingdom is also attested by the absence of female 'lector priests'; ROBINS 1993: 111; FISCHER 2000: 27; ZINN 2012: 3.

IV. THE COMPLICATED MATTER OF IRETRAU'S TITLE AS A SCRIBE

It is notable that discussion of Iretrau and her position as a scribe is one of the most complicated issues, especially in the absence of texts written by her like most of male scribes. However, there is abundant written and pictorial evidence for women in ancient Egypt. We can glimpse the lives of royal, noble, as well as peasant women. However, there are limitations on how clearly we can comprehend their actual status and role in ancient Egyptian society, especially since most of the pictorial evidence we have is from tombs that only royalty or nobility could afford to build. The reliefs and statuary in them show a perfect world meant for the eternal after life, not as a truly realistic depiction of their everyday or professional life²⁷.

Iretrau is not depicted or shown seated on the ground with crossed legs or one knee standing up, holding a partly unrolled papyrus²⁸. But, maybe this was not suitable for women, and that is why Iretrau was not represented in this form.

The group of literate women in ancient Egypt which Iretrau was one of them do not seem to have developed any surviving literary genres unique to themselves, such as a female equivalent to the male wisdom texts which would have advised to young women²⁹.

The exact duties of Iretrau remain unclear in the God's Wife of Amen institution, although other scribes, men as far as the evidence indicates, are known in the same institution as Scribes for the Domain of the Divine Adoratrice³⁰. In addition, other titles include: Scribe and Chamberlain, Scribe and Overseer of Chamberlains, Scribe of Documents for the domain, Temple Scribe and Seal Bearer³¹.

Since Iretrau used the very plain title of the scribe, perhaps it does indeed suggest that she was not directly involved in the administration of the institution or assigned a specific office or bureau³². There is no reason to assume that Iretrau identified herself as a scribe on her tomb. «Graefe³³» emphasized that by his suggestion: «however, that the entire administration of the god's wife of Amun institution was in the hands of men, overseen by the Great Steward of the God's Wife of Amun, there is no reason to assume, however, that the 'sš.w šhm.t' would have only acted in a private, secretarial nature for the God's Wives of Amun»³⁴.

²⁷SABBAHY 2013: 1.

²⁸ZINN 2012: 4.

²⁹ROBINS 1993: 113.

³⁰LI 2010: 37 note 32; LI 2017: 39.

³¹LI 2010: 37 note 32; LI 2017: 39.

³²LI 2010: 37 note 32; LI 2017: 39.

³³GRAEFE 1981: 117–118.

³⁴Li, LI 2010: 37; LI 2017: 38-39.



V. ACCEPTING HER AS A SCRIBE WITH REAL DUTIES

We have many reasons for accepting Iretrau as a literate woman who held a scribal occupation with actual duties according to previous indications such as:

The word «*seshet*», the feminine form of the male title «*ses*h» «scribe» was found occasionally in the Middle Kingdom. However, this form is taken by some scholars to be merely a shortened form of a female title which has been understood to mean «painter of her mouth» or «cosmetician». This interpretation would seem to be strengthened by the fact that the title is listed in association with the title of hair dresser³⁵.

Archaeologically, there are examples of female scribes known from stelae and scarabs of the Middle Kingdom³⁶. Apparently the right to use a title and a name on a scarab seal was «confined to a privileged few by virtue of their office», which suggests that, at least in the Middle Kingdom, the title of female scribe indicated actual duties rather than an honourific status³⁷.

Although, almost all bureaucrats were men in the New Kingdom, there were occasional examples of female scribes, administrators, and some women who helped their husbands³⁸. During the reign of Hatshepsut, women became increasingly active in the Theban clergy. They may also have held a scribal status indicating an administrative position³⁹.

Furthermore, visual proof of female literacy in the New Kingdom occurs since traditional scribal palettes were depicted under women's chairs or on the side of a double chair, such as TT84 [Iamnedjeh also holds a rolled papyrus], TT69 [Menna], TT162 [Kenamun], TT147 [unknown], and TT148 (Amenemope). Some women with the scribal kit under their chairs also held titles of Songstresses of Amun [*šm^cyt nt Imn*], or singers in the Amun-temple⁴⁰.

