

The It Neter or father of the god: a case study of cultural dislocation and (re)location in Kemet. Part I: The royal court, miscellaneous examples, and Senenmut.¹

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Abstract

This paper presents the first part of a study of the *It Neter* or “father of the god,” a key office in Kemet, ancient Egypt. It combines approaches from history, sociolinguistics, and cultural analysis to interrogate some of the available information. The results demonstrate that the Eurocentric perspective, which is currently predominant in Egyptology, has proven to be very inadequate in scholars’ attempts to understand this office. Here, the limitations of Egyptology arise from a failure to understand the concept of father that is alive in the term. It is not a European father in a nuclear family based on blood alone, with a narrow and rigid set of roles. This view has prevented Eurocentric scholars from recognizing a non-blood or social father that is part of Afrikan tradition. In this culture, the concept of father is not confined to an immediate biological ancestor and embraces a larger set of roles than father in the European tradition. *It Neter* describes roles which were previously not understood or fully understood to belong to a single concept, and may be grouped under the title Vizier in ancient Egyptian, and prime minister or mentor in today’s terminology. Afrocentric methodology illuminates the concept of father of the god by relocating it within the history and culture of Afrika to which it has always properly belonged. This is the only approach that makes sense, or full sense, of the available information.

Keywords: *It Neter* or ‘father of the god,’ father, Africology, Afrikan culture, Egyptology, Eurocentrism, the royal court, Senenmut.

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Introduction

Afrikology is the study of Afrikan and other phenomena from Afrikan perspectives without excluding the presence and influence of other cultures wherever necessary. It locates Afrikan people and phenomena within Afrikan history and culture (Asante, 1998; Mazama, 2003). It is where they always belonged. It avoids distortion or worse.

Eurocentrism attempts to universalize the values, standards and perspectives of Europe. The birth of Egyptology during the era of western European colonialism did not permit this academic discipline to escape colonialist values.

The aims of this paper are simple. First, to provide an outline and analysis of the development of Egyptological study of three aspects of the *It Neter* or father of the god, a specific manifestation of Afrikan culture in Kemet, ancient Egypt. Secondly, to inquire whether the relocation of the phenomena studied into the historical and cultural contexts of Kemet clarifies misconceptions resident in the scholarship of Egyptology and provides a better explanation of the information at hand. The results vindicate Afrikology.

In Kemet, notions of ancestor, father, mother, son, daughter, brother and sister were extended beyond blood ties from very early in the development of that civilization. In fact, it is likely that the people who became the ancient Egyptians held these ideas and corresponding practices even before they became the people of Kemet, since the very same concept is general in Afrika. Throughout Afrika, this convention may be witnessed by the deployment of these terms to relations that, while they sometimes may have indeed been blood relations, were not always so and are not exactly those normally described by these familial labels assigned to them in European languages and practice. In Kemet, the greatest clarity is gleaned from information concerning ancient Egyptian royalty, simply because more information is extant about this elite than about any other group in that society. Dodson and Hilton conclude that “(a)lthough a considerable range of titles could be accredited to them, five basic tags defined the categories of royal relation: king’s wife; king’s mother; king’s son; king’s daughter; king’s sister; plus a *unique example* of king’s father.” (Dodson and Hilton, 2010, 25. Emphasis added). There are no cousins, half siblings, “step” or any surrogate, or fictive relations of any kind here. The person(s) on each side of a relationship was valued; no one was devalued. This is entirely consistent with this observation by Théophile Obenga: “*Des mots répondant au français ‘cousin’ et ‘cousine’ n’existent pas non plus dans les langues négro-africaines. La distance parentale et sociologique que véhiculent avec eux des termes comme ‘cousin’ et ‘cousine’, etc, n’existe pas pour la psychologie sociale africaine.*” (Obenga, 1996, 141).² In addition, it is known that in the language of the people of Kemet, the word for sovereign is derived from the word for father, that the kingship was founded upon ancestor veneration, and that the kings honored their ancestors in various ways including a specific ritual (Bell, 1996, 56-58; Kusimba, 1996, 59-61). These facts suggest that it is the Afrikan extended family form that was practiced by the royal family. In Kemet the culture of the royal elite was substantially rooted in the culture of the mass of the people.

Let us begin with the assertions that king’s father is the same office as father of the god and so the two titles, if they are indeed different from each other, refer to the same group of roles and functions and the same functionary in whom they were vested. Thus the only thing which may be unique in the example mentioned by Dodson and Hilton may lie in the fact that it was the most visible and powerful instance of the transfer of notions of father to figures that were not rendered *ipso facto* biological fathers by this terminology and were indeed not usually so.

² “The words that correspond to French ‘cousin’ do not exist in Black African languages. The sociological and parental distance that is established by the terms ‘cousin’, etc. does not exist in the African social psychology.”

