

### Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

الدور النشط للمرأة في الرياضة والترفيه في مصر القديمة

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#### **Abstract**

Women held a prominent position in ancient Egyptian society. She enjoyed an acceptable level of equality with men, which enabled her to participate fully in all aspects of life, and thus she held many important positions in the worldly and religious fields. She worked as a doctor, judge, scribe, priestess, educators, nurse, dresser for the king, heads of royal harems, divine wife, singer, musician, head of the royal treasury, and administrator of rituals. Some women even ascended to the throne, becoming queens such as Merneith (1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty), Khentkaus I (4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), Sobekneferu (12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), Hatshepsut (18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), and Tawosret (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty). Although most sports activities were limited to men, and there may have been physical, social or cultural restrictions that prevented women from participating in some violent sports such as wrestling, fencing, boxing and weightlifting. However, this did not prevent women from participating in some sports of strength, flexibility, speed and skill, such as gymnastics, jumping of various types and playing ball. Sports, entertainment and artistic activities were practiced in free time for the purpose of enjoyment, amusement, mental health and physical health, and may have been more available to women of the palace and the upper classes and were individual and collective. Although there was a difference in rights and privileges between the different classes of women, this did not prevent the lower classes from participating in some of these activities, such as swimming, dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, drawing, sculpting, intelligence games, and hunting fish, birds and animals. Women's participation in religious rituals and celebrations was an important part of entertainment. Although there are few scenes and murals depicting women in various sporting and recreational activities, compared to the scenes of men that fill the walls of tombs and temples, they are valuable evidence of the active role of women's participation in sporting and recreational activities in ancient Egypt.


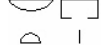
**Keywords:** Ancient Egypt, The role of women in society, women's sports and entertainment, gender equality.

## الملخص

حظيت المرأة بمكانة مرموقة داخل المجتمع في مصر القديمة. حيث تمتعت بمستوى مقبول من المساواة مع الرجال، مما مكنها من المشاركة الكاملة في جميع جوانب الحياة، وشغلت بذلك العديد من المناصب المهمة في المجالين الديني والديني. فقد عملت كطبيبة، وقاضية، وكاتبة، وكاهنة، ومربية، ومرشدة، ومزينة للملك، وكبيرة للحریم الملكي، وزوجة إلهية، ومغنية، وعازفة للموسيقي، ورئيسة للخزانة الملكية، ومقيمة للشعائر. وبعض النساء وصلن لسدة الحكم وأصبحت ملكات مثل الملكة "مريت-نيت" من الأسرة الأولى، و"خنت-كاوس" الأولى من الأسرة الرابعة، و"سيك-نفرو" من الأسرة الثانية عشر، و"حتشبسوت" من الأسرة الثامنة عشر، و"تاوسرت" من الأسرة التاسعة عشر. وعلى الرغم من أن معظم الأنشطة الرياضية كانت تقتصر على الرجال، وربما كانت هناك قيود بدنية أو اجتماعية أو ثقافية، منعت النساء من المشاركة في بعض الرياضات العنيفة مثل المصارعة والمبارزة والملاكمة وحمل الأثقال. لكن هذا لم يمنع المرأة من ممارسة بعض رياضات القوة والمرونة والسرعة والمهارة، كالجهاز والوثب بأنواعه واللعب بالكرة. وكانت الأنشطة الرياضية والترفيهية والفنية تمارس في أوقات الفراغ بغرض الاستمتاع والتسلية والصحة العقلية والجسدية، وربما كانت متاحة أكثر لنساء القصر والطبقات العليا وكانت فردية وجماعية. ورغم وجود اختلاف في الحقوق والامتيازات بين طبقات النساء المختلفة، إلا أن ذلك لم يمنع الطبقات الدنيا من المشاركة في بعض هذه الأنشطة، مثل السباحة، والرقص، والغناء، والعزف على الآلات الموسيقية، والرسم، والنحت، وألعاب الذكاء، وصيد الأسماك والطيور والحيوانات. وكانت مشاركة المرأة في الطقوس والاحتفالات الدينية جزءاً مهماً من الترفيه. وعلى الرغم من قلة المناظر والحداريات التي تصور النساء في مختلف الأنشطة الرياضية والترفيهية، مقارنة بمشاهد الرجال التي تملأ جدران المقابر والمعابد، إلا أنها تعد دليلاً قوياً على الدور الفعال لمشاركة المرأة في الأنشطة الرياضية والترفيهية في مصر القديمة.

**الكلمات الدالة:** مصر القديمة، دور المرأة في المجتمع، الرياضة والترفيه النسائي، المساواة بين الجنسين.

## Introduction:

In ancient Egypt, women  *st* were revered as “Lady of the House”  and held pivotal roles in society throughout the ages. They contributed to various aspects of life, including sports and recreational activities, dating back to pre-dynastic times. Archaeological evidence attests to women's participation in diverse physical activities such as agriculture, hunting, and even warfare <sup>1</sup>.

Ancient Egypt was a pioneer in sports and games since ancient times, as the Egyptians excelled in many sports and set rules for each game that gained wide fame, in which the elderly and young, males and females participated.

Surprisingly, the ancient Egyptians were the first to invent the ball, which was primarily played by females <sup>2</sup>. Egyptologists believe that the ancient Egyptians were familiar with various sports and that women played ball games (in the royal harem) with skill and grace to entertain their royal master, the king <sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Robins, G., 1998. *Women in Ancient Egypt*. London, British Museum Press: 92.

<sup>2</sup> Fadel, D., 2020. ‘Social Entertainment in Greco- Roman Egypt (Games and Sports)’. *JAAUTH* 19 (3): 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Gama-Rolland, C.A., 2017. ‘Atividades físicas egípcias antigas: jogos, treinamento militar e a força real’. *R. Museu Arq. Etn.*, 29: 7-9.

# Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

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## **(1) Women's Contribution in Ancient Egyptian Society:**

There are many factors that contributed to women's involvement in ancient Egyptian society, as the degree of women's participation changed throughout the ages in ancient Egypt. The society permitted women to own property and manage businesses in certain cases<sup>4</sup>. In addition, social traditions valued women's roles within the family and community, a relatively higher status compared to other ancient civilizations. Egyptian females were considered equals to males in many aspects of life<sup>5</sup>.

