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Where does the Masculine Begin and the Feminine End?

The Merging of the Two Genders in Egyptian Coffins during the Ramesside Period

Gender is not a static definition, but rather a social phenomenon that is always "in production" and "dynamic" in a given culture.¹ A person's sex is biologically determined, but gender is a social construct, defined and delineated by a culture; the female gender is demarcated through a number of indicators, including clothing, skin color, behavior, artifacts, and social practices that are all understood in relation to the male gender.² Individuals can transform and modify something that is socially constructed, but not something that is fixed. In ancient Egypt, socially constructed mythologies of rebirth after death were highly masculinized, forcing a variety of creative gender adaptations for the dead female through her funerary equipment. The rebirth of the female individual into the afterlife after death required not a sex change into a masculine being, but a gender shift, allowing her to be likened to the gods Osiris and Re by means of an androgynous coffin, wrapped mummy, and funerary texts. Parts of the female's funerary ensemble, in particular, the anthropoid coffin, mummy, and the inscribed name, were re-gendered, while the unchangeable sex of the individual was hidden inside layers of mummy bandaging. Externally, the female individual was likened to Osiris; inside, the fully gendered human personality was retained. This article will examine private coffins and funerary texts from the perspective of gender and rebirth mythologies grounded in male sexuality, using the Ramesside Period as a case study.

Gender acts only within its context, particularly in relation to social status. It is very possible that only affluent and literate Egyptians, who could afford coffins and tombs and who were a part of priestly and bureaucratic upper-status circles, understood highly intellectualized liturgies of masculinized creation which created a conundrum for half of their population when preparing for death. Mythologies of rebirth focused on masculine creator gods; the deceased female individual essentially required a male divine identity to be reborn.³ The problems this raised for elite Egyptian

¹ Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero, "Tensions, Pluralities, and Engendering Archaeology: An Introduction to Women and Prehistory," in: *Engendering Archaeology*, ed. Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9; Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-75.

² Natalie Boymel Kampen, "Gender Theory in Roman Art", in: *I, Claudia*, ed. Diana E. E. Kleiner and Susan B. Matheson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

³ Ann Macy Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility", in: *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*, ed. Alison E. Rautman, *Regendering the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

women encouraged a great deal of ingenious and innovative adaptation, and it is preserved today *only* in high cost funerary art. No funerary goods from burials of the poor in the Ramesside Period document such adaptation with regards to gender.⁴ Elite status artisans, priests, and patrons (male and female) were aware of the problem of female rebirth, and there were many solutions. They could associate the female deceased individual with Osiris by combining her name with his and by depicting Osiris' consorts and protectors Isis and Nephthys at the foot and head of the coffin. Educated artisans and scribes could liken the female individual to the sun god through Book of the Dead invocations, by providing her with gilded or dark red solarizing skin, or by naming Nut as the mother of the deceased in the central text panel. Artisans could also provide an androgynous mummy case, giving the dead woman a new and fully-bound Osirian body for her transformation. Scribes could also use the masculine pronouns "he" and "him" instead of feminine in transformative funerary inscriptions.

Divine creation and rebirth always had a sexual subtext in the surviving ancient Egyptian textual material. As early as the Old Kingdom, the god Atum of Heliopolis is said to be 'self created' through an act of masturbation, and he creates the next generation of gods through an act of ejaculation after his body is fully formed.⁵ A female entity – his hand, *djeret* in Egyptian and a feminine word – helps Atum create himself by acting as the vessel, but this female element was also part of himself. Atum is a solar deity, and the daily cycle of the sun through the heavens can also be seen as a sexualized male creation through union with the mother, the sky goddess Nut.⁶ Atum is a manifestation of the evening sun, ready to die but full of potentiality for new life. When he sets in the West, he enters the mouth of his mother Nut, the sky goddess, moving inside of her body into the *duat* afterlife space, planting the conception of himself within his own mother. He will be reborn from her in the eastern horizon in the morning as Khepri, the masculine god of new life represented by a scarab beetle capable of "coming into being" from death.⁷ The god Osiris has the same potentiality for creating his own

⁴ Evidence for lower status burials in this, or any time period, are sorely lacking. However, see M. Raven, *The Tomb of Iurudéf: A Memphite Official in the Reign of Ramesses II* (London and Leiden 1991). None of the poorly preserved individuals buried in this cache tomb without a coffin show any visible gender adaptation.

⁵ J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, Yale Egyptological Studies (San Antonio Texas: Van Siclen Books for Yale Egyptological Seminar, Yale University, 1988); J. Zandee, "The Birth-Giving Creator-God in Ancient Egypt", in *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society in Honour of J. Gwyn Griffiths*, ed. Alan B. Lloyd, Occasional Publications 8 (London: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1992), 169-85.

⁶ Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 5-6; J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 172-74.

⁷ For example, see chapter 79 of the Book of the Dead in which the deceased likens himself to these creator gods: "I am Atum who made the sky and created what exists, who came forth from the earth, who created seed, Lord of All, who fashioned the gods, the Great God, the self-created, the Lord of Life, who made the Ennead to flourish". For this translation, see Raymond Faulkner and Ogden Goelet, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day. The First Authentic Presentation of the Complete Papyrus of Ani* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), 109.

resurrection after his murder and dismemberment by his brother Seth.⁸ Once his consort and sister Isis had reassembled him into a wrapped human form, which in Egyptian mythology is understood as the first mummy, Osiris was able to recreate himself through a sexual act with himself, the same act of masturbation used by Atum at the first moment of creation. Isis is present to provide sexual excitement, but it is Osiris who essentially raises himself from the dead.⁹ Isis created the enclosure for Osiris' rebirth – his mummy wrappings – and she now acts as the vessel for the conception of the next generation and the new king on earth, Horus.

The Egyptians understood the male sexual act as *the* process that reunited the disparate parts of a person, or a god, into a complete whole after death or before creation, and we will see these beliefs reflected in funerary literature and art. The god Atum's sexual act occurred just at that moment of bare self awareness, before he understood his entire being, and before he had fully created his own body. The sun god's sexual act with his mother-consort-daughter Nut happens at the very moment of his death, when he is dissolving and fading. The sexual act of Osiris with Isis happens after his death, after his body has been dismembered, physically fragmented, and then magically reconstituted.