Palettes bearing the names of Maketaten and her sister Meritaten, daughters of the pharaoh Akhenaten, give the impression of being scribal rather than painting palettes due to the use of only red and black ink as well as writing pens. They might therefore indicate female literacy at least among princesses⁴¹.

Women appear to have taken on significant administrative responsibilities in Thebes by the end of the New Kingdom, as the Late Ramesside Letters, feature a number of

³⁵ROBINS 1993: 111.

³⁶ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.) 1951, *Wb.* III, 481; WARD 1986: 16-18; LI 2017: 38.

³⁷LI 2010: 37 note 31; LI 2017: 38.

³⁸ROBINS 1993: 111- 114, 116; SWEENEY 2011: 3.

³⁹LI 2010: 50.

⁴⁰LI 2010: 50, note 50; ZINN 2012: 3.

⁴¹BRUNNER 2011: 81; ZINN 2012: 3; Tools found in Tutankhamun's tomb. Unfortunately this is not a clear evidence that the princesses were good at writing, the tools are indeed used and certainly owned by them, but the usual writing tools include only the black and red ink the necessary for writing while the palette included six colors which means that it is closer to drawing than writing See, BRUNNER 2011: 81.

women who held responsibilities regarding paying and provisioning the workers of the Theban necropolis⁴².

This possibility of the existence of female scribes from the New Kingdom may offer a parallel to the appearance of female scribes during the Eighth-Sixth centuries BC. At the same time, throughout the New Kingdom and into the Third Intermediate Period there was an increased desire for women to participate in status expressions⁴³. Therefore, it is clear that ancient Egyptian women were fully capable of functioning as scribes and we may accept that Iretrau was a Female Scribe with actual duties.

VI. IRETRAU'S PREROGATIVE AS A FEMALE SCRIBE

The scribes always belonged to a privileged class, an intellectual elite. They were highly esteemed ancient papyri texts and are generally reported in modern books on life in Ancient Egypt⁴⁴. Iretrau was a unique woman because she belonged to those elite.

Iretrau seemed to be a great change in the administration, simply by being a female scribe, because as we know the power structure of ancient Egypt from the king down, was all males⁴⁵. While women could not participate in the government bureaucracy or temple administration to an appreciable extent⁴⁶, Iretrau also broke women's systemic rule by working outdoors a reversal of what we know about non-royal women. For example, one of the most common female titles is «nbt pr » «Mistress of the House»; it refers that women required to remain at home in charge of the running of household affairs. In documents and tomb scenes, women are engaged only in household duties of child-rearing and food preparation; in contrast men were engaged in activities outside the household⁴⁷.

Finally, we can imagine that Iretrau did not pay taxes depending on the definition of The «Scribe» profession that contains among others, the following statements:

⁴²WENTE 1967: 16–17; LI 2010: 37 note 29; LI 2017: 38. There is some evidence for the learning of foreign languages in New Kingdom schools, a fact that historically corresponds to the era of Egyptian imperialism and the extension of Egyptian foreign relations. This evidence, which includes, for example, lists of foreign words or names, is far from conclusive, since it shows more an acquaintance with foreign vocabulary, possibly used in Egyptian texts, rather than mastery over a foreign language. Nevertheless, the occasional use of foreign languages in Egyptian administration (as was the case, for example, at el-Amarna and the famous diplomatic correspondence in Akkadian), was surely a result of some training in foreign languages that could have taken place either in the Egyptian capital or in foreign schools. In addition to these subjects, sports, music, and other arts could have also been featured in Egyptian education. However, the evidence for the treatment of such subjects is, scarce; LAZARIDIS 2010: 6.

⁴³LI 2010: 50.

⁴⁴GOUDSMIT 1974: 78.

⁴⁵SABBAHY 2013: 1.

⁴⁶FISCHER 2000: 46.

⁴⁷GOUCHER & LE GUIN 1998: 302. Furthermore, Households were not self-sufficient. Women were responsible for supplying household needs by exchanging and selling of garden provisions, cloth, and other goods. It is likely that in managing the household economy, they could also accumulate wealth See; GOUCHER & LE GUIN 1998: 302.


«His profession was the foremost of all the professions. To practice it was an honor. The scribe did not pay taxes. He was an educated man»⁴⁸.