Sports in ancient Egypt were not merely leisure activities but largely ritualistic practices closely tied to religious beliefs, as with all aspects of life<sup>6</sup>. Queens and princesses participated in sports as part of military training and preparation for war and as a means of maintaining physical fitness. Palace and noblewomen engaged in swimming in the Nile and artificial lakes, climbing, horseback riding, and participating with men in hunting wild animals such as lions, leopards, and gazelles, and in archery, javelin throwing, physical fitness exercises, and games such as chess and puzzles. Scenes show both children and adults engaged in games, and kings, princes, and statesmen were keen to attend sporting events, which they encouraged and provided with the necessary equipment. However, typically, boys' were more rigorous than girls' games<sup>7</sup>.

### ***1.1: Gender Equality and Women's Contribution to Sports and Recreation***

Women were essential partners to men in ancient Egyptian society, as they went out to work alongside their husbands, as men and women were equal before the law. Ancient Egypt was a pioneer in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment, including in the field of sports and recreational activities<sup>8</sup>.

Women were considered the sole partner of men in their worldly life, as the husband and society respected and appreciated them, and they enjoyed complete legal equality. They had the right to education, to choose a husband, to divorce and to inherit, and they participated in public life and attended government councils<sup>9</sup>. All of these privileges have contributed to enabling women to practice sports and recreational activities since the earliest ancient Egyptian times.

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<sup>4</sup> Millard, A., 1976. *The Position of Women in the Family and in Society in Ancient Egypt, with Special Reference to the Middle Kingdom*. PHD, Vol. II, London, University College London: 348-349.

<sup>5</sup> Hunt, N.B., 2009. *Living in Ancient Egypt*. Chelsea House Publishing: 43.

<sup>6</sup> Zein, M., 2022. 'Scenes of Some Sports Activities and their Double Significance in New Kingdom Private Theban Tombs'. *MJTHR* 14(2): 94.

<sup>7</sup> Hamed, A.E.A., 2015. 'Sport, leisure: artistic perspectives in Ancient Egyptian temples (Part I, II)', *Recordes, Rio de Janeiro* 8, n.1: Part I. 2, 16. Part II. 8-9, 19.






<sup>8</sup> Hunt, N.B., 2009: 43.

<sup>9</sup> Mahmud, M.F., 2021. 'Gender Inequality in Ancient Egypt', *MFTH* 5 (2/1): 168.

Archaeological evidence indicates that women participated in individual and group games such as jumping and dancing, and these activities were often associated with religious celebrations and festivals. The women of the royal palace, queens and princesses, practiced sports activities such as swimming, hunting and wrestling. They received military and sports training like men and participated in various military activities. It seems that women in ancient Egypt participated in activities that could be considered outdoor sports to a limited extent. Tomb paintings depict girls and young women playing with balls, or performing acrobatic dance moves <sup>10</sup>. Women from lower classes participated in folk and group games such as dancing, and goddess Hathor was revered as the deity of dance and music <sup>11</sup>.

There were no clear restrictions on Egyptian women's participation in various sports, as sports and entertainment were a natural part of women's lives. Practicing sports was not just a physical activity, but rather the key to a healthy and happy life, and its importance extended to include physical fitness and mental health alike <sup>12</sup>.

### **1.2: Women's Role in Ancient Egyptian Society**

Women in ancient Egypt held prestigious positions and played diverse roles in various political, religious, economic, and cultural aspects of life, holding various important positions and roles, and some assumed leadership positions, such as Queen as Merneith (1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty)  *mryt-nit*, Khentkaus I (4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)  *hnt-k3w.s*, Sobekneferu (12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)  *sbk-nfrw*, Hatshepsut (18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)  *Hnmt-Imn-H3t-Špswt*, and Tawosret (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)  *t3-wsrt*. while others held religious positions as priestesses in temples, and many queens and princesses held the position of the divine wife of Amun <sup>13</sup>. Moreover, some excelled in fields such as medicine, pharmacy, and healthcare, becoming renowned skilled physicians and healers <sup>14</sup>, or practiced in various artistic professions such as sculpting, painting, weaving, pottery, skilled artisans in fields like jewelry making and fine fabrics. As for education and writing, noblewomen received a high-quality education and were literate and some became famous teachers and educators in schools and royal palaces <sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Sabbahy, L.K., 2022. *Daily Life of Women in Ancient Egypt*. ABC-CLIO: 85.

<sup>11</sup> Graves-Brown, C., 2010. *Dancing For Hathor. Women in Ancient Egypt*. New York, Continuum: 25-26, 166.

<sup>12</sup> Noblecourt, C.D., 1999. *La Mujer en tiempos de los faraones*. Madrid: 183, 203-205, 277.

<sup>13</sup> Karenga, T., 2007. 'The Office of The Divine Wife of Amen in 25th And 26th Dynasties'. A study of Women and Power in: *Ancient Egypt, Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies*, California.; Beckerath, J., 1999. *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, MÄS 49, Mainz: 87, 135, 163; Robins, G., 1983. 'The God's Wife of Amun in the 18th Dynasty in Egypt'. In: A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, Eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity*: Cranberra, Croon Helm: 65-78.

<sup>14</sup> Blackman, A.M., 1921. 'On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy'. *JEA* 7 (1/2): 8-30.

<sup>15</sup> Graves-Brown, C., 2010: 73, 77, 82-83.





## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

### **(2) Women's Participation in Sports in Ancient Egypt:**

Women's participation in sports in ancient Egypt was diverse, varied and closely linked to their daily lives and culture. Swimming was one of the most prominent activities, practiced by women in the river Nile and artificial swimming pools in kings and nobles' palaces<sup>16</sup>. They also practiced various forms of gymnastics (flexibility and balance movements), especially from the upper classes<sup>17</sup>. Women also participated in light sports such as ball throwing and simple running games, which were not merely for recreation but also an integral part of social and religious life, reflecting the important role they played in ancient Egyptian society.

School curricula in addition to the core subjects of formal education included various sports activities such as swimming, boating, wrestling, ball games, and archery. In renowned ancient Egyptian educational systems physical activities were a desirable means of correcting laziness and disobedience and a means to generate individuals who possessed scientific or academic qualities and demonstrated self-control and good morals to become valuable members of society. As for recreational games, there is some difficulty in distinguishing between actual games used for amusement and recreation, and "dolls" and other small figurines used for magical or religious purposes. However, there is sufficient evidence to prove that children and adults played and enjoyed a variety of games including dolls in cradles, animal toys like crocodiles with mobile jaws, dancing dwarfs, and miniature weapons that ranged from simple clay figurines made from Nile mud to sophisticated wooden dolls that were painted and had mobile limbs<sup>18</sup>.