It is the contention here that the notions of father that were transferred, often to figures completely outside of the biological family, include those roles and functions normally described under the rubric of mentor in the world of today. It is further contended that these were archetypal roles and functions which were originally located inside the family and discharged by the blood father. Even further, that the same is to be said for the other familial relations thus identified, in so far as the terms deployed to identify them do not always describe blood relations, but always describe roles and functions that were originally vested in blood relations that had been originally located within the family, or roles derived from these original ones, and that in Kemet and the rest of Afrika, have always been conveyed by these kinship, that is, 'blood' or familial terminologies.

Here we see that social relations were expanded beyond biology; however, the terminology used to describe those relations remained unchanged; the terms deployed to describe the new relationships are rooted in the old terms for the earliest or archetypal blood relationships. They are the same familial terms. They remained rooted in biology. The reason for this continuity in lexical items is the preservation and continuity, within these new relationships, of the intimate social ethos of the family, the psychological closeness implied above by Obenga, and the resulting quality of relationships, which have always defined traditional Afrikan society. The only thing different about these new non-blood relationships was neither their quality nor the mutually binding rights and obligations imposed by tradition and accepted by all, but their location outside of the Afrikan family. Such quality human relationships were not fundamentally new to the Afrikan experience, so new words were not necessary to describe and convey them. It is therefore these old familial terms, based on blood or biology at their very earliest manifestations, that are mostly preserved in the languages of Afrika, including Ancient Egyptian, to describe social relations.

When viewed from the perspective of the culture in which it evolved, this example of king's father is therefore perfectly normal. It is entirely consistent with each of the other categories of royal relations given by Dodson and Hilton. There is nothing unique in this "unique example," either conceptually (i.e. in form and function) or in the terminology deployed to describe it. The title king's father becomes unique only when it is viewed from the perspective of European culture, in which a father is almost always a biological or blood father, and his location and roles are restricted to the ambit of the nuclear family.

Some linguistic considerations

The "god" restricts our concern mainly to the office as performed to the pharaoh by priests and by certain other persons who were his political mentors — the two categories of 'father' referred to in the title 'Father of the God.' The term , with its variants , , , , etc., exist in the *Medew Neter* (Allen 2000, 66, 455; Gardiner, 1988, 502, 555, 612, 576; Erman & Grapow I, 1982, 141, 142; Faulkner, 1962, 32; Ranke, 1935, 58-49; Budge, 1920 I, 96, 98, *et al*), to use the name its creators actually bestowed upon this writing system, which is usually termed 'hieroglyphs' in the currently dominant ideology. There are two basic meanings provided by the texts. These are god's father and *priestertitel* (Erman & Grapow I, 1982, 142), this latter being the name of a class of *elder* priests (Gardiner, 1988, 555 and 612. Emphasis added). The term itself is composed of two distinct morphemes, each of which exists independently as a word in the language of the people of Kemet. The first of these words is  *it*, which means 'father'. The second is : *neter*, which means 'god.'

In order to understand the composite term $\text{𓂏𓂏𓂏} It Neter$ or father of the god³ it is necessary to recognize the grammatical functions of each of these two morphemes. $\text{𓂏𓂏} it$ = father is the descriptor, the real active and potent word here. It gives the possibilities of the functions of the father in Kemet, for it is these different and differing roles of the father in that society which hold the key to our understanding of the entire term. 𓂏 : *Neter* or ‘god’ here is merely the object described. Grammatically it is a static particle. Yet, the god here is a referent to the pharaoh, by far the most important and influential office in the land. Because of this tremendous importance, it does in practice exert a great enhancing influence on the roles performed by the father when the god is the recipient of the fatherly attention. Therefore, in this specific instance of the father of the god, the importance of the pharaoh provides greater opportunity for clarification of the construction of fatherhood, which was already a tremendous force in the shaping of some of the leading institutions in the society of Kemet, including that of the sovereign itself. Much the same is to be asserted for the parallel office of $\text{𓂏𓂏} Mut Neter$ or mother of the god.

The direct genitive formed by the juxtaposition of the two items completes the linguistic analysis in this section. In Afrikan languages, two morphemes may be placed together to indicate possession or connection, which may not be otherwise stated. In the construction under consideration here, “of the” must be read after father and before god to obtain a full reading of the term. Hence, father (of the) god.

Within the royal court

It is entirely likely that the title *It Neter* could have evolved from the ancient title $\text{𓂏𓂏} : It Mn$ = ‘father of (the God) min’ which is clarified in later writings such as $\text{𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏} It-Ntr Mn$ (Gardiner 1947 I, 52). However, though it is attested in the Old Kingdom, for example in the *Sebayat* or Instructions⁴ of Ptahhotep, the title may have become fully established in the royal court only in the First Intermediate Period (FIP), when a number of bearers are attested and it is applied comparatively frequently. In fact, Habachi says “the title god’s father ... seems to have been given in the First Intermediate Period (FIP) to persons who played quite an important role in the history of Egypt, especially in establishing new dynasties.” (Habachi 1958, 171-2). The term became established as a title for priests towards the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty (Janssen & Janssen, 1990, 128), hence not long before 1295 Before the Common Era (BCE). As explained below, this year is significant for marking the beginning of the era of the more obvious manifestation of the office under consideration.