VII. THE REFLECTION OF HER POSITION ON HER TOMB (TT 390)

The monumental tomb of Iretrau marked one of the first instances where non-royal women had monuments on a scale never before seen in Egyptian history. TT390⁴⁹, is one of the major Late Period tombs on the west bank of Asasif⁵⁰, Iretrau belonged to a prominent Thinite family, therefore her family necropolis is located in Abydos⁵¹. By her arrival to Thebes, she had to choose a new place for her tomb. She decided on the Kushite necropolis⁵², in South Asasif on the Southside of Qurna⁵³, while few women even among the higher-ranking elite had tombs that reflected this level of personal career orientation. So Iretrau's monumentally sized tomb must be associated with her position as a Scribe and a Chief Attendant⁵⁴.

Her spacious tomb contains two pillared halls that were never finished. The walls and pillars of the halls are almost completely devoid of decoration except for some remains of paintings⁵⁵, Iretrau's position appeared in every scene; at first in the double scene on the outer lintel of the first pillared hall where the bark of Re in the center, adorned by Nitocris followed by Iretrau on the left, then Shepenwept II followed by Iretrau adoring Atum on the right.

Standards of the Western Horus, and the Benu-bird are at each end, accompanied by remains of her titles as a Scribe and a Chief Attendant of the God's Wife [FIGURE 1]:


*Wsir rh.t nsw Irt-ir-w šps.t m3̄c.t hrw s3̄.t n it-ntr (n) Imn Ip-wr m3̄c.t hrw mwt.s nb.t pr šps.t t3-šiw m3̄c.t hrw.*⁵⁶

⁴⁸GOUDSMIT 1974: 78.

⁴⁹This tomb was visited by 'J. G. Wilkinson', 'R. Hey' and 'J. Burton' in 1820, then explored and recorded by 'K. R. Lepsius' in 1840, then observed and photographed by 'D. Eigner' in 1970. It was finally rediscovered in 2001 by the South Assasif Conversation Project: PISCHIKOVA 2009: 19 note 44.

⁵⁰Asasif is a part of the Theban necropolis, situated in front of the valley of Deir el-Bahari, The royal temples of Deir el-Bahari (Mentuhotep Nebheptre, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III) rise above the plain of the Asasif valley; see, KAMPP-SEYFRIED 1999: 802; POLZ 2001: 140-142; BUDKA 2015: 111-129.

⁵¹PM I¹,440; www.Southassassif.com.

Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁵²This necropolis located in the South Asasif area, south of Qurna on the Theban West Bank, is not well-known, having been practically lost by the beginning of the Twentieth Century, and only recently re-discovered and re-explored. The importance of the necropolis for the history of private tomb decoration is difficult to overestimate, as it contains the tombs of the Mayor of Thebes and the Fourth Priest of Amun Karabasken (TT 391), and that of the First *aq*-priest of Amun, Karakhamun (TT 223). These are the earliest known Kushite decorated tombs in the Theban necropolis, built during the reign of Shabaqo to Shebitqo; PISCHIKOVA 2009: 11- 30.

⁵³www.Southassassif.com.

Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁵⁴<https://Southassif.wordpress.com/mysteries-of-irtieru>. Accessed June 12, 2018.

⁵⁵www.Southassassif.com.

Accessed April 25, 2018.

⁵⁶PM I¹, 441; LD vol. 3. 272 [a]

[Deseaced, the king's Acquaintance Iretrau, Justified, Daughter of the Divine Father of Amun Ipwer, Justified, her mother, Mistress of the House, Noblewoman, «Tashaiu», Justified]

There is an offering-text of the deceased with the name of her father on the ceiling:



hṭp di nsw wsir hnty imntt ntr ʿ3 nb ʿ3bdw di.f h3 m t m hntk n K3w ʿ3pdw n k3 n wsir šms.t ʿ3.t (n) dw3.t ntr ʿIrt-ir-w m3ʿ.t hrw s3.t it-ntr (n) Imn ʿIp-wr m3ʿ.t hrw.

[An offering which the king gives to Osiris, Foremost of the westerners, Great God, lord of Abydos, to give a thousand of bread, a thousand of beer, oxen, and birds for the spirit of the deceased, the Chief Attendant of the God's Wife Iretrau, Daughter of the Divine father of Amun Ipwer, Justified].