#### **2-1: Swimming and Rowing**

Swimming and rowing were well-known aquatic sports in ancient Egypt. Swimming was common in the Nile river and in the lakes of royal and noble palaces. Despite the limited sources on sports' practice in the Nile and Lakes of specific locations for swimming, Khety II's autobiography  *hty*, indicates that learning to swim was part of a good education for elite children<sup>19</sup>. and a well-known activity, as evidenced by ancient Egyptian terms for swimming (Fig. 1), such as  *nbi*,  *mhi*, and the hieroglyph  meaning "to swim"<sup>20</sup>. scenes depicting women swimming demonstrate the importance of this activity, which was considered a means of recreation and cooling off in the hot climate<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Carr, K.E., 2022. *Shifting Currents A World History of Swimming*. Reaktion Books: 19-23.

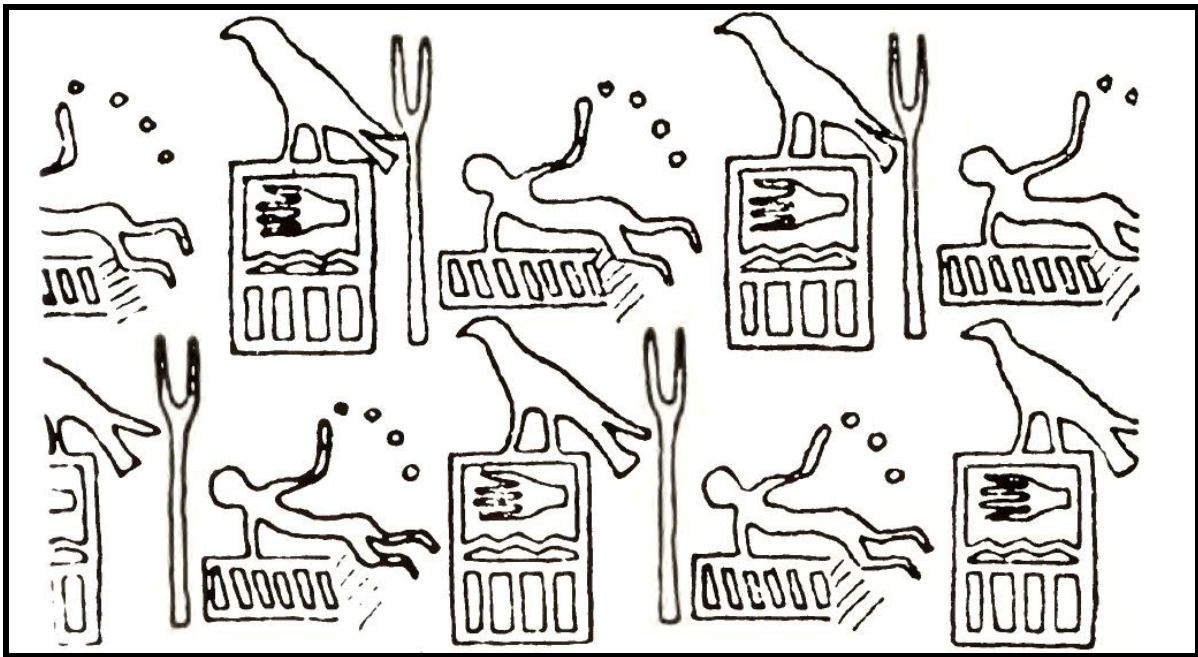
<sup>17</sup> Osman, S & Ezz El-Din, D & Magdy, H., 2023. 'Representations of Gymnastics in Ancient Egypt, Religious conceptions, Purpose to Sport Heritage'. *JFTH* 20 (1): 47-48.

<sup>18</sup> David, A.R., 1999. *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*. Oxford University Press: 250, 369-370.

<sup>19</sup> Tyldesley, J.A., 2007. *Egyptian Games and Sports*. Bloomsbury USA: 50.; Gama-Rolland, C.A., 2017: 13.

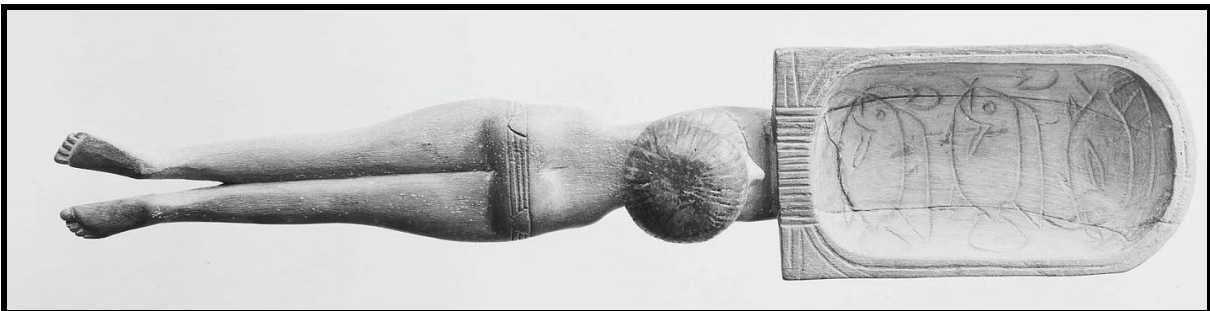
<sup>20</sup> Dickson, P., 2006. *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. California: 77, 141, 147, 150.; Faulkner, R.O., 2017. *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: 11, 141, 161.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt, N.B., 2009: 52.



(Fig. 1) Hieroglyphic depiction of swimming figures on the top of a 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty vessel.  
Decker, W., 1992: 90. fig. 59.

There are two statues (cosmetic spoons), in the Louvre Museum dating back to the 18th Dynasty, depict women in swimming positions as if they were floating on the water's surface with one holding a hollow cartridge that may have contained cosmetics (Fig. 2) and the other holding a duck (Fig. 3).