There are a number of sexual allusions in Egyptian funerary literature. For example, in the Book of the Dead, the deceased links his rejuvenation directly to male sexuality:

I am Osiris, Lord of persons, alive of breast, strong of hinder-parts, stiff of phallus, who is within the boundary of the common folk. I am Orion who treads his land, who precedes the stars of the sky which are on the body of my mother Nut, who conceived me at her desire and bore me at her will. I am Anubis on the Day of the Centipede, I am the Bull who presides over the field.¹⁰

Another chapter links political power in the afterlife to masculine sexuality:

Those who are in Heliopolis bow their heads to me, for I am their lord, I am their bull. I am mightier than the Lord of Terror; I copulate and I have power over myriads.¹¹

In Osirian-solar mythologies of rebirth and creation, the female element always takes on the role of empty vessel, aggressive protector and helper. Although she excites the male with her presence, provides sustenance, protects him from harm, reconstitutes his shape and contains him in her womb, she is not responsible for the spark of creation that gives new life.¹² Creation and

⁸ J.G. Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and His Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

⁹ A.M. Calverley, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos. Vol. III: The Osiris Complex* (London: The Egypt Exploration Society and the University of Chicago Press, 1938), pl. 62; Sylvie Cauville, *Le Temple de Dendara. Les Chapelles Osiriennes, Bibliothèque d'étude, 117* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1997); F. Dumas, *Dendara et le Temple d'Hathor: Notice Sommaire, Recherches d'archéologie, de Philologie et d'histoire XXIX* (Cairo: IFAO, 1969).

¹⁰ Chapter 69, Faulkner and Golet, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani*, 107.

¹¹ Chapter 82, translation found *ibid.*

¹² Betsy M. Bryan, "In Women Good and Bad Fortune Are on Earth: Status and Roles of Women in Egyptian Culture", in: *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Anne K. Capel and Glenn E. Markoe (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996). We can

re-birth is a male prerogative in Ancient Egypt.¹³ In every day village life, sterility was thought to be a problem for the man in a relationship, not the woman, as it is in most Western cultures.¹⁴ Because of the mythological links between divine male sexuality and rebirth after death, the deceased individual likened himself or herself to a god of creation and rebirth. As early as the 6th Dynasty, the name of dead individuals was combined with the name of Osiris whether they were male or female.¹⁵ The renaming of the deceased as Osiris-N is a kind of alteration; the human being undergoes a transformation and actually joins with this god, who after his death recreated himself and impregnated Isis with his offspring Horus.

The masculine act of impregnation is one means of personal resurrection after death and associated funerary practice. Betsy Bryan states:

Beliefs of the afterlife included an important sexual aspect that required copulation and impregnation of a female if any deceased person (male or female) was to have a continued existence...¹⁶

The need to impregnate required a vessel, and a variety of "vessels" were placed in the tomb early on.¹⁷ Sexualized female servants and images were

even apply some of this thinking about divine birth and resurrection in Christianity, looking at it through an Egyptian lens of gender and power. The virgin birth is clearly a masculine creation. The female, the virgin Mary, is not necessary for the conception of Jesus Christ. She is simply a vessel. God impregnated her with a version of himself, much in the manner of the Egyptian sun god. Justin, an early theologian and Christian apologist, believed that Jesus materialized himself within Mary. Mary does not generate; instead, she shields the child, raises him, and mourns when he sacrifices himself. Mary cleans and preserves the body of her son before his entombment. After three days of death, Jesus again regenerates himself by himself – a very Egyptian and even Osirian notion. No female element is necessary for his resurrection. See Keith Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: The Strange Triumph of Christianity* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 301-29. Also see Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 115-16; R.G. Bonnel and V. Ariele Tobin, "Christ and Osiris: A Comparative Study", in: *Pharaonic Egypt: The Bible and Christianity*, ed. S. Israelit-Groll (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1985). Closer to our topic of rebirth, in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus tells Mary Magdalene that she must be masculine to become reborn: "For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven" See Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods*, 322.

¹³ Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility".

¹⁴ G. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1993), 77; Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility," 190.

¹⁵ Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 74; H.G. Fischer, *Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom and of the Heracleopolitan Period*, 2nd ed. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 17; Heather Lee McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari: A Case Study of Decorum, Gender, and Regeneration", *JARCE* 39 (2002) 174. But see Smith, "Osiris NN or Osiris of NN?" *Totenbuchforschungen*, B. Backes, I. Munro, and S. Stoehr, eds., Wiesbaden 2006.

¹⁶ Bryan, "In Women Good and Bad Fortune Are on Earth", 45.

¹⁷ One could even make a stretch and argue that the surplus of pottery vessels buried with the deceased in the Pre- and Proto-dynastic time periods fulfilled this function. There is no textual evidence to make a real case for it, but many of the Naqada II wares are painted with images of a feminine form with arms raised above her head, of boats, and possibly of funerary processions. For such pottery, see Dorothea Arnold and Janine Bourriau, eds., *An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Pottery*, *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Abteilung Kairo 17* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1993).

placed in burials in the Old Kingdom,¹⁸ and they may have served this purpose. By the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom the servant figurine had evolved into female offering bringers, wooden models of semi nude women who are depicted carrying food and drink to the deceased.¹⁹ Most of these wooden figures accentuate the sexual aspects of breasts, pubic triangle, and youthful female body. By the New Kingdom, sexualized female figurines are common additions to the tomb, and decorated tomb chapels include many depictions of the nude adolescent girl who offers food and drink at the banquet.²⁰ All of these female images could be thought of as vessels for the deceased's sexual ability to impregnate, but they were also servants who offered the necessary food and sexual energy to allow the deceased to begin his process of rebirth. In Egyptian funerary literature, including Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and New Kingdom underworld books, nourishment usually comes from a female source,²¹ suggesting an intimate connection between the consumption of food and subsequent masculine sexual activity. In the Ramesside Period, the source of sustenance is often depicted as the tree goddess on the feet of the anthropoid coffin.²² The female was a necessary, active, and dynamic component of the resurrection process, but as an enclosure, not as the seed.²³

The deceased female individual therefore required transformation into a male divine entity, a transformation involving gender adaptations that are often overlooked by scholars of Egyptian afterlife beliefs.²⁴ There were many

¹⁸ Bryan, "In Women Good and Bad Fortune Are on Earth", 91-92; McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari"; G. Robins, "Ancient Egyptian Sexuality", *Discussions in Egyptology* 11 (1988); G. Robins, "Some Images of Women in New Kingdom Art and Literature," in: *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia: Proceedings of the Conference on Women in the Ancient Near East, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, November 5-7, 1987* ed. Barbara Lesko (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Ann Macy Roth, "The Absent Spouse: Patterns and Taboos in Egyptian Tomb Decoration", *JARCE* 36 (1999).