In addition to remains of her titles on the pillars⁵⁸, she appeared in the outer lintel of the inner room, seated alone before offerings at the left end, with her titles as a Scribe and a Chief Attendant [FIGURE 2]⁵⁹. Finally, Iretrau appeared with libation-vases before Osiris in the niche containing a false door [FIGURE 3]:



hṭp di nsw Wsir wn-nfr ntr ʿ3 hK3 dt di.f hṭpw nb(.w) n k3 n wsir sš.t šhm.t šms.t ʿ3.t (n) dw3.t ntr Nit-ʿIkt ʿnh dt s3.t nsw nb t3wy Psmṯk m3ʿ.t hrw ʿIrt-ir-w m3ʿ.t hrw.

[An offering which the king gives to Osiris wennfer «Onnofris», the Great God, Lord of Eternity, to give all offerings for the spirit of the deceased, the Female Scribe, a Chief Attendant of Divine wife Nitocris, Daughter of the Lord of the Two lands, Psmatik, Justified, Irtrau, Justified].

Certainly, these scenes with texts reflect her high position as a Female Scribe and a Chief Attendant of the God's wife of Amun [Nitocris]. It mostly depicts her as young and beautiful⁶¹, which means she was one of the elite women who were only shown young and beautiful in the perfect state they should be in forever. This is the opposite of non-elite women who could be represented in daily life scenes in the tombs, showing the activities of the tomb owner's estates. In these scenes, the women are active and working: weaving, making beer, serving food, and baking bread. Their figures are not bound by the same conventions as elite women, because what is important is showing the production of food and goods, not the people doing it⁶².

⁵⁷PM 1¹, 441; CHAMPOLLION 1929: 511(b).

⁵⁸PM 1¹, 441; CHAMPOLLION 1929: 511[near top right].

⁵⁹PM 1¹, 441; LD.3. 272 [b]; CHAMPOLLION 1929: 510, 511.

⁶⁰PM I¹, 441; LD.3, 271 [b]; CHAMPOLLION 1929: 5II [A, B].

⁶¹<http://www.southasasif.com/Irtieru>.

Accessed June 12, 2018.

⁶²SABBAHY 2013: 2.



In addition to appearing alone in most of the scenes; which means she is the most important person here, not the secondary person as we usually find in the case of non-royal women who share the tomb of their husbands according to an elite male perspective. Accordingly Iretrau was a non-royal woman who utilized the privilege of royal women who owned single tombs⁶³. Furthermore, Iretrau did not share her status with her husband like most women, nor did she derive her status from her husband. Iretrau's husband was of higher rank than she was and was buried in his own ancestral cemetery at Abydos, while her son, also a vizier, had his own tomb in the hills overlooking the Asasif plain⁶⁴. Undoubtedly, Nespakashuty wanted to be buried next to his mother [FIGURE 4], so he attempted to usurp the tomb of Karakhmun because the tomb of his mother was adjacent to it⁶⁵.

Thus, it can be argued that the monumental tomb of Iretrau marked the culmination of a development of the increasingly overt independence of women. This growth of independence was undoubtedly linked to the growth in power of the God's Wife of Amen institution. It also was reflected in the high-status cemetery of the «Singers in the Residence of Amun» at Medinet Habu, and perhaps even earlier in the burial groups of Tashebet in TT192, whose husband was also absent, and of Diesenesy at Deir el-Bahri⁶⁶.

Finally, it is questionable why Iretrau does not appear as a scribe in her tomb like male scribes in their tombs? Could it be because the seat of the male scribe was not appropriate for her? but at least it is imperative to see the tools of a scribe in her tomb, while countless scenes show male scribe at work.

VIII. GENERAL Commentary

The ladies had prominent positions, and several were important and influential and played a major role, but overall were one step behind the men. Low-born men could improve their lot by becoming scribes, as could the women, but there seemed to be far fewer female-scribes than males. Men could become priests, while ladies could become priestesses, but the most important religious figures seem to have been men, and, of course, the High-Priest was the Pharaoh, who was, almost always, a man⁶⁷.