(Fig. 2) Sycamore wood cosmetic spoon of a swimming woman with outstretched arms holding a hollow cartouche. Reign of Amenhotep III. Louvre Museum, N.1704.  
<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010004962>

## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

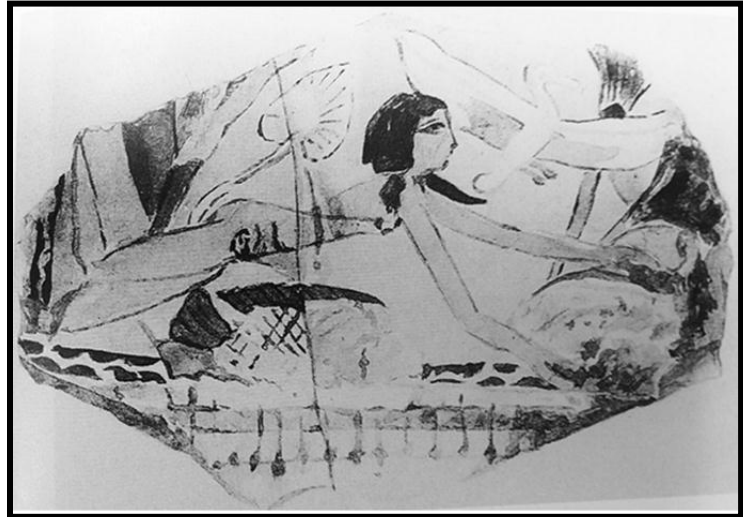


(Fig. 3) Ivory and Sycamore wood cosmetic spoon of a swimming woman holding a duck in both hands, used as a cosmetic spoon. Reign of Amenhotep III. Louvre Museum, N.1727b, E.218. <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010006164>

Likewise, an ostrakon shows a woman swimming naked in the water surrounded by plants, reaching for a white heron with outstretched arms (Fig. 4) and plate from Psusennes I's tomb (22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty from Tanis) (Fig. 5) depicts girls swimming among fish, suggesting that it was a popular sport for girls<sup>22</sup>.

(Fig. 4) Ostrakon depicting a nude female figure swimming in water, from Deir el-Medina, now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Turin, Italy.

Carr, K.E., 2022: 23, fig. 4.



(Fig. 5) An artifact of silver dish inlaid with gold, depicting swimming maidens discovered from the tomb of Psusennes I, a pharaoh of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty, at Tanis. It is currently housed in the Egyptian Museum, catalog number JE.87742. Lilyquist, C., 2012: 31, fig. 46.

It is important to note that women's nude swimming was not sexual in nature as girls swam in the water for enjoyment, like the 12-year-old girl who went swimming in the Nile River with her friends in 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Roman Egypt. Unfortunately, a doctor's testimony confirms that she drowned after getting caught in a dam gate<sup>23</sup>.



<sup>22</sup> Lilyquist, C., 2012. 'Treasures from Tell Basta: Goddesses, Officials, and Artists in an International Age', *MMJ* 47(1): 31, Fig. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Carr, K.E., 2022: 19-23.

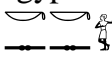




## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

Given the risk of drowning, girls were required to learn to swim in the Nile River and its many canals<sup>24</sup> as swimming in the river was extremely dangerous due to strong currents, crocodiles, and fearsome hippopotamuses, not to mention the harmful parasites that could be picked up from swimming in branches and canals, therefore, those who swam regularly were generally fishermen and bird hunters. Swimming also appeared in famous literary tales such as “The Lover of the Scribe's Wife,” who swam in the lake after making love but drowned. Furthermore, Egyptian mythology depicts competitive swimming in the story of conflict between Horus and Seth. The risks associated with swimming in the Nile may explain why informal swimming is less popular than practical swimming<sup>25</sup>. Swimming, like other athletic disciplines, was part of physical education and body training, thus swimming lessons were mandatory for royal children, at the least princes and courtiers and nobles’ sons educated in the royal court<sup>26</sup>.

Ancient Egyptians were also familiar with rowing, a water sport that relied heavily on arm strength as depicted in a scene of rowers in Queen Hatshepsut’s temple (18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty),  *Hnmt-Imn-H3t-Špswt* at Deir el-Bahri and Menakht’s tomb in the West Bank (four rowers in the middle of a boat rowing)<sup>27</sup>. In a magical story from the Westcar Papyrus, King Snefru  *snfrw* summoned a magician and instructed him to allow twenty beautiful girls wearing only fishing nets to row in the palace lake<sup>28</sup>.

### 2-2: Gymnastics

Gymnastics is one of the oldest physical activities and sports in the world, with roots that extend back thousands of years<sup>29</sup>. Ancient Egypt is considered the birthplace of gymnastics, as wall paintings depict numerous intricate poses that are still practiced today with the same techniques and details<sup>30</sup>. Ancient Egyptians used specific hieroglyphs to represent acrobatic dance or gymnastics, such as  *ksks*<sup>31</sup>,  *hbi*<sup>32</sup>,  *ib3*, all of which refer to rhythmic dance or gymnastics<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Sabbahy, L.K., 2022. *Daily Life of Women in Ancient Egypt*. ABC-CLIO: 85.

<sup>25</sup> Booth, C., 2020. *How to Survive in Ancient Egypt*. Pen & Sword Books: 119-120.

<sup>26</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969. *Der Sport im alten Ägypten*. Leipzig, Edition Leipzig: 29-30.

<sup>27</sup> Haūās, Zāhī., 2007. *Al'al'āb ūā Altāstīuh ūā Altārfīuh 'ind Almāsrī Alqadīm*. Family Library, Cairo: 12.

<sup>28</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: 32.



<sup>29</sup> Brunner-Traut, E., 1958. *Der Tanz im Alten Ägypten: nach bildlichen und inschriftlichen Zeugnissen*. Hamburg: 79-80.

<sup>30</sup> Lexová, I., 1935. *Ancient Egyptian Dances*. Prague, Oriental Institute: 22.

<sup>31</sup> Wb., V, 1971: 141-142.3.; Vartavan, C., 2016. *Vocalised Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian*. SAIS Books, London: 122, 246.

<sup>32</sup> Dickson, P., 2006: 293-294.

<sup>33</sup> Faulkner, R.O., 2017: 18-19.

Numerous depictions of gymnastics have been found in archaeological inscriptions, where gymnastics was classified according to the movements of the performers' various body positions <sup>34</sup>. In the viziers Kagemni  *k3-gmni*, and Meho's  *mhw* tombs in Saqqara we find depictions of women wearing short white veils with a necktie in the middle, performing high leg kicks, kicking one leg high in front while throwing their bodies backward in an unstable position, performing an exercise closer to gymnastics (Fig. 6). Gymnastics took many forms and movements, including high leg kicks, the bridge, and the bow pose, where the back is arched backward, the chest is open, and the body takes a convex shape. This position was often used in dance movements to make them appear more extended and attractive <sup>35</sup>. Egyptian women were historically the first to practice gymnastics, combining strength, flexibility, speed, and skill as evident in the scenes depicted on tomb walls, showing women practicing gymnastics accompanied by music, similar to modern-day rhythmic gymnastics. It involved bending the body backward until the hand touched the ground, demonstrating remarkable flexibility of ancient Egyptian women <sup>36</sup>.