It is imperative to read the plurality in the notion of establishing new dynasties as reflective of the rather unsettled context of the FIP, when many of the centralizing conventions and tendencies established in the Old Kingdom were questioned, disrupted and even overturned in some instances. It therefore appears to be with considerable caution the *It Neter* or the *Sebayat* — or anything else except perhaps decentralization — may be assumed as being

³ A certain feature of the *Medew Neter* should be noted here. Without doubt a practice instructed by spirituality, it is the changing the word order in certain written expressions to indicate reverence of divinity and of important personages in general. The words denoting the revered are written first, even though in the spoken language they are pronounced later. Hence here, in the word *It Neter* 𓂏𓂏𓂏 , the morpheme 𓂏 , *Neter* = ‘god’, has been written first, though in speech it is pronounced last. This convention has been termed honorific transposition or honorific inversion by Egyptologists and ought to be differentiated from graphic transposition, which is also some reversal or change of the written word order, but for aesthetic purposes.

⁴ ‘Written teachings’ or ‘Instructions’ (Gardiner 1988, 588, 616, 626) in which a much-accomplished person, usually a vizier, passes on the wisdom he has acquired in public service. The recipients are his “sons,” usually relatively inexperienced successors.

established in this period. It is possible to speak with greater certainty of the following period, known as the Middle Kingdom, in which the *Sebayat* is clearly established (Assmann, 1996, 106-127; Janssen & Janssen, 1996, 81), becoming even more frequent in the New Kingdom (Janssen & Janssen, 1990, 128; Gardiner, 1947 I, 51). Perhaps a key part in this explanation is Assmann's observation that, following developments initiated in the First Intermediate Period, the *Sebayat* became established in the Middle Kingdom (Assmann, 1996, 125-134). This points a finger firmly in the direction of the expanded meaning of the term father (and therefore as well as that of son), which is integral to the very notion of the *Sebayat*. The meaning of father transcended blood ties from very early in the social history of Kemet. The *Sebayat*, as well as the *It Neter*, are therefore very clear demonstrations of the operationalization of the expanded or non-blood or socially constructed meaning of the term *it* or father and the (re)location of this expanded concept to institutions outside the family, that is, in the wider society.

Details in the sources affirm these observations, for we shall see below that while the Father of the God was also known in the Old Kingdom, it became established only in the Middle Kingdom. Positing a link between the *Sebayat* and the father of the god may therefore be not as illogical as may appear upon the surface. Both belonged to the specific context of the royal court. In fact, it is more than likely that many a *Sebayat* was issued by a father of the god, as in the known examples from the Old Kingdom of Imhotep, who was vizier or father to djoser (third dynasty, about 2800 BCE), Kagemni, father to Snefrou (fourth dynasty) and Ptahhotep, father to Isesi (fifth dynasty, about 2600 BCE). Thus, the available evidence, though incomplete, does appear sufficient to indicate a trend. Further, such a trend invites informed speculation about whether there was a tradition of each father of the god issuing a *sebayet*, or even if it was the duty of each one of them to do so. The known examples of the listing of the duties of the vizier do not include this task (Davies 1973, 88-94). But this need not mean that a vizier was not expected to issue a *Sebayet* at some strategic moment in his career, most probably towards the end or just after. The known examples tell us that he may have issued one if he chose to do so; however, scholars are uncertain whether what may have been begun as an unwritten convention later acquired the force of tradition.

We may be more certain that the popularity and institutionalization of the *Sebayat* reinforced the extended meanings of father and son which had been certainly carried in the language from the inception of its written form, and most probably before then, and doubtless in popular usage also.

The records show specific actions and roles of the  *It ntr*: *It Neter* or father of the god at various points in the long history of the state of Kemet. Inhabitants of this office include Ptahhotep, Kagemni, Kuya and Ay, as well as a significant number of others examined by Janssen and Janssen, some of which shall presently receive close attention in this text. It is very important to include the unique example of an  *It Ntrt*: father to the goddess, played by Senemut to Neferura, daughter of Hatshepsut. The title god or goddess was usually reserved for a reigning female; however, along with *hmt-ntr*: god's wife, it was bestowed upon Neferura, more than likely because from her early years she had been designated to arrive on the throne (Gardiner, 1947 I, 53), a clear comment upon the use of political power in the somewhat unusual reign of her mother. There is a gender difference here from the other examples in this essay: the referent is a female; however, the roles are still those of a father. They do not vary from those of a normal father in African culture and vary from the other examples here only in so far as the recipient is feminine.