¹⁹ Janine Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals. Egyptian Art in the Middle Kingdom. Catalogue. With a Contribution by Stephen Quirke. Exhibition Organised by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge 19 April to 26 June, Liverpool 18 July to 4 September 1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 103-16; S. d'Auria, P. Lacovara, and C.H. Roehrig, eds., *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt. Exhibition Catalogue. Museum of Fine Arts Boston* (Boston: 1988), 102-03; J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie Égyptienne IV* (Paris: Picard et Cie, 1958), 147-49.

²⁰ Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 57-58, 176-90.

²¹ Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 153, 223-24.

²² For example, on the coffin of Sennedjem from Theban Tomb 1 at Deir el Medina. See B. Bruyère, *La Tombe No. 1 de Sennedjem à Deir el Médineh* (Cairo: 1959), 73; A. Niwinski, *Twenty-First Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies* (Mainz: 1988), 118; V. Schmidt, *Sarkofager, Mumiekister, Og Mumiehylstre I Det Gamle Aegypten. Typologisk Atlas* (Copenhagen: 1919), 625-27.

²³ Bryan, "In Women Good and Bad Fortune Are on Earth"; McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari"; Joyce Tyldesley, *Daughters of Isis: Women of Ancient Egypt* (London and New York: Penguin, 1994), 252-54.

²⁴ Most recently, see Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*. Assmann's study on afterlife beliefs in ancient Egypt does not mention sexuality or gender in terms of the re-creation of the individual after death. He does divide the two genders according to their ritualistic roles: females mourn and bury, while the male avenges and performs correct liturgies. He therefore genders the funerary rituals that allow the deceased to come back to life, placing female aid into the category of "bodily rebirth" and masculine aid into the category of "social rebirth" He does

means of adaptation, and no clear rules or orthodoxy. Recently, scholars have begun to examine the deceased female individual and her burial equipment as an adaptation to a set of rituals and activities designed for masculine beings.²⁵ First, the Egyptian female's association with Osiris after her death, as Osiris-N, allowed her to become masculine and divine, providing her with rebirth like Osiris and Re.²⁶ Second, for those who could afford one, the coffin²⁷ offered the ideal means of divinizing the deceased; this wooden container surrounded the dead individual with texts and scenes that remade him or her into the image of a god. During the ritual activity of the funeral, and even after its interment, the coffin acted as a *cult object*, which the deceased *inhabited* only temporarily, dwelling there at times during the day to receive offerings from living family members as well as at night in the *ba* form to become one with his or her corpse. The coffin can be understood as the chief material manifestation, for the elite at least, of syncretism, or at least some kind of unification, with Osiris.²⁸

A deceased female individual was therefore likened to masculine divinities, to Re, Osiris, and Atum, gods of creation, to become an effective *akh* spirit in the next world. The coffin and the associated funerary rituals represent the most visible transformation of the female individual into a male divinity. During Dynastic Egypt, the deceased female's body is shaped into the form of the god Osiris, as it would be with a man. In the New Kingdom, the woman is also placed into an anthropoid coffin which mimics the mummy and includes some of her feminine aspects but nonetheless identifies her as a male god. For example, one Ramesside coffin set names a 19th Dynasty deceased female "the Osiris Chantress of Amen in Ipet-Sut, Mistress of the House, Henut-mehyt"²⁹, a link between human and god that was standard from Dynasty 6 until the demise of traditional Egyptian burial practices.³⁰

not, however, discuss the female deceased individual's necessary association with a masculine god and the adaptations this would have required in funerary texts and equipment.

²⁵ Bryan, "In Women Good and Bad Fortune Are on Earth"; McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari"; Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*; Roth, "The Absent Spouse"; Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility"; Terry G. Wilfong, *Women and Gender in Ancient Egypt from Prehistory to Late Antiquity: An Exhibition at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 14 March - 15 June 1997* (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 1997).

²⁶ Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 175.

²⁷ For an analysis of Ramesside coffins, see Cooney, Kathlyn M., *The Price of Death in Ancient Egypt: The Value of Private Funerary Art in the Ramesside Period Egypt*, Egyptologische Uitgaven 22 (Leiden: 2007).

²⁸ I have adapted the ideas of Hans Bonnet and his notions of "Einwohnung" in understanding how the deceased was merged with Osiris, although he never applied them to funerary beliefs or ritual. H. Bonnet, "On Understanding Syncretism," *Orientalia* 68, no. 3 (1999).

²⁹ W. Budge, *British Museum: A Guide to the First, Second and Third Egyptian Rooms* (London: 1924), 82-83, pl. XIX; W. Budge, *The Dwellers of the Nile* (London: 1926), 280, pl. X; Niwinski, *Twenty-First Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*, 12, n. 34, 154; J.H. Taylor, "The Burial Assemblage of Henutmehyt: Inventory, Date and Provenance," in *Studies in Egyptian Antiquities: A Tribute to T.G.H. James*, ed. W.V. Davies, *British Museum Occasional Paper* 123 (London: 1999).

³⁰ Not until the Greco-Roman period does a woman syncretize her name with that of a goddess, particularly Hathor, for rebirth in the afterlife. See d'Auria, Lacovara, and Roehrig, eds., *Mummies and Magic*, 76-77; McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari", 174, n. 21; Christina Riggs and

(See Fig. 1) The high value coffin set of Henut-mehyt provides the deceased female with a set of nesting Osirian bound bodies that will not decay because they are made of wood. The inner coffin and mummy board in this set are fully gilded, providing her with the flesh of the sun god. The coffin transforms her into a masculined being, mingling her essence with that of Osiris so that there only remain hints that the dead individual is female: modeled breasts underneath her wesekh collar, her feminine wig, her feminine name and titles, and the feminine pronoun *.s in dd.s* 'she says' found in the central text column on the lid. This 19th Dynasty coffin indicates that gender flexibility, not a complete gender change, was believed to work best when helping the deceased female attain the desired goal of rebirth into the next life.

Ramesseid Period coffins of females provide a number of examples of this gender flexibility. In fact, at the beginning of the Ramesseid Period, coffins began to include a number of new adaptations more inclusive of the feminine gender. For example, Iy-neferty, a 19th Dynasty Deir el Medina inhabitant whose coffin set and mummy were found in Theban Tomb 1,³¹ is called Osiris-Iy-neferty on her coffin and in funerary texts, but the makers of this coffin set included some creative funerary adaptations with regards to gender. (See Fig. 2) The female form is depicted on the inner mummy board in a pleated and fringed white dress, with feminine posture of one arm folded below the breast and the other flat on the thigh. This female depiction only appears inside of her second coffin piece. The outer anthropoid coffin, on the other hand, transforms her more clearly into a manifestation of Osiris. Both the anthropoid coffin and the mummy board depict the woman with dark red skin, a color typically reserved for men, but during the reign of Ramses II often used for females, including queen Nefertari in her tomb in the Valley of the Queens.³² Iy-neferty's anthropoid coffin is masculinized, except for the abbreviated and unnaturalistic breasts and a feminine wig. The placement of the feminized mummy board *inside* of an androgynous anthropoid coffin suggests that the masculine and Osirian transformation Iy-neferty must undergo is somehow partial or temporary, one that does not touch her final and intended nature. The female and male principles are combined in this coffin set.