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<sup>34</sup> Morris, E.F., 2011. 'Paddle Dolls and Performance In Ancient Egypt', *JARCE* 47: 71-73.


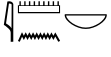


<sup>35</sup> Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994. *Bildatlas zum Sport im alten Ägypten: Corpus der bildlichen Quellen zu Leibesübungen, Spiel, Jagd, Tanz und verwandten Themen*. Teil 1: Text, Leiden - Köln, Brill: 718-719, 779.

<sup>36</sup> Decker, W., 1992. *Sports and games of ancient Egypt*. Yale University Press: 136-146.; Osman, S & Ezz El-Din, D & Magdy, H., 2023: 48-53.

## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

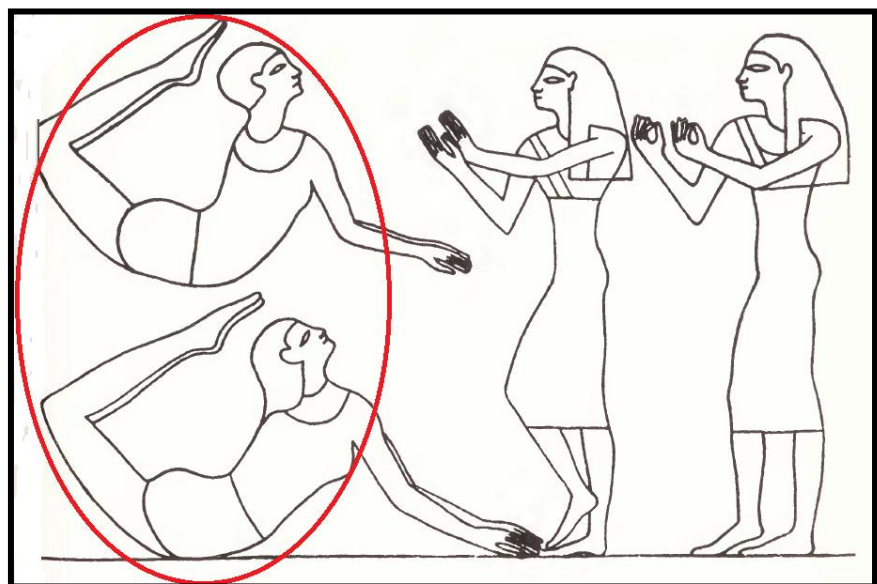


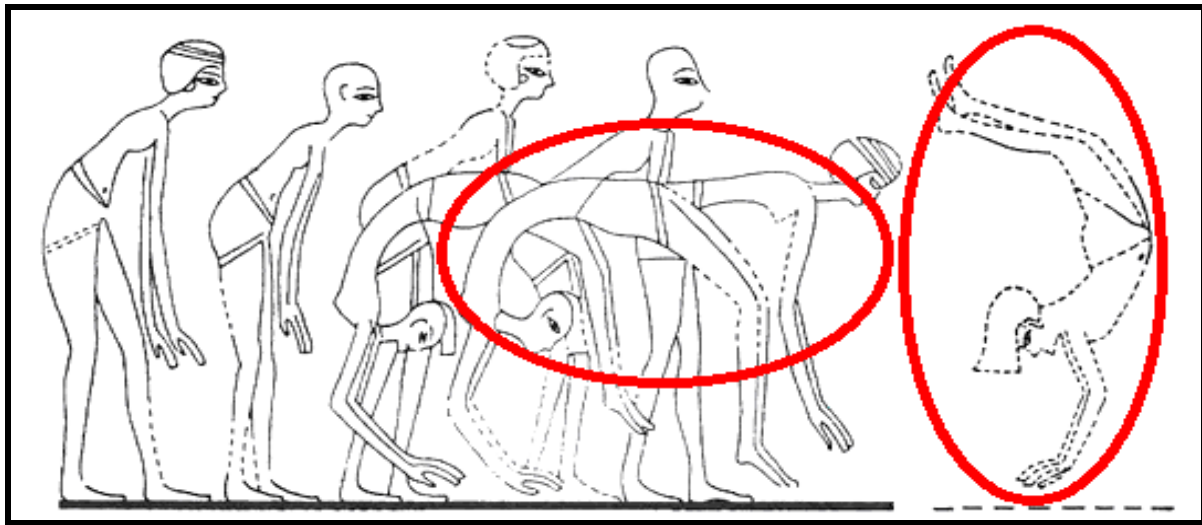
(Fig. 6) The high-kick leg position from Meho's tomb in Saqqara.  
Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel ,CDXXIII, s 3.58.

Remaining scenes show various gymnastics poses in the tombs of Antefoker/  
Antefoker  *intf-ikr* And his wife Senet TT60 (bow pose) (Fig. 7),  
Nebamun  *nb-ïmn* TT181 (bow and bridge poses) (Fig. 8), and Baqet III  
 *B3kt* BH15 (bridge pose) (Fig. 9). Likewise, a scene of girls performing  
acrobatic movements is found in Khetý's  *hty* BH 17 (11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) tomb at Beni  
Hasan (Fig. 10), a scene of Women performing gymnastics.

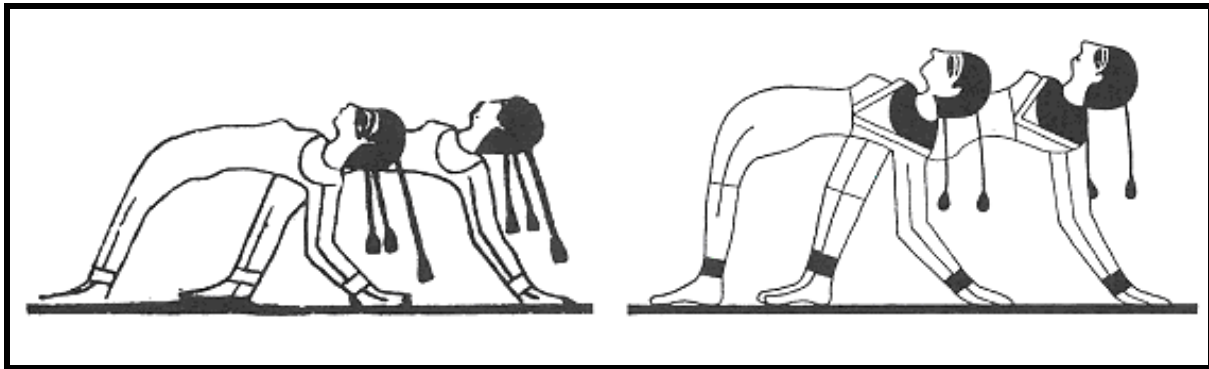
(Fig. 7) The bow pose  
from Antefoker's tomb  
(TT60) in Sheikh Abd  
el-Qurna, Middle  
Kingdom.