A specific example of the parallel office of $\overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}} Mwt Ntr$: gottesmutter or mother of the god (Erman & Grapow II, 1982, 54), that is, a woman mentoring a pharaoh, here played by the sixth dynasty Queen Ankhnespepy, will also be examined. But this title, mother of the god, is also well represented throughout the history of Kemet (the late period writing is $\overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}}$ and $\overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}}$: Lesko & Lesko I, 2002, 254), so it must be noted *en passant* that there are numerous other examples to be uncovered and interrogated. The existence of this title and the roles covered by it help to attest the often different but complementary roles of men and women in Kemet. Such information may also inform scholars about gender balance and equity in that society.

Cultural determinism, uncertainty and speculation

In 1947, Gardiner published a significant hypothetical definition of the father of the god:

...*it-ntr*⁵ ... is applied to royal and non-royal persons alike; the one common factor is that the word *ntr* always signifies the living king, to whom the holder of the title stands in the relation of father, whether actual or by marriage (father-in-law) or by virtue of high station, advanced age, outstanding wisdom or some such attribute. (Gardiner 1947 I, 51).

Gardiner relies here upon an accumulation of accurate details, not cultural analysis, to arrive at this rather precise description of the term. But it is not a definition. His ‘provisional hypothesis’ (Gardiner, 1947 I, 47), though relying mainly on description, is insightful. But until now it has remained unproven. For instead of following up upon Gardiner’s notion of a non-biological father, which was implied but not demonstrated, it has become standard for Egyptologists to interpret the father of the god first as a class of priests and secondly as some combination of blood relations and functions, such as a royal or non-royal father of the reigning pharaoh, the father-in-law of the reigning pharaoh, an elder statesman to the pharaoh and someone who was instrumental in establishing a new dynasty. In this second instance a blood relationship has traditionally been postulated as the major explanation of this most important national office of Kemet, though in some recent studies and comments this has also been supplemented by the role of tutor (Dodson & Hilton, 2010, 40; Grajetzki, 2009; Janssen & Janssen, 1996, 78-86; Davies, 1994, 96, Note 164; Schaden, 1977, 77-220, *passim*; Desroches-Noblecourt, 1965, *passim*; Habachi, 1958, 167-190; Aldred, 1957, 30-41; Newberry, 1932, 50-52). Essam El-Banna’s article falls wholly outside of this ambit. It focuses exclusively on the title father of the god in the realm of the divinities and does not appear to countenance any application of this concept to the spiritual and political locations within the society of Kemet that are identified in the majority of studies on this topic. Father of the god(s) in this instance remains restricted to a badge of rank, an indicator of seniority among the divinities of Kemet (El-Banna, 1986, 151-170).

It has been shown above that in the *Medew Neter* the term $\overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}}$ contains the morpheme $\overline{\text{𓄏}} \overline{\text{𓄏}}$ which translates into English as father. This morpheme, father, is the more active and potent aspect in the term father of the god. Hence, it is imperative that scholarship understands this morpheme – in addition to the morpheme “god” upon which most attention has been so far focused in Eurocentric academic enquiry – if a viable understanding and explanation of the entire concept is to be obtained. It is not possible to really know that a particular term is understood if there remains any ignorance or confusion or uncertainty about the meaning of one of its constituents. Janssen & Janssen typify Egyptology’s occupation with descriptors, the continuing inattention to the nature of the concept of fatherhood conveyed by the morpheme, and the consequent disaggregation of this single idea of father of the god.

⁵ The sign *l* in this term is now usually written t, a change that is suggested in the work of Gardiner himself, among others. (Gardiner 1988, 28). In this passage Gardiner employs the previous transliteration of this sign.

Until now this dismemberment has been a permanent result of scholarly enquiry into the meaning of the concept, rather than a stage in the process of obtaining a full understanding of it. The result has been a failure to advance scholars' understanding of this important figure in the social history of Kemet:

It will be evident that 'god's father' could refer to several quite different positions and functions during the long period of Egyptian history. Yet, the word 'father' retained throughout the notion of veneration, whether it referred to a real father (-in law) of the reigning king, to a wise advisor of the sovereign, or merely to a priest who was initiated into the secrets of the god. (Janssen & Janssen 1996, 86).

Apart from Gardiner, Egyptology's lack of descriptive validity for the term under discussion is underlined by these two scholars' notion that it 'could refer to several quite different positions and functions during ... Egyptian history.' (Janssen & Janssen, 1996). It will be demonstrated later in this study that although the position of father of the god was located in two distinct aspects of the state, the royal court (Part I) and the temple (Part II), both the court official and the priest concerned performed the same function of father or adviser to the god or pharaoh, and that such an arrangement is perfectly normal and entirely consistent with the meaning of father in Afrikan culture from the earliest known times to the present.