In the coffin set of Iy-neferty, the female is shown as both feminine and masculine. Not to oversimplify the situation, but it seems that her anthro-

Martin Andreas Stadler, "A Roman Shroud and Its Demotic Inscription in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston," *JARCE* 40 (2003); Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility," 199; Mark Smith, *Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum, III: The Mortuary Texts of Papyrus BM 10507* (London: The British Museum, 1987), 130.

³¹ G. Daressy, "La Trouvaille de Sennezem: Objets Séparées de L'ensemble," *ASAE* 28 (1928): 7-11; W.C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, vol. II (Cambridge, Mass.: 1959), 14-16; Niwinski, *Twenty-First Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*, 159.

³² Nicola Harrington, "From the Cradle to the Grave: Anthropoid Busts and Ancestor Cults at Deir El-Medina", in: *Current Research in Egyptology 2003: Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Symposium Which Took Place at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 18-19 January 2003*, ed. K. Piquette and S. Love (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005); McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari".

roid coffin masculinizes, while her mummy board feminizes. However, this gendered depiction was not exclusive to female deceased individuals; even Ramesside period men saved the personalized white, pleated, and fringed depiction of themselves for their mummy board, as we see in the board of Piay in the Cairo Museum.³³ (See Fig. 3) This style of mummy board is not limited to Thebes or Deir el Medina. A mummy board now in the Brooklyn Museum of Art,³⁴ probably from Saqqara, shows the same stylistic trend. These representations of the deceased in pure white allow a different representation than does the anthropoid coffin. The female can show her femininity; the male can represent himself unbound and clothed in the desired garments of the afterlife. Such depictions of the deceased in white can be linked to many visual allusions to dress in the Book of the Dead, including the opening rubric to chapter 125 in the Book of the Dead:

The correct procedure in the Hall of Justice. One shall utter this chapter pure and clean and clad in white garments and sandals, painted with black eye-paint and anointed with myrrh.³⁵

So this garment is linked with the purity of passing through the Hall of Justice as a pure soul. In spell 75, the deceased travels to Heliopolis to take his rightful place, and his garments are specifically described as given to him after his transition:

I have gone forth from the limits of the earth that I may receive my fringed cloak for the heart of the Baboon... I have appeared in glory, I have been initiated, I have been ennobled as a god...³⁶

This depiction of the deceased in pure white on a mummy board is a Rameside innovation, and it is *not* gender flexible; the dead individual appears according to inherent sexuality as a woman or man, not as a bound androgynous being associated with Osiris.

The mummy board of the Ramesside Period actually takes the creative step of displaying the deceased as an effective *akh* soul – as a whole being after his rebirth – in three dimensional form, wearing the beard and sometimes shown bare-chested if the individual is masculine, or wearing a woman's wig, bracelets, earrings, and holding flowers if the deceased is female. The white garment represents the purity of a soul who has done no wrongdoing and whose heart has passed the scales of truth. This particular image of the deceased is almost always found *inside* of the anthropoid coffin, which depicts the deceased in an androgynous manner, as the Osiris. Therefore, the anthropoid coffin is more in line with a depiction of the *ka* of the deceased as syncretized with Osiris, and it acts as the vehicle for the inner

³³ C. Desroches-Noblecourt, ed., *Ramsès le Grand, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais* (Paris: 1976), 172-73.

³⁴ H. Abbot, *Catalogue of the Egyptian Antiquities of the New York Historical Society* (New York: 1915), 25.

³⁵ See pl. 32 of Faulkner and Goelet, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 108. See also chapter 171 (Faulkner and Goelet, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani*, 128.): "May you remove the evil which is on him. As for this pure garment for N, may it be allotted to him for ever and ever, and may you remove the evil which is on him".

personality or *akh* to appear and manifest. This *akh* form, represented on the inner coffin piece, is the intended outcome and final step of an individual's rebirth.

Ramesseid women, usually given fewer funerary goods in comparison to male members of the same family,³⁷ could include this creative depiction of the pure and effective *akh* soul, even when they could only afford one anthropoid coffin, rather than a multi-piece nesting set. Iset, of Theban Tomb 1, for example, was buried with only one coffin,³⁸ and the lid displays her in a pure white garment, with her femininity clearly represented in her modeled body contours and jewelery. (See Fig. 4) This one coffin was therefore used by artisans to represent her multiple manifestations, and even both of her afterlife genders for her journey into the *duat*. The coffin combines the feminizing depiction in pure white on the coffin's lid with the masculinizing outer coffin, here using the case sides with their yellow background and Book of the Dead texts likening the deceased to male creator gods. The lid is a closer representation of her effective *akh* being, while the case sides contain funerary texts that associate her with Osiris and Re, and thus syncretize her *ka* with those divine manifestations to enable her transformation. These correlations between coffin and human manifestation cannot be understood as exact, but it is possible that these innovative and multi-layered depictions represent the fragmentation of the individual through death and the subsequent rebirth of the individual as a whole and pure being within the material matter of the coffin set itself. This coffin actually represents two stages of her afterlife journey simultaneously on one object: her masculine transformation as a syncretization with Osiris and her feminine existence as an *akh* soul in the desired parts of the afterlife.

Not all Ramesseid coffin sets included the gendered mummy board. There were no clear rules about how to represent gender or human-divine manifestation in Egyptian funerary etiquette, and solutions to the problem of female rebirth were solved in many different ways, sometimes with the inclusion of the feminine within another form, as with Iset or Iy-neferty, and sometimes with overt masculinization at the expense of the feminine. For example, a Ramesseid coffin set now in Frankfurt lacks a representation of the female in traditional dress on the inner piece.³⁹ (See Fig. 5) In fact, all of this woman's coffin pieces are masculinized, or perhaps better stated, androgynized. Her arm posture and body shape is Osirian. The mythological texts inscribed onto the coffin front and sides of this woman's coffin set retain the *f* and *sw* masculine pronouns "he" and "him." On the front of the

³⁷ L. Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class et Cetera in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: 1999).