Whatever the actual meaning of «*seshet*», the contrast between its use and that of the masculine form *sesh* is striking. «*Sesh*» is one of the basic male titles of all periods occurring repeatedly on the monuments. Even if we were to accept all the occurrences of «*seshet*» as signifying the female equivalent of a male scribe, the number would be pitifully small⁶⁸.

⁶³SABBAHY 2013: 1.

⁶⁴LI 2010: 126.

⁶⁵PISCHIKOVA 2009: 12, 19; BOOTH & BOOTH (eds.) 2012: 5 FIG. 5.

⁶⁶LI 2010: 126-127.

⁶⁷BRIAN 1976: 3.

⁶⁸ROBINS 1993: 113.

There are no depictions from any period of working female scribes, nor can we prove that these few «*seshet*» were employed in the state bureaucracy since they may instead have held a position in a large private or royal household⁶⁹.

Clearly, the existence of a few women called «*seshet*» does not destroy the basic gender distinction in the elite class between men who were scribes and could hold government office, and women who were not in general, and did not hold office⁷⁰.

It seems that the old Egyptian society did not accept women in many jobs, even as ruling queens. Notable examples are the female kings Neferusobek and Hatshepsut, who had to negotiate between their female sex and their kingship, which was socially defined as male. Neferusobek was sometimes represented wearing a royal kilt and a nemes headdress over a dress. Sobekneferu «circumvented» the problems created by her gender by proclaiming herself a «female Horus», to be like the king of ancient Egypt who ruled because he was the god Horus, son of Osiris, and the rightful heir to the throne⁷¹, [FIGURE 5]. Hatshepsut took this one step further when she became king, state purposes she simply portrayed as a man⁷². She is represented with a combination of male and female elements and she adopted the image of a male king⁷³. Hatshepsut is depicted wearing the «*nemes*» headdress and a false beard. She is dressed in the royal kilt, traditionally worn only by male rulers. For example, her statue in the [Metropolitan Museum, New York], showed her as a male. She has no breasts and her face looks like that of a man although the waist is thinner than the hips, suggesting a woman⁷⁴.

IX. CONCLUSION

Iretrau was a literate and qualified woman, with many titles and occupations «a Female Scribe and a Chief Attendant of the Divine Adoratrice».

Iretrau did not depend on her husband's position or her son, to reach these positions. This may have been due to the power of the position of God's Wife in the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. Despite this increased power and independence of women apart from their husbands and fathers, women in general and even queens were still one step behind men in ancient Egypt.

Iretrau's status as a Female Scribe and a Chief Attendants was probably similar to the great Steward of the God's Wife of Amen, especially since she was buried in an exclusive tomb in Asasif like the great Stewards of the God's Wife of Amen.

⁶⁹ROBINS 1993: 113.

⁷⁰ROBINS 1993: 113.

⁷¹CAPEL & MARKOE 1996: 30, FIG. 7; OLIVIER 2008: 69, FIG. 35, 95-96; SWEENEY 2011: 3; SABBAHY 2013: 1.


⁷²SABBAHY 2013: 1.

⁷³SWEENEY 2011: 3; On the other hand, Hatshepsut's royal titulary capitalized upon her female sex to build identifications with goddesses that would have been impossible for male kings; she is often described with female nouns and pronouns; SWEENEY 2011: 3.

⁷⁴OLIVIER 2008: 95, FIG. 52.