Decker, W., 1992: 137.  
fig. 99.; Osman, S & Ezz  
El-Din, D & Magdy, H.,  
2023: 47-54.





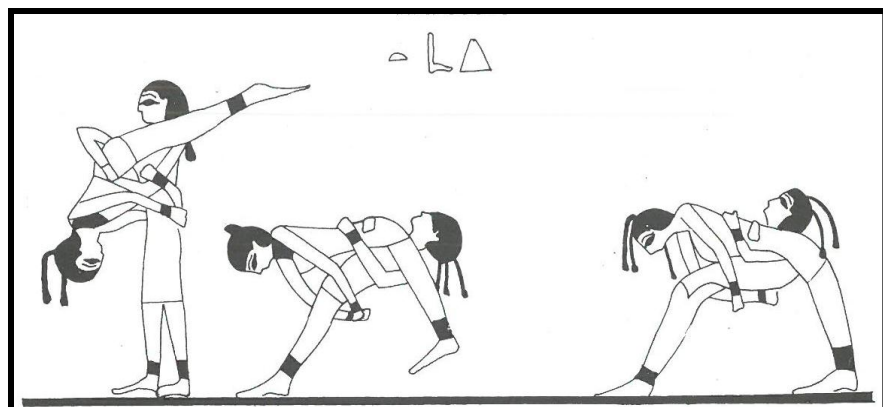
(Fig. 8) The bow and bridge pose from Neb-Amon's tomb (TT181) in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna. Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel , CDII, R 3.28.



(Fig. 9) The bridge pose from the tomb of Baqet III (BH15) in Beni Hasan. Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel , CCCXC, R 3.4,5.

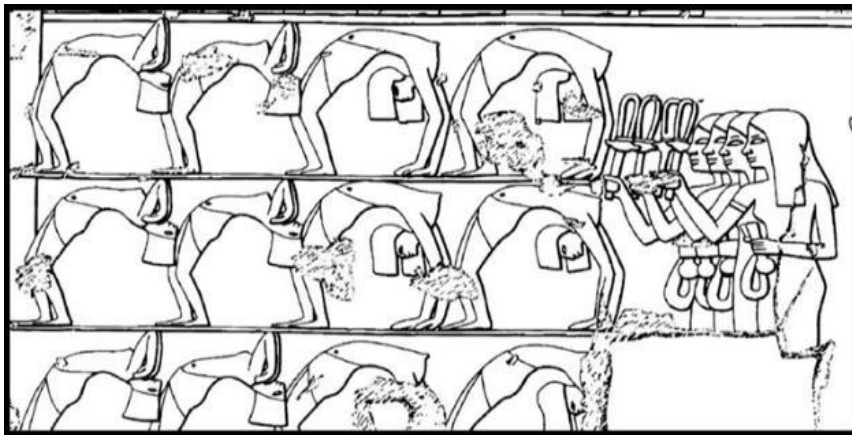
(Fig. 10) Young girls performing acrobatic feats from Khety's tomb (BH 17) in Beni Hasan.

Decker, W., 1992: 144, fig. 110; Booth, C., 2020: 133.



The bridge pose in the Opet festival at the Karnak Temple (New Kingdom) (Fig. 11), a scene of a girl performing the bridge pose on an ostrakon in the Turin Museum, C. 7052 (Fig. 12), and a statue of a woman performing the bridge pose in the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 13).

## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt



**(Fig. 11)** Women performing gymnastic exercises, specifically the bridge pose, during the Opet festival at the Temple of Luxor.

Osman, S & Ezz El-Din, D & Magdy, H., 2023: 53, fig. 12.

**(Fig. 12)** A depiction of a bare-chested girl performing a gymnastic bridge pose on an ostrakon of limestone from Deir el-Medina. Currently housed in the Egyptian Museum in Turin, C. 7052.


Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: fig. 64.

[https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/Cat\\_7052](https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/Cat_7052)



**(Fig. 13)** Limestone statue of a woman performing the bridge pose, Brooklyn Museum, N.13.1024. <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3083>

**2-3: Whirling Games**

Women also engaged in games resembling whirling, which might seem like children's games in our modern society, however, in Egyptian wall paintings, whirling is practiced by both adult women and men as found on the north wall of Baqet's III  *B3kt* tomb where two girls and two boys are engaged in a whirling-like activity (two girls spun around each other by two boys with their feet grounded in the middle of the circle) (Fig. 14)<sup>37</sup>, and another scene depicting four girls engaged in the similar activity (Fig. 15), where the wide angle of the tilted bodies indicates the speed of the movement. Without exaggerating the description of this game, it is possible to classify is as a “gymnastic exercise”<sup>38</sup>.

**(Fig. 14)** A depiction of two girls and two young men engaged in the game of Whirling on the northern wall of the tomb of Baqet III BH15.

Kanawati, N & Woods, A., 2010: Fig. 58; Rolland, C.A., 2017: 10, Fig. 2.



**(Fig. 15)** Four naked female figures engaged in a playful activity involving rotation (Whirling). Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel, CCCXLII, p 3.3.