Miscellaneous examples

The dominant worldview among western scholars, and the consequent biases that colored their study of the family in Kemet, including of course the institution of fatherhood, are, naturally, reflected in their scholarship on the *It Neter* or father of the god. The early Egyptologist, E. A. Wallis Budge, supplies, respectively, father of the god, i.e. a kind of priest and father of the god, which he explains as title of a priest, or father-in-law of the king (Budge, 1920, 96, 98). Today, a century after his contribution, the understanding of this figure in Egyptology has not advanced much beyond Budge. Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, writing in the early 1960s, is somewhat ambivalent about the correct reading of this term, which she predominantly styles divine father (Desroches-Noblecourt, 1965, 42, 76, 77, 84, 90-91, 97, 109, 120, 144) and divine father or father of the god, thus only once deploying the now standard translation father of the god, an error still recorded recently (Lesko & Lesko Vol. I, 2002, 50) who supply both god's father and divine father despite old and new rejections of divine father (Gardiner ,1947 I, 47; Janssen & Janssen, 1996, 78). Dodson and Hilton supply a junior priest and "a person closely related to the king, on occasion his father or father-in-law." (2010, 40). These are typical descriptions — not definitions — that occupy the normal categories of the priesthood and some close but not clearly and comprehensively defined relationship to the pharaoh. Significantly, no underlying connection is demonstrated between these two manifestations of the concept.

There has been much uncertainty and a lack of clarity about the exact meaning of this title. Dodson and Hilton (2010, 35) find it "one of the most problematic" of the titles designating royal spouses and (their) offspring. This latter construction indicates the nuclear view of the family held by these two scholars, which in the context of this discussion, is very significant as an indicator of cultural determinism and, as a consequence, the danger of misrepresentation. Grajetzki opines that "one can only guess about this family relationship" purported between the god's father and the royal family of Kemet (Grajetzki, 2009, 48) and concludes that the title "could have had several meanings" (Grajetzki, 2009, 148). Egyptology is therefore certain that this figure had some relationship with the ruling pharaoh. But beyond that, there is uncertainty and speculation. Egyptologists will not move beyond these surface level descriptions unless they locate Kemet in its Afrikan context, as Afrikology logically insists. (Asante, 1998; Mazama, 2003; *et al*). It is only then that there could be an end to much uncertainty and speculation about the fundamentals of this title.

The work of Rosalind M. Janssen and Jac J. Janssen (1996, 78-86) is one of the most recent as well as one of the fullest available studies of the father of the god. It is also largely representative of the scholarship of Egyptology on this subject. For these reasons, it offers a convenient lens through which to examine Egyptology's vision of this and by extension other aspects of the ancient society that is the major focus of its attention.

In dynasty six (2345-2181 BCE) in the reign of Pharaoh Pepi I, Khuy, Pepi's father-in-law twice over on account of his two daughters being married to Pepi, was called god's father, god's beloved because he had strong ties to the monarchy. Janssen and Janssen assert that in this instance, "The title can simply be interpreted as father-in-law to the king." (Janssen & Janssen 1996, 78). The reality that Janssen and Janssen are examining is not that simple. The family under investigation is the Afrikan 'extended' family, as has been asserted in the scholarship of a significant number of scholars who recognize Afrikans as active agents in their own culture. (Examples include Troy Allen, 1998; Obenga, 1996; Monges, 1997, 125-154; Diop, 1989; Amadiume, 1987; Diop, 1974, 142-145; Mbiti, 1988, 106-109). It is not to be confused with the nuclear family of Europe. Here, blood is not the only tie and roles are different from and more in number than the roles in a European nuclear family. Yet it is the latter which is the model against which Janssen and Janssen have interpreted the information they uncovered. That they provide no statement of any criteria for such assessment is indicative of just how deeply held within them is the view that the institution and society they are examining conform to European cultural norms. Janssen and Janssen further point to the existence of several other persons in the history of Kemet with this title, "but for what reason we do not know. That they were all related to the Pharaoh is unlikely. That is only the case with some of them." (Janssen & Janssen 1996, 78).

Clearly, these two Egyptologists have a major investment in blood relations, to which they limit their vision of the office under investigation, and therefore encounter difficulty in understanding the phenomenon before them. They view the information through European cultural lenses, which do not permit them to recognize an Afrikan family in operation, so they do not comprehend that the concept of fatherhood in this instance is not merely a matter of blood relationship, but much more than that. The relationship these different men had with the pharaoh they served was exactly that articulated in the title father of the god, but here the idea of father is far grander than that envisaged by Egyptologists. It encompasses each of the specific roles identified by Janssen and Janssen as well as surpasses them all. For in the construction of the father in Afrikan tradition, the sociological whole is far greater than its original biological base. It is the same for each of the collection of roles grouped under 'blood' terminology of the family, irrespective of whether those roles remained inside the family, or were migrated to offices and institutions in the wider society.