³⁸ Desroches-Noblecourt, ed., *Ramsès Le Grand*, 170-71, pl. 37; Niwinski, *Twenty-First Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*, 118; F. Tiradritti, *Egyptian Treasures from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo* (New York: 1999), 272.

³⁹ E. Bayer-Niemeier et al., *Skulptur, Malerei, Papyri und Särge*, Liebieghaus Museum Alter Plastik Ägyptische Bildwerke III (Melsungen: 1993), 302-23; B. Geßler-Löhr, *Ägyptische Kunst im Liebieghaus* (Frankfurt am Main: 1981), 25-27; Niwinski, *Twenty-First Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*, 140.

coffin in the central text strip, the Book of the Dead invocation is written *dd.f*, "He says," addressing *his* mother Nut, not *her* mother. The inclusion of these male pronouns on female coffin inscriptions is best understood as a purposeful and powerful association with the male gender,⁴⁰ as has already been suggested for Nefertari's tomb.⁴¹ Nonetheless, this woman Ta-kayt still maintains gender flexibility by retaining some of her femininity within her coffin set: she wears a stylish woman's wig and prominent earrings, and her inner mummy mask shows abbreviated breasts. Interestingly, this woman is also depicted in the white female dress of an *akh* in small two-dimensional representations found on the surface of the coffins themselves, and it could be argued that this feminine two-dimensional depiction of her on a masculinizing three-dimensional coffin grants the female individual a flexibility of gender and manifestation on one and the same coffin. Multiple manifestations of the individual and the inclusion of both genders seem to have been necessary for the deceased's rebirth in the next realm.

A man's coffins could also depict him in multiple manifestations, if not multiple genders, in the same coffin set, and again it is possible to see each funerary piece as representing a different adaptation that the deceased person could use on their journey to the afterlife. For example, the Ramesside Deir el Medina craftsman Khonsu owned two coffins found in Theban Tomb 1, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁴² (See Fig. 6) In both coffins, he is shown in Osirian form, bound with mummy bands, but the outer coffin represents the man in a more divine manifestation, as Osiris-Khonsu, because he wears the long curled divine mummy beard. His inner coffin shows him wearing the short beard of a man. It seems that even though he owns no mummy board showing him in pure white, the artisans are using details as small as the beard to depict the adaptability of this man's elements using various coffin pieces within a set.⁴³

⁴⁰ McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari," 191; Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 175.

⁴¹ Hans Goedicke et al., *Nofretari: Eine Dokumentation der Wandgemälde ihres Grabes* (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1971).

⁴² Daressy, "La Trouvaille de Sennezem: Objets Séparées de L'ensemble", 7-9; C. Gillett, *Catalogue of the Egyptian Antiquities in Halls 3 and 4* (New York: 1898), 123-24; Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, 417; Niwinski, *Twenty-First Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*, 159; E. Toda and G. Daressy, "La Découverte e l'inventaire du Tombeau de Sen-nezem", *ASAE* 20 (1920) 145-60.

⁴³ New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period coffins often attach the long curled beard to the outer coffin and the short beard to the inner coffin. These same coffins are depicted in many New Kingdom Theban tombs in funeral scenes in the back corridor. Scholars are often confused by the depiction of these two coffins, and most interpret them as the mummies of husband and wife, eternally paired in the ritual of burial (Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 310-12; P. Barthelmess, *Der Übergang ins Jenseits in den Thebanischen Beamtengräbern der Ramessidenzeit* (Heidelberg: 1992). I interpret these scenes differently. These are not representations of mummies, but two-dimensional depictions of a set of *wet* coffins belonging to the male deceased and owner of the tomb. The pieces in the coffin set are not differentiated by size in these two-dimensional representations, but by iconographical markers. The coffin depicted with the curled beard represents the outer piece, while the coffin with short beard or no beard depicts the inner piece. See Cooney, *The Cost of Death*.

Ancient Egyptian funerary equipment expresses and adapts to the fragmentation of the human being at death, as well as the recreation of a whole and effective eternal being.⁴⁴ Mummification itself is a form of fragmentation and reintegration. It is a method of preservation that grapples with the temporary separation of the soul from the body. When body is no longer alive, it is a preserved corpse – the *khat* “corpse” or the *wet* “the embalmed body”, both feminine words that speak to the corpse acting as a vessel for the manifestations of the deceased. The anthropoid coffin is also called *wet* in Egyptian language, but the word is followed by a determinative for wood, indicating that the word means something like “mummified body of wood” and represented a wooden substitute for the embalmed body.⁴⁵ In the Ramesside period especially, the Egyptian artisans and commissioners were innovative in expressing the fragmentation of the body from the soul at death and its subsequent reunification in the various parts of the funerary ensemble at the moment of rebirth.

The *ka* soul, a masculine word, is most associated with the androgynous coffin showing the deceased as Osiris, because it is usually understood as the part of the soul that has a divine essence and powers of regeneration.⁴⁶ The Ramesside anthropoid coffin represents the deceased with arms crossed and body bound in the manner of the divine Osiris. The dead individual can therefore meld with masculine divinity, whether male or female. The *ba* does not find representation in any piece of funerary equipment, and given that it is understood as the solar soul of mobility meant to fly up to the heavens,⁴⁷ we should not expect it to find a coffin correlation. The *ba* is depicted in two-dimensions on Ramesside funerary equipment, as on the sarcophagi of Khonsu and Sennedjem from Deir el Medina’s Theban Tomb 1, but the only actual funerary equipment that seems to encapsulate it, are amulets associated with the *ba*, that were placed on the body, encouraging the *ba* manifestation to join again with the corpse and presumably with the coffins. Chapter 89 of the Book of the Dead has instructions that include a *ba* amulet and also make it clear that this kind of magical help was only available to those who could afford it, just like the coffin:

To be spoken over a human-headed bird of gold inlaid with semi-precious stones and laid on the breast of the deceased.⁴⁸

It was absolutely necessary to write the *ren* name of the deceased, with his or her appropriate titles, on all funerary objects. When combined with Osiris, the name and individual are manifested as a divinity. But the association is still very flexible: the gendered titles of the deceased in association with the name helps the individual to retain his or her social place, status, and gender even in the afterlife realm. This flexibility is allowed through the separation

⁴⁴ Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 23-28.

⁴⁵ Cooney, *The Cost of Death*.

⁴⁶ Lanny Bell, “Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (1985) 259.

⁴⁷ Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*.