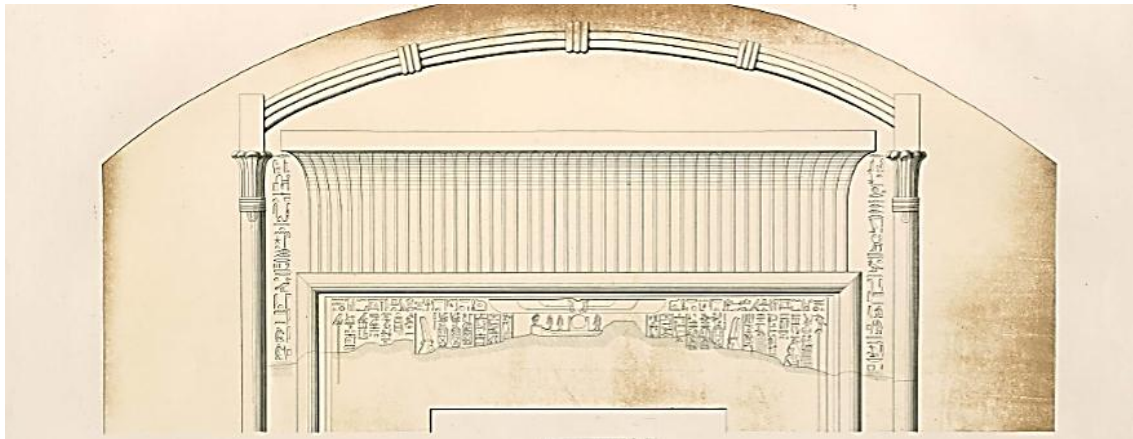
HOW TO CITE

Maher, H., « A Female Scribe in the Twenty Sixth Dynasty [Iretrau]  », *Journal of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists*, vol. 6/2, 2021. Doi: 10.21608/JGUA2.2021.61794.1050.
hebamahe45@gmail.com

BIBLIOGRAPHY

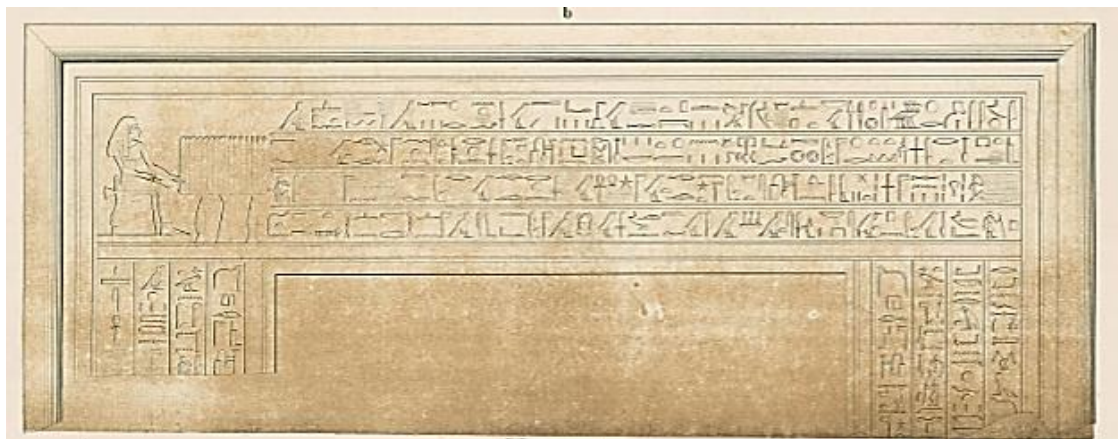
- BOOTH, A. & Booth, M. (eds.): *Ramesses and Radar: A Collaborative Study of a Tomb Complex at South Asasif, Luxor, Egypt, Nerc Geophysical Equipment Faculty, Scientific Report*, 2012, 1-7.
- BRIAN, M. T. P.: «Women Sex Objects in Ancient Egypt», *the Fourth Annual Convention of the North American Society for Sport History at the University of Oregon*, June 16-19, 1976, 1-6.
- BRUNNER, H.: *Altägyptische Erziehung*, trans. Mostafa Abd El Baset, Egypt (the National Center for Translation) 2011.
- BRYAN, B. M.: «Evidence for Female Literacy from Theban Tombs of the New Kingdom», *BES* 6, 1984, 17-32.
- BUDKA, J.: «The Asasif Revisited: New Results from the Austrian Concession; Originalveröffentlichung», *ICE* 10, 2015, 111-129.
- CAPEL, A. K. & MARKOE, G. E.: *Mistress of the House, Mistress of the Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt*, Cincinnati (Hudson Hills Press) 1996.
- CHAMPOLLION, J. F.: *Monuments de L'Égypte et de La Nubie: Notices Descriptives Conformes aux Manuscrits Autographes Rédigés sur les Lieux I*, Paris (Chez Firmin Didot Frères: Librairies-Éditeurs) 1929.
- ERMAN, A. & GRAPOW (eds.), H.: *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache*. 5 vols. Leipzig (Akademie-Verlag) 1971.
- FISCHER, H. G.: *Egyptian Woman of the Old Kingdom and of the Heracleopolitan Period*, New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) 2000.
- GOUCHER, C. Lee., and Le Guin, Ch. A. (eds.): *Ordering the World: Family and Household, the Balance: Themes in Global History*, Boston (McGraw-Hill) 1998.
- GOUDSMIT, S. A.: «An Illiterate Scribe», *AJA* 78, 1974, 78.
- GRAEFE, E.: *Untersuchungen zur Verwaltung und Geschichte der Insitution der Gottesgemahlin des Amun vom Beginn des Neuen Reiches bis zur Spätzeit*, Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz) 1981.
- HANSEN, S. C. E.: *Das Gottesweib des Amun*, København (Ejnar Munksgaard) 1940.
- KAMPP-SEYFRIED, F.: «Thebes, el-Asasif', in K. A. Bard (eds.) », *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, 1999, 802.
- LAZARIDIS, N.: «Education and Apprenticeship, in E. Froot and W. Wendrich (eds.) », *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2010, 1-14.
- LI, J.: *Elite Theban Women of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries BCE in Egypt: Identity, Status and Mortuary Practice*, Ann Arbor (MI: UMI dissertation publishing) 2010.
- _____: *Women, Gender and Identity in Third Intermediate Period Egypt*, New York (NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group) 2017.
- LOON, V. A. J.: «Law and Order in Ancient Egypt: The Development of Criminal Justice from the Pharaonic New Kingdom until the Roman Dominate», MA. Thesis, Faculty of Humanities, 2014.
- MATIC', U.: «Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities», *NEA* 79 N^o. 3, 2016, 174-183.
- OLIVIER, A.: «Social Status of Elite Women of the New Kingdom of Ancient Egypt: A Comparison of Artistic Features», MA. Thesis, University of South Africa, 2008.
- PISCHIKOVA, E.: «Reliefs from the Tomb of the Vizier Nespakashuty: Reconstruction, Iconography, and Style», *MMJ* 33, 1998, 57-101.