In the First Intermediate Period (FIP), Shemay was a father of the god. Janssen and Janssen identified him as an official married to a princess called Nebet and speculate that he was vested with this title for that reason. (Janssen & Janssen 1996, 78). The same designation was bestowed upon the son of this couple. Here the title was held by people who were not the fathers-in-law but the son-in-law and the grandson of the reigning Pharaoh. (Janssen & Janssen 1996, 79). Our two scholars assert a "distinct change in meaning" of this title later in the FIP, in the early part of dynasty 11 (ca 2130-1991 BCE), where the title "designates the (non-royal) father of a king." (Janssen & Janssen). It is clear that this purported change in meaning of the title is but a difference in the initial relationship of the office holder to the king. It is a change which may occasion further illumination of the meaning of the office itself, but only if viewed through a culturally appropriate lens. The only way a son-in-law and a grandson could be fathers of a king is when fatherhood is beyond blood ties. In this specific instance, relationship to the pharaoh, as son-in-law and grandson, would be expected to be a factor in their appointment; however, that both post holders were obviously younger than the king may further

complicate the issue and perplex the observer who is armed only with a pair of Eurocentric spectacles and so constrained to a search for blood ties. Though age is important to the point of virtually assuring reverence in the culture of Kemet, wisdom is even more valued. Hence it is almost certain that the possession of wisdom, or the extensive or even critical knowledge upon which wisdom is often predicated, is likely to have been a comparatively more important criterion than age in the appointment of each of these two men to the office in question. This much is also illustrated in the biblical story of Joseph, which is located in Kemet and examined in Part II of this study.

Janssen and Janssen assert the same non-royal meaning of the term is attested in dynasty 18, where the god's father *senusret* is indeed *senusret*, the non-royal biological father of Pharaoh Amenemhat I, the founder of dynasty 12. But this name and this designation are part of a listing of kings revered in later ages. (Janssen & Janssen, 80). Hence, it ought to be clear that in addition to the role of wise advisor to his blood son who was initiating a new line of pharaohs, *senusret* is quite likely also viewed as a revered progenitor — hence emphasizing another role of a father in the Afrikan cultural universe. This very role of father as revered founder also eludes Janssen and Janssen in their analysis of Antef, blood father of Pharaoh Montuhotep II. Antef was never a pharaoh of Upper and Lower Kemet and “(t)herefore ... was theoretically not the predecessor (= the father) of Montuhotep (in his role as pharaoh).” Yet, these scholars acknowledge Antef as the biological father of the initiator of the 11th dynasty. (Janssen & Janssen, 80-81). The exact blood relation is identified between the brothers Khasekhemre Neferhotep and Khaneferre Sobekhotep, two of the foremost pharaohs of dynasty 13 in the late Middle Kingdom, and their non-royal father, Haankhef.

In these instances, even though these scholars imply a meaning of father that is restricted to father as predecessor of a pharaoh, and thus hint at one of the extended meanings of the term in its Afrikan context, they fail to recognize that in the particular examples before them the term must also mean father as genetic progenitor of the pharaoh, a blood relation which announces the expectation of both reverence and respect on the side of the pharaoh as biological son, as well as the biological father's duty to mentor his son, in this instance in the discharge of Pharaonic power and influence, but clearly rooted in the more traditional fatherly duties that were once housed exclusively within the family. It is significant for our understanding of the roles of this office that both *Senusret* and *Antef* were blood fathers of pharaohs who initiated new dynasties. The specific circumstances of their office, that is, father to the spiritual, political, economic and social head of the nation, would have therefore vested them with and emphasized the roles and authority of father in the senses of blood father and so revered progenitor and, additionally, trusted or even chief advisor: the supreme operational definition of mentor.

Janssen and Janssen argue that in dynasty 18 (ca 1560- ca 1295 BCE) there was “a fundamental change in the meaning of the title, many important persons now being called *it-netjer*, with the implication of adviser of the sovereign or elder statesman.” (Janssen & Janssen, 81). The examples they supply are interesting: a number of high priests of Amun, viziers and viceroys of Nubia, one of whom, *Usersatet*, was a childhood companion of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (Janssen & Janssen). It seems clear that at that historical juncture the office was becoming more formalized, and more persons are appointed to it; the office is operationally regularized. The circle from which *It Neters* are recruited is now wider. Such a conclusion is entirely consistent with the known economic and political situation of the time, which was characterized chiefly by an increasingly wealthy elite and an expanding state. While Janssen and Janssen do not supply any other relationship to the ruling pharaoh, it is important and logical to recognize that ability, achievement and/or connections, as well as the status which arose from these, would have been instrumental in the attainment of this post. In turn, such status would have, as a fact in itself, recommended the holder as a knowledgeable and wise advisor to the pharaoh, an