⁴⁸ Faulkner and Goelet, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani*, pl. 17.

of the person's manifestations. The dead could only be reborn through a complex act of separation – in spirit, in body, in name, and even in gender. This fragmentation allowed the transformation. Fragmentation was complemented by funerary texts and mythologies, and it was made concrete within funerary equipment. The Ramesside anthropoid coffin set can be thought to represent many of a person's separate human elements. Many elements maintained the gender of the deceased, such as the *ba* soul, *akh*, or the *ren* name, while others, such as the *ka* had more flexibility in gender.

The anthropoid *wet* coffin can be examined further with regards to its dual gender. The word most often used for anthropoid coffin in the Ramesside Period is *wet*, which because of the *-t* is feminine,⁴⁹ but the object represents both male and female gendered power in one three-dimensional object. The coffin is understood by many Egyptologists as the female power that conveys and protects the deceased, as the body of Nut, the womb, the egg, and the *duat*, as Jan Assmann explains:

On coffins, a deity speaks to the deceased, both as coffin and as mother. She greets him as her son, whom she accepts forever into her body... The coffin becomes the body of the goddess of the sky, and this body encloses an entire divine realm.⁵⁰

For Assmann, the coffin is the re-birth mother of the deceased. This view is completely valid, but the multiple meanings of the Egyptian anthropoid coffin are much more complex. The coffin as feminine container references only *internal space* as an enclosure for the deceased. By placing the mummy of the deceased *inside* of a coffin, ritual participants believed they were placing an image of Osiris into a protected conveyance from which rebirth was possible. In fact, not all Ramesside words referencing the anthropoid coffin are feminine. The compound *nb-ꜥnh* "lord of life", often used in formal funerary texts, and the word *mn-ꜥnh* "one enduring of life", often used in socioeconomic contracts, are both masculine and seem to refer to the deceased contained by the coffin, not to the container itself.⁵¹ The feminine principle of the coffin is therefore the empty space of enclosure. The masculine is what is placed inside, and when a human body is put into a coffin, it is thought to be inside of the feminine. Almost all Ramesside coffin interiors are painted with a thick black pitch resin,⁵² representative of the darkness of a womb-like enclosure, of the empty space that the feminine principle represents. Later in the Third Intermediate Period, text and iconography were painted on the interior surface to represent features and beings that existed in the *duat* after-

⁴⁹ In O. Louvre 698, the word used to describe the container of the dead is more archaic – *ꜥdt*, meaning "chest" – but the word is still feminine (P.J. Frandsen, "The Letter to Ikhtay's Coffin: O. Louvre Inv. No. 698", in *Village Voices*, ed. R.J. Demarée and A. Egberts (Leiden: 1992). The *swht*, originally meaning "egg," and the *yit* funerary object, both reference smaller inner body containers, and both words are feminine. The *dbꜣt* sarcophagus is also a feminine word (For a full discussion of this lexicography of body containers, see Cooney, *The Cost of Death*).

⁵⁰ Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 165-66.

⁵¹ Cooney, *The Cost of Death*.

⁵² Serpico M. and R. White, "The Use and Identification of Varnish on New Kingdom Funerary Equipment", in: *Colour and Painting in Ancient Egypt* (London: 2001).

life space; the goddess of the west or the sky mother Nut is often depicted on the Third Intermediate Period lid's underside, stretched out over the mummy of the deceased like the canopy of the sky.⁵³ The mummy itself was meant to represent Osiris, but only externally as a bandaged and bound entity. Internally, the body can be identified by sex underneath the wrappings.

The Egyptian coffin represents the container and the contained, the transformation and the outcome. It is made up of the exterior surface area, the interior space, and the contained mummy, while the external decoration is meant to depict a viable image of the mummy on the coffin surface. The decorated coffin exterior was meant to create for the deceased a second imperishable wooden mummy (*wet* written with the wood determinative), inside of which was the actual embalmed body (*wet* written with the mummy determinative). The internal space represents the *duat* interior, the feminine afterlife realm.

These coffin spaces can also be gendered. External anthropoid coffin decoration usually remakes the deceased in the image of masculine gods Osiris and Re, with crossed arms and stylized mummy bandages. But the external decoration of a Ramesside coffin still allowed the female deceased some gender flexibility; it included her feminine wig, name, titles, and sometimes modeled breasts. She was Osiris, but also herself. This is the purpose of association with Osiris; it provided adaptability.⁵⁴ The external decoration of the Ramesside coffin also includes representations of divine protectors, both masculine and feminine. Isis and Nephthys are depicted at the head and foot of the case. On the case sides are the four sons of Horus – Imsety, Hapy, Duamutef, and Qebehsenuf – in the company of Thoth who protect the mummy form from dying a second death on his journey to the desired parts of the *duat*. The tree goddess is often shown at the feet of the coffin lid providing the deceased with cool waters and sustenance. Nut is shown spreading her wings over the deceased at midbody on the lid, and the deceased's invocation is drawn between the bound legs on the lid exterior: "Oh my mother Nut, stretch yourself over me that (I) may be placed among the Imperishable Stars." This invocation tells us that the feminine principle of the coffin is inside, as interior space.

The coffin is therefore representative of the enclosure (the feminine Nut, the *duat*, and the womb) as well as the enclosed deceased (the male creative deity as Re and Osiris), who is also represented on the coffin lid. The coffin can be understood to represent *both* human genders in one multi-layered substitute wooden body. The representational logic even follows biological reality: the masculine is represented outside, just as the male sex organs are outside the human body; the feminine is represented hidden inside, just as the female sex organs are hidden inside of the human body.⁵⁵ One could take this thought further. The feminine holds the mysterious masculine spark of creation and rebirth, but only when the viable masculine power is enclosed

⁵³ Niwinski, *Twenty-First Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*.

⁵⁴ Bonnet, "On Understanding Syncretism".

⁵⁵ Kampen, "Gender Theory in Roman Art".

and contained within her.⁵⁶ The *duat* was thought of an enclosure or a bodily interior from which birth was possible in the manner of the sun god; for example, in chapter 180 of the Book of the Dead, the deceased addresses those in the *duat* and tells them how his rebirth as the "heir of Osiris" involves coming forth from this body:

I am the heir of Osiris, I have received his Nemes headdress in the *duat*; look at me, for I have appeared in glory in coming forth from your body, I have become his father, and he applauds. Look at me, rejoice over me, for behold, I am on high, I have come into being, one who provides his own shape; open a path to my soul, stand at your proper places, let me be at peace in the beautiful West, open a place for me among you.⁵⁷

The transformation of the deceased occurred inside of hidden space – either inside the coffin or the burial chamber as analogy for the *duat* interior space. In the accessible tomb chapel, on the other hand, the Egyptian woman's final and ideal form as an *akh* spirit is depicted, not her temporary Osirian transformation.