- _____ : «Early Kushite Tombs of South Asasif», *BMSAES* 12, 2009, 11-30.
- POLZ, D. C.: «Asasif», in D. B. Redford (eds.) », *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* I, 2001, 140-142.
- PORTER, B. & MOSS, R.: *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings. I: The Theban Necropolis*, Oxford (Clarendon Press) 1927.
- RANKE, H.: *Die Ägyptischen Personennamen. Bd I. Verzeichnis der Namen*, Glückstadt (J. J. Augustin) 1935.
- ROBINS, G.: *Women in Ancient Egypt*, London (British Museum Press) 1993.
- SABBAHY, L.: «Women, Pharaonic Egypt: from EAH', in R. S. Bagnall (ed.) », *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 2013, 1-3.
- SWEENEY, D.: «Sex and Gender, in E. Froot and W. Wendrich (eds.) », *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2011.
- WARD, W. A.: *Essays on Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom and Related Subjects*, Beirut (American University of Beirut) 1986.
- WENTE, E. F.: *Late Ramesside Letters*, SAOC 33, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 1967.
- ZINN, K.: «Literacy, Pharaonic Egypt, in R. Bagnall (ed.) », *Encyclopedia of Ancient World*, 2012, 1-5.



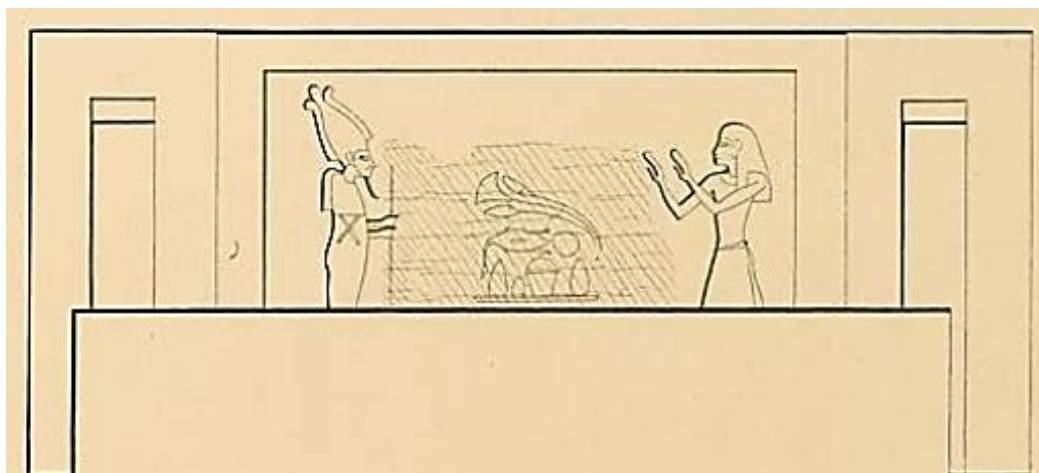
[FIGURE 1]: Double scene in outer lintel of the first hypostyle Hall.