it-neter in that particular sense of the term, even if he were not already, or subsequently became, a trusted advisor or even the chief one or *It Neter*. The fact Usersatet was a childhood companion to Amenhotep indicates a close relationship based on trust and suggests solidarity and even camaraderie. Such a relationship would have been nurtured by initiation into the system of age grades that developed bonding among members of the same sex and age group, as well as contemporaneous initiation into and experience of the Kap, a royal college which was known to cultivate social capital and corresponding influence and patronage: what today, in some aspects of society, would be termed the old school tie effect. Again, our two scholars grasp only that aspect of the office that was plainly visible to them when looking through Eurocentric lenses. They do not link what they know from this example to other aspects which are visible in other known examples of the office. Nor do they come up with those roles that would have been logically and easily inferred once the phenomenon was located in its correct cultural context. They therefore emerge with only a partial description and analysis of the office in question – and an incomplete and limited understanding of the information at their disposal.

Senenmut

Nowhere in the surviving literature is the various roles of the *It Neter* more clearly illustrated than in the example of the political life of Senenmut, a senior official who performed this office to Neferura, daughter of Hatshepsut. Such clarity is due entirely to the fact that the surviving account covers all or almost all of the very lengthy and evolving relationship between these two. Here can be seen the different roles undertaken by Senenmut reflected in the changing titles, in this context virtual job descriptions, which outline his career path in service to the young princess as she grows up, matures and herself undertakes new roles and responsibilities in her trajectory toward the pinnacle of power in Kemet. This is a symbiotic relationship, for the evolution of Senenmut's career is outlined by his changing job descriptions, which also reflect the rise of Neferura. He is listed as a foremost embodiment of the *It-Neter* in the role of tutor to the crown prince (or princess). (Janssen & Janssen 1996, 81). It is clear, even in this specific example, that this is but one of the roles of this office, since Senenmut gives his roles at various times as father and (male) nurse, steward of the estate of Princess Neferure⁶ and father of the goddess. These titles and roles indicate progression in the career of the growing royal personage and corresponding acquisitions and/or changes of emphasis in Senenmut's duties that eventually lead to the acquisition of the title and roles of the father of the goddess. With this latter title, Senenmut had arrived at the pinnacle of his professional career in service to the princess. It is significant that Janssen and Janssen remark that the title father of the goddess probably dates from a later stage of Senenmut's career, when his charge "needed not so much a 'nurse' as a mentor." (Janssen & Janssen). It is the latter term that is all encompassing and through which, for historical reasons, these roles have come to be known and articulated in western European society (Colley, 2003, 1; Roberts, 1999; Barondess, 1997, 347; Barondess, 1995, 3-6). It is quite likely that these two scholars do not apprehend that in supplying that latter term they have finally given a more precise identification of an office they have found to be so elusive.

Janssen and Janssen also mention Heqareshu, a dignitary in dynasty 18, whose titles included (male) nurse of the king's eldest son and god's father. They also mention his son, Heqaerneheh, who held the same positions. Here we again encounter evidence of an evolving relationship marked by differing emphases in the role of the father of the god, or perhaps the roles performed by the person who would become father of the god. We see suggested by the examples of Senenmut, Heqareshu, Heqaerneheh and others, the considerable probability that the same person was once tutor to a school-aged prince or princess, then nurse to the royal

⁶ Neferura and Neferure are variations in the rendering of the same name:  *Nfrwra*, which translates as 'Perfections (or Beauties) [of the Divinity] Ra.' Note the honorific transposition mentioned in note 3.

person later on, and eventually father even later, when the royal mentee attained the status of god/goddess.

After Kemet

The titles of Ifi Amadiume's book, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, and Nwande Achebe's *The Female King in Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*, provide an insight into the continuation of this sociological system in later Afrika. In the title of Amadiume's text, the terms male and female are strictly biological. They state the sex of the individuals. Daughters and husbands supply the social roles and therefore the gender performed by each of these two groups of persons thus identified. In Achebe's book, female is the biology; king the social roles and so gender. Again, this grammar is not possible in a European cultural context. These facts also indicate the relationship between ancient Egypt and traditional Afrika.

"The Woman King," a recently released film written by Maria Bello and Dana Stevens, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood and starring Lashana Lynch, Viola Davis and Hero Fiennes Tiffin, preserves this grammar. Here, woman is the biology of the referent and king is the distinctive and related collection of roles she performs in society.