The coffin is the body that conveyed the deceased to destinations in the afterlife, particularly to the stars known as the Imperishable Ones usually mentioned on the coffin lid invocation. The coffin can even be likened to the *mekhnet* ferry that the deceased must call to bring him to the heavens in chapter 99 of the Book of the Dead. This ferry boat also has a feminine identity, and it is likened to the dead body before rebirth – inert and in pieces. The deceased must find a way to make the ferry boat whole again, as an analogy of his own fragmentation at death and rebirth through reconstitution. When the mast is missing, the deceased says, "Bring this phallus of Babai which creates children and begets calves." He then says to attach the mast to "the thighs which open out the shanks" of the feminine ferry boat. When the ferry boat is finally constructed out of the requisite limbs and members, the boat demands that the deceased name each and every part before he is allowed to come aboard. The deceased then equates every body part of the ferry boat with a different divinity, a classic treatment of the fragmentation of the body in Egyptian funerary texts. He tells her the name of the mooring post: "Lady of the Two Lands in the shrine." The mast is "He who brought back the Great Goddess after she had been far way," and the sail is fittingly called "Nut". The wooden ribs along the sides of the boat are called "Imsety, Hapy, Duamutef and Qebhsenuf", the four sons of Horus.⁵⁸ Egyptian theologians have fragmented the boat into both masculine and feminine parts, each dependent on the other. If we read this section

⁵⁶ Compare, however, Roth's thinking that creation is completely masculine with no real feminine element. For example, she claims "Clearly, Nut has no effect on the sun; it simply passes through her" See Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility," 189. Assmann, on the other hand, does not pay as much attention to the masculine spark of creation and indicates that most of the power for rebirth lies with the feminine principle, the real power behind the masculine, seeing the surrounding protective circumstances as the most vital. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 405-06.

⁵⁷ Faulkner and Golet, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani*, 132.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-11.

carefully, this description of the ferry boat is very similar to the two-gendered understanding of the Egyptian coffin, the imperishable body of the deceased. The combination of the mast and hull are a union of masculine and feminine. The sail of the ferry boat is Nut, who covers and encloses the deceased with her protection as the vault of the sky, exactly as she does on the lid of a New Kingdom coffin at midbody in her form of a human bird with wings outstretched. The four sons of Horus also take position on the case sides of a coffin,⁵⁹ like the ribs of the ferry boat. The coffin and ferry boat were both thought to be eternal bodies launching the deceased into the afterlife.

The process of fragmentation was a powerful and creative mechanism. By breaking the person, the coffin, or even the ferry boat, into various conceptual parts, it is possible to make adaptations that the whole cannot sustain. This fragmentation is how the Egyptians were able to apply a masculine sexualized creation mythology to an individual female's rebirth into the next world. It is how they also applied a divine identity to a human being. Fragmentation allowed the feminine *wet* coffin to include masculine powers of rebirth. Death caused the separation of a person's elements; rebirth reconstituted that which had been fragmented into a more powerful and eternal form, like putting the body of Osiris back together again, or refitting the ferry boat that conveyed the deceased to the heavens. Only when a person was vulnerable and fragmented, were transformations into a god, or into another gender possible. When the rebirth transformation was achieved, wholeness was achieved. And the deceased could be shown as a gendered *akh* in the act of worshipping Osiris.

Rebirth requires male and female elements. The male god is essentially dependent on the female to excite him, to contain him, and to protect him. Atum needs the female element, his hand. The sun god needs the sky goddess to impregnate with his essence and to gestate within. Osiris needs the protection, magical powers, and erotic powers of his consort Isis. And the next generation is created within her. Many scholars have explained the problem of female rebirth simply as a need for masculine power that women lack,⁶⁰ but this solution is too simple. By the New Kingdom, it seems the Egyptians believed that to be reborn, the deceased would need to become *both* genders. For example, in chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead, the deceased likens himself not only to the male gods of creation, Osiris and Re, but to the goddesses Isis and Nephthys who incorporate powers of protection and sustenance:

⁵⁹ The speeches of the four sons of Horus as well as Isis and Nephthys written on the case sides and ends of a typical Ramesside coffin come from chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead. Each divinity places him or herself in relation to the deceased Osiris, as sister, wife, and as son. For example, Qebehseuef says: "I am Qebehseuef, your son, O Osiris-N, the vindicated. I have come that I may be your protection. I assemble your bones, I pull together your limbs. I have brought your heart to you. I have put it in its place in your body for you. I have caused that your house flourish after you. May you live eternally". See pl. 33, *ibid.* Also see Barbara Lüscher, *Untersuchungen zu Totenbuch Spruch 151* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 73.

⁶⁰ Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs About Conception and Fertility"

I have come into this land, I have made use of my feet, for I am Atum, I am in my city. Get back, O Lion, bright of mouth and shining of head; retreat because of my strength, take care, O you who are invisible, do not await me, for I am Isis. You found me when I had disarranged the hair of my face and my scalp was disordered. I have become pregnant as Isis, I have conceived as Nephthys. Isis drives out those who would await me, Nephthys drives off those who would disturb me. The dread of me follows after me, my dignity is before me, millions bend their arms to me, the common folk serve me, the associates of my enemies are destroyed for me...⁶¹

Chapter 42 of the Book of the Dead goes even further and likens each body part with a different divinity. The deceased is described with parts that are both male and female; his or her body has both breasts and phallus:

My hair is Nun; my face is Re; my eyes are Hathor; my ears are Wepwawet; my nose is She who presides over her lotus-leaf; my lips are Anubis; my molars are Selket; my incisors are Isis the goddess; my arms are the Ram, the Lord of Mendes; my breast is Neith, Lady of Sais; my back is Seth; my phallus is Osiris; my muscles are the Lords of Kheraha; my chest is He who is greatly majestic; my belly and my spine are Sekhmet; my buttocks are the Eye of Horus; my thighs and my calves are Nut; my feet are Ptah; my fingers are Orion; my toes are living uraei; there is no member of mine devoid of a god, and Thoth is the protection of all my flesh.⁶²

Rebirth after death is therefore as much of a problem for the male as it is for the female. The male needs female powers of containment, gestation, and nourishment. The female needs masculine powers of sexual potency. Egyptian funerary equipment, particularly the coffin set, is the materialization of the abstract notion of Egyptian fragmentation and re-combination. The coffin does not simply re-assign gender; it provides the deceased with the powers associated with both genders. The Book of the Dead adapted to allow for this increasingly dual-gendered understanding of creation. For example, chapter 164 includes a spell meant to be spoken over a bisexual divinity:

To be said over (a figurine of) Mut having three heads: one being the head of Pakhet wearing plumes, a second being a human head wearing the Double Crown, the third being the head of a vulture wearing plumes. She also has a phallus, wings, and the claws of a lion. Drawn in dried myrrh with fresh incense, repeated in ink upon a red bandage. A dwarf stands before her, another behind her, each facing her and wearing plumes. Each has a raised arm and two heads, one is the head of a falcon, the other a human head.⁶³

In the guidelines of this spell, the masculine phallus and feminine womb are combined; the masculine creator and the feminine enclosure are found in one and the same body. This Book of the Dead text dates to the Ramesside period or the Third Intermediate Period and may signal a trend in which creation and rebirth is more and more associated with the feminine in com-

⁶¹ See pl. 10, Faulkner and Goelet, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani*.