LD. vol.3 (1842-1845), 272 [a].



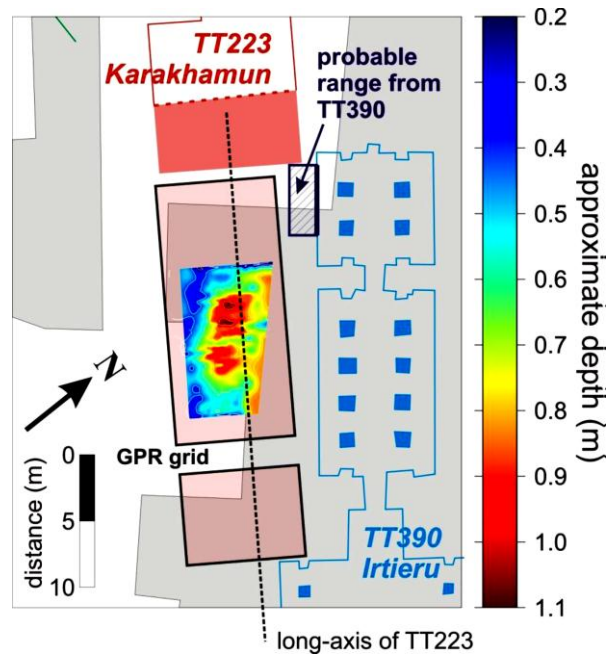
[FIGURE 2]: Iretrau seated before offerings at the left end in the outer lintel of the inner room.

LD. vol.3 (1842-1845), 272 [b]



[FIGURE 3]: Iretrau with libation vases before Osiris in niche.

LD. vol.3 (1842-1845), 271 [b].



[FIGURE 4]: Iretrau's tomb (TT 390) is adjacent to the tomb of Karakhamun.
BOOTH & BOOTH (eds.) 2012: 5, FIG. 5.



[FIGURE 5]: Torso of Sobeknefru wearing a king's head-dress and kilt,
Dynasty Twelve, Louvre Museum, E 27135.
CAPEL & MARKO 1996: 30 FIG. 7.



كاتبة فى الأسرة السادسة والعشرين "ارت رو"

هبة ماهر محمود أحمد

مدرس، كلية الآداب، جامعة المنصورة، مصر

المخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية لقب الكاتبة الخاص بالسيدة «ارت ابرو»، والذي ذكر عدة مرات بنقوش مقبرتها. وتعد «ارت ابرو» ومكانتها ككاتبة؛ هى من أكثر القضايا تعقيداً، نظراً لعدم ظهور نصوص كتبت بواسطتها كما هو الحال عند الكاتبة الذكور، فضلاً عن عدم وجود أدوات الكتابة فى مقبرتها. ومع ذلك هناك العديد من الأسباب الأخرى التى تتيح النظر إلى اعتبار «ارت ابرو» امرأة متعلمة، ومتقلدة لمنصب الكاتبة ولديها واجبات فعلية. ومما لا شك فيه هو ارتباط ذلك بزيادة القوة المؤسسية الخاصة بالزوجة الإلهية لأمون رع خلال العصر المتأخر، واعتبار «ارت ابرو» صانعة تغيير كبير فى نظام الإدارة من خلال تقلدها لهذا المنصب، فمن المعروف هيمنة الرجال على السلطة فى مصر القديمة، فى حين لم يُسمح للنساء بأن يكونوا جزءاً منها.

الكلمات الدالة: ارت ابرو، الكاتبة، الأسرة السادسة والعشرون، الزوجة الإلهية، مقبرة ٣٩٠، النوع الاجتماعى، محو الأمية للاناث.