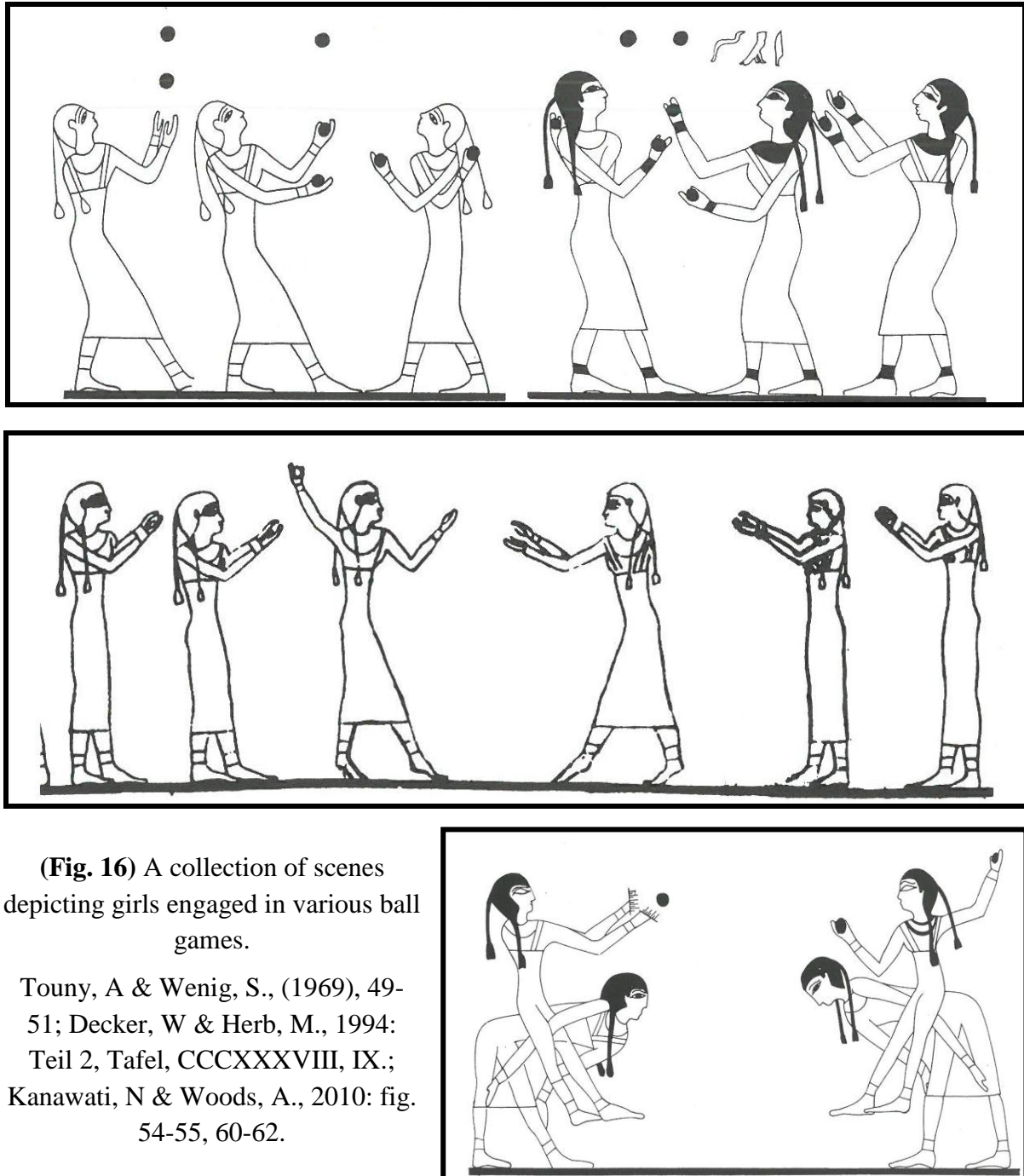
<sup>37</sup> Kanawati, N & Woods, A., 2010. *Beni Hassan: art and daily life in an Egyptian province*. Supreme Council of Antiquities, Cairo: Fig. 58.; Gama-Rolland, C.A., 2017: 9-10, Fig. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Decker, W., 1992: 118-119.

## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

### 2-4: Ball Games

Ball games were a popular pastime among both men and women often played during social events and celebrations in ancient Egypt, as scenes like the one depicted in (Fig. 16), which suggests a long-standing tradition of ball sports in ancient Egyptian society, with the Egyptians possibly being the pioneers of handball<sup>39</sup>. Children, too, participated in these games, as illustrated in scenes of girls throwing balls on tomb walls<sup>40</sup>.



**(Fig. 16)** A collection of scenes depicting girls engaged in various ball games.

Touny, A & Wenig, S., (1969), 49-

51; Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994:



Teil 2, Tafel, CCCXXXVIII, IX.;

Kanawati, N & Woods, A., 2010: fig.

54-55, 60-62.

<sup>39</sup> Fadel, D., 2020: 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 370.

The tombs of Beni Hasan in Minya (Middle kingdom) provide evidence of women's involvement in handball with a series of scenes showcasing their engagement in ball games accompanied (Fig. 17): Baqet's III  *B3kt* BH15 and his son on the north wall, and Khety's  *hty* BH17<sup>41</sup>.

**(Fig. 17)** Girls playing ball from Khety's tomb, BH17, Beni Hasan, Middle Kingdom.

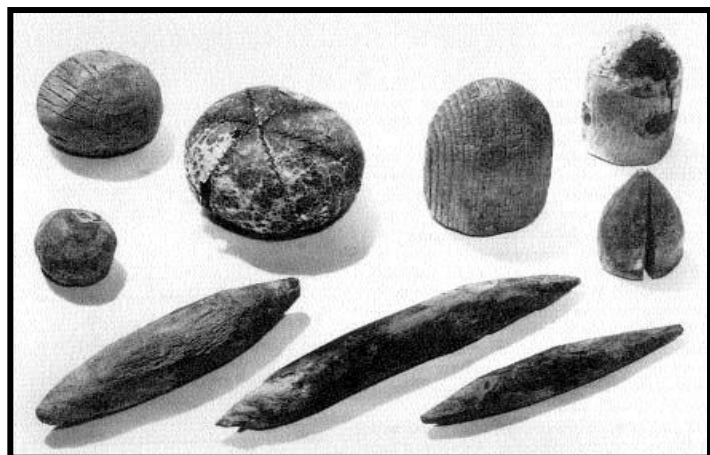
Decker, W., 1992: 114. fig. 77.; David, A.R., 1999: 370.; Tyldesley, J.A., (2007), 21.; Kanawati, N & Woods, A., 2010: fig. 61-62.



Beyond the previous pictorial representations, physical evidence of ball games also exists, as numerous balls have been discovered in children's tombs, dating back to prehistoric times<sup>42</sup>. These balls were often made from materials like palm fibers, papyrus, and leather, sometimes covered with woven palm leaves or papyrus (Fig. 18). These balls were generally heavier and larger than modern ones, with diameters ranging from 3 to 9 centimeters. Among the best-preserved ones are the papyrus ball in the Egyptian Museum JE 43981, JE 43982 and those made of thread found in the Manchester N.96 and Hanover Museums in Germany (Fig. 19)<sup>43</sup>.

**(Fig. 18)** A collection of ball shapes, including wooden balls, a leather ball, and wooden clubs, from Kahun, dating back to approximately 1890 BCE.

David, A.R., 1999: 371.



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<sup>41</sup> Decker, W., 1992: 111-115, fig. 77; Kanawati, N & Woods, A., 2010: 42-43, fig. 54-55.