⁶² See pl. 32, *ibid.*

⁶³ See p. 125, *ibid.* For this text in connection with the tomb of Nefertari, see McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari", 193.

bination with the masculine.⁶⁴ The text is evidence that theologians were continually grappling with the creative elements of rebirth, constantly glossing and adapting, eventually leading to an understanding that, by the Greco-Roman period, allowed women to name themselves Osiris-Hathor-N or even just Hathor-N on their coffins or shrouds, rather than Osiris-N.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ For example, a famous hymn to the goddess Neith at Esna dating to the Greco-Roman period clarifies the creative powers now ascribed to femininity by incorporating masculinity. It reads: "Tu es la maîtresse de Saïs, c'est-à-dire Tanen, dont deux tiers sont masculine, et un tiers féminin; déesse initiale mystérieuse et grande, qui commença d'être au début, et inaugura toute chose (?). Tu es la voûte céleste dans laquelle [...] celle qui enfanta les astres tous tant qu'ils sont, et les éleva sur leurs nattes (?); le souffle qui calcina la terre de la flamme de ses yeux, de l'ardeur sortie de sa bouche; la mère divine de Rê, qui brille à l'horizon, la mystérieuse qui rayonne de sa propre lumière (?)" Sauneron, *Le Temple d'Esna* vol. 3, 137, col. 252; translation found in Sauneron, *Les Fêtes Religieuses d'Esna*, 110. Interestingly, the problem of gendered fragmentation and recombination does not stop with Egyptian polytheistic religion. Early Christianity seems to have had similar problems with the undeniable masculinity of Jesus Christ and his need for female power. Keith Hopkins points out that many Christian hymns include an understanding of God the Creator as partially female. Ode 19 from the Ode to Solomon reads: "The Son is the Cup, and he who was milked in the Father; and the Holy Spirit is she who milked him. Because his breasts were full, and it was undesirable that his milk should be spilled without purpose, the Holy Spirit opened her bosom/womb and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father"; Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods*, 140. The confusion in this text between semen and milk is undeniable. This god is both male and female at the same time. Not only is God considered partly feminine, but the Holy Spirit is also referred to as masculine and feminine in this text and many others, implying a trinity that can be interpreted as God the father, Holy Spirit the mother, and Jesus the son; Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods*, 323.

⁶⁵ Perhaps as early as the Late Period and certainly by the Greco-Roman period, a change took place with regards to the conception of female divine creation, and women were now sometimes named Hathor-N or Hathor-Osiris-N. Mark Smith tells us that the change is "normally explained as a manifestation of a desire, increasingly widespread in the Late Period, to bring about a closer relation between mortals and the divine. By becoming a 'Hathor' rather than an 'Osiris', it is thought, a woman avoided the barrier which gender difference imposed between herself and the god". Smith continues that, "instances in which a deceased female is called Hathor are known only from the later periods of Egyptian history. Yet one wonders to what extent the gender difference was felt to be a barrier, particularly since Osiris remained in use alongside Hathor as a designation for deceased women" Smith, *The Mortuary Texts of Papyrus BM 10507*, 130. For examination of a shroud of a female designated Hathor-N, see Riggs and Stadler, "A Roman Shroud", 69-87. I disagree with Riggs and Stadler that this gender distinction goes back to the Middle Kingdom. They liken the phrases *im3h hr Wsir* "venerated before Osiris" and *im3ht hr Hwt-hr* "venerated before Hathor" with Osiris-N and Hathor-N, which I believe is an over-simplification. A deceased woman of the Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, or Late Period could be "revered before Hathor" in one funerary context and still be called Osiris-N in another context, sometimes on the same funerary object, because her link to rebirth was as a male divinity, not as a female. For example, see the Ramesside coffin of Iset in the Cairo Museum (Desroches-Noblecourt, ed., *Ramsès Le Grand*, 170-71; Tiradritti, *Egyptian Treasures from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo*, 272) in which the deceased is "venerated" before a number of male and female divinities, still to be called Osiris-Iset in the appropriate places on her coffin. The same is true with a man, who could be "venerated" before a number of male and female divinities, and yet still be called Osiris-N in the appropriate context. For an example, see the 13th Dynasty model coffin of Nemtyemweskheth, on which he is "venerated" before both male and female gods and is called Osiris-Nemtyemweskheth only on the lid of the piece (Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals*, 92-93). The *im3h* honorific title meaning "venerated one" or "revered one" is a designation of the blessed dead who have made the transition to the afterlife successfully. Before this stage, the individual still required association with a god of rebirth for their transformation into an effective spirit, and so they were called Osiris-N. After their successful transition, they

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became a "venerated one". In true Egyptian fashion, funerary pieces represent both stages of afterlife existence – transformation as Osiris-N and eternal existence as a venerated one. Texts on Egyptian coffins usually provide the deceased with the expected end result as one of the Blessed Dead in the sought after parts of the *duat*, even in advance of the transition.

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Fig. 1 – Coffin set of Henutmehyt, 19th Dynasty, British Museum, EA 48001, Photo by the author.



Fig. 2 – Coffin set of Iy-neferty, 19th Dynasty, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 85.1.5 a-c, Photo by the author.



Fig. 3 – Mummy board of Piay, 19th Dynasty, Egyptian Museum Cairo, JE 2156, Photo by the author.



Fig. 4 – Coffin of Iset, 19th Dynasty, Egyptian Museum Cairo, JE 27309 a,
Photo courtesy of Adel Mahmoud.



Fig. 5 – Coffin set of Ta-kayt, 19th Dynasty, Die Städtische Galerie Liebieghaus Frankfurt 1651 a-b, Photo by the author.



Fig. 6 – Coffin set of Khonsu, 19th Dynasty, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 86.1.1 a-b, Photo by the author.