The term you(r) big sister brother, recently (2015) deployed by an Afrikan Guyanese in a village along the coast of that country, illustrates the continuation of this Afrikan grammar in the Diaspora. Here the term you(r) refers to the person addressed; big indicates that the referent is older than the person addressed; sister indicated the gender of the person in question, and brother indicated that person's sex or biology. The referent is the gay elder brother of the addressee. With the lexical items elder and sister placed before the nouns they modify, the word order in this extract is certainly dominated by the English language. The concept of gender which is represented in sister is one not determined by biology; it is a group of social roles that is indicated by this term. This grammar is very Afrikan.

Conclusion

In Egyptology, the sum of the research on the  or father of the god since Gardiner has been characterized by much uncertainty, a lack of clarity, speculation arising from an aggregation of descriptions of conceptually disjointed roles attached to this title, a consequent disaggregation of the concept and disconnection and balkanization into its various examples, roles and the other rather more easily visible but partial manifestations available to scholars in search of blood ties. But there has been no identification and explanation of the invisible ties that bind together these, until now, apparently disparate aspects of the office into the single, full and coherent concept developed and operationalized in the social history of Kemet. The office of mother of the god has received even less scholarly attention.

But in order to recover the entire concept of father of the god, the scholar must do more than merely disinter various parts of its dismembered body that are accessible from the incomplete records available today or view them from Eurocentric cultural assumptions with which scholarship has begun its search for the meaning of this figure. An Afrocentric approach is inescapable if sense, or full sense, is to be made of this information. For it is necessary to relocate those rescued pieces of information into the specific conceptual framework that bound them together, animated them into a distinct entity that was larger than any or even the mechanistic summation of all these constituent parts, gave to them form, function and meaning and thus provided them with a distinctive identity within the cultural and historical context in which this entity existed. Armed with this cultural construct, scholarship may also be able to discern further details and so fill gaps in humanity's knowledge and understanding of this office. We must accept Fu-Kiau's challenge to do more than what this wise ancestor observed as "an academic exercise which, usually, consists of transferring bones from one graveyard to another."

(Fu-Kiau, 2001, 14). It is fortunate that in the study of this concept, there is now available a more meaningful reconstruction of the living relations that provided the immediate context in which it existed, as well as a fuller understanding of each of the two linguistic components of which the term representing it is comprised, and the paradigm of Afrocentricity to guide our positioning and understanding of the information at our disposal.

The incoherence, inconclusiveness, lack of clarity — and even perplexity — of Eurocentric scholarship appear to be influenced, in the very least, by the fact that such scholarship has failed to locate Kemet, and more specifically for this essay, the positioning and roles of the father of the god, within the Afrikan cultural context to which these entities have always belonged. Here it is imperative that we note that the concept of family under consideration is an early statement of the Afrikan extended or consanguineal family. The differing roles and emphases observed by the Egyptologists amount to statements of the various roles of this functionary, including various emphases to suit specific circumstances and challenges that confronted the office at different points in its evolution within the very long history of Kemet. Most European scholars examining this phenomenon have grasped only isolated aspects of the multi-roled office of guardian of the would-be or reigning pharaoh's many interests. It is necessary to consider the office as a whole, its entire integrity, instead of as a number of dismembered aspects which, in this view, appear as unconnected roles and functions; that is, as separate entities. The Eurocentric approach does not and cannot provide a fuller and more accurate picture of the office because it does not consider the cultural values which, conceptually and in practice, provide the context, connectivity, unity and rational explanation of what have otherwise proved to be disparate pieces of an insoluble puzzle.

The term : *It Neter* or father of the god articulates a specific relationship, that is, a fatherly relationship, to the pharaoh. It includes a number of roles which, in Kemet and the rest of Afrika, are implied by and associated with that relationship. Historically, in the evolution of this office, as for any office, emphasis upon various roles varied according to circumstances, that is, specific aspects of the relationship were emphasized or deemphasized in response to the exigencies of particular situations. But as in any relationship this was not a one-sided association. The term also articulates, from the side of the pharaoh, trust, respect and a willingness to rely upon advice from this chief adviser. It is located in the royal court because this is the first location, after the popular family, in which modern scholarship sees the role of the figure we now term mentor developed so significantly — undoubtedly to meet the multiple demands on the leadership of a vastly expanded and infinitely more sophisticated state; however, in the development of society in Kemet the role of the  *It* or father had already been expanded to accommodate both the nature of the Afrikan extended or consanguineal family and the increasing demands for guidance, leadership, education and socialization of the younger generation at various levels of organization: family, clan, state and nation. The  *It Neter* or father of the god was the specific institutional response to the pharaoh's need for such guidance, that is, the expression of the need at the level of the national state. Further, it is entirely logical that such a response is totally consistent with the prevailing cultural values, tradition and organizational format of the people of Kemet. In fact, no other cultural response is logical and therefore possible. That is why any interpretation of this term which is instructed by a different cultural tradition is very likely to be incomplete, inadequate, confusing and misleading.

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