<sup>42</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: 49.

<sup>43</sup> Tyldesley, J.A., 2007: 20-21.



## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt





Leather-covered balls, Egyptian Museum JE 43981, JE 43982.




Clay-coated balls adorned with straw, housed in the Hanover Museum, Germany.

(Fig. 19) A diverse collection of balls preserved in the Egyptian Museum and the Hanover Museum in Germany. Decker, W., 1992: 112. fig. 75-76.

### 2-5: *Jumping*

Jumping was a popular sport among ancient Egyptians and varied between long, high, and triple jump forms often performed during festivals and celebrations, where high and triple jumps were demanding and requiring strength, balance, and skill and often practiced by professional athletes<sup>44</sup>. Jumping games were also incorporated into dance and acrobat games as depicted in Antefoker's/Antef-Aker's  wife Senet's tomb TT60 (12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) in a scene where a dancer is poised vertically, suspended in mid-air between two women clapping that is repeated in Amenemhat's  *imn-m-h3t* TT82 tomb (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)<sup>45</sup>.

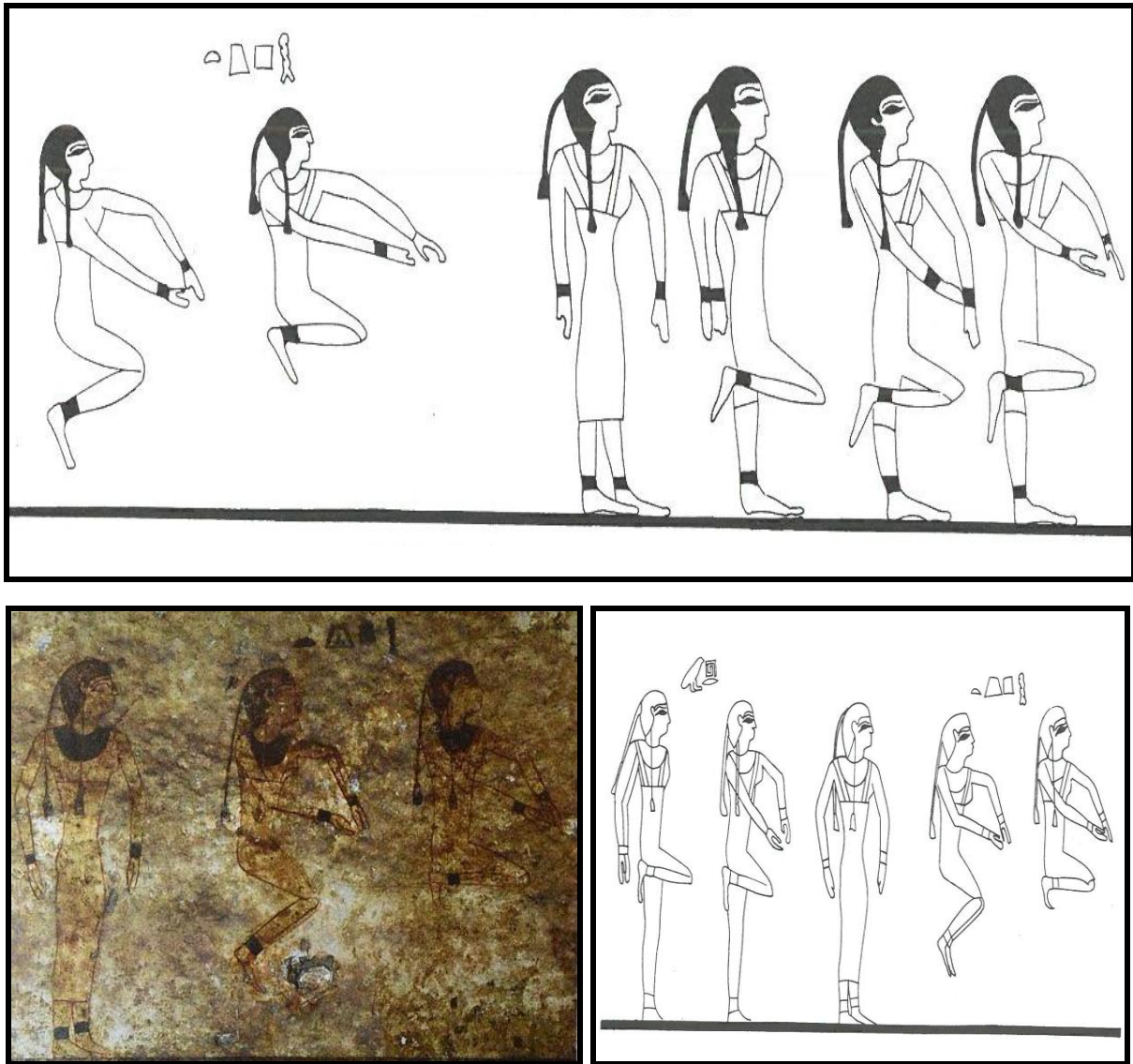
Furthermore, in Baqet's III  *B3kt* BH15 tomb a series of scenes illustrate the different stages of high jump (Fig. 20). One scene depicts a woman with her leg bent behind her and her hands outstretched, preparing to jump while another shows a young man performing a high jump, leaping over a standing bull, and a third shows five boys holding a bull's horns, legs, and tail to prevent it from moving and ensure the jumper's safety<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Elgammal, M.A., 2008. 'The ancient Egyptian Sports during the Pharaoh dynasties & its relation to the ancient Greek Sports'. In: *Youth Olympic Games: Children and Sport*. the International Olympic Academy and the International Olympic Committee, Livani Publishing Organization: 91.

<sup>45</sup> Decker, W., 1992: 69-70.

<sup>46</sup> Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 1. 706, R 1.1, R 1.2.

Jumping games were also popular among children in ancient Egypt as depicted in the tombs of the viziers Ptah-hotep and Mereruka at Saqqara, showing a type of high-jump exercise known as “Khazza lawizza” or the “goose step” (katta al wizza)<sup>47</sup>, where the boys sit opposite each other with one leg extended and their hands placed on their knees, forming a kind of human hurdle, then take turns jumping over an obstacle, and a participant is seen wearing a ribbon on his shoulder, possibly as a reward for being a winner<sup>48</sup>.



**(Fig. 20)** Multiple scenes depicting women engaged in jumping exercises from the tomb of Baqt III in Beni Hassan, Minya.

Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel, CCCLXXXVII, III, R 1.1, 2.; Kanawati, N & Woods, A., 2010: fig. 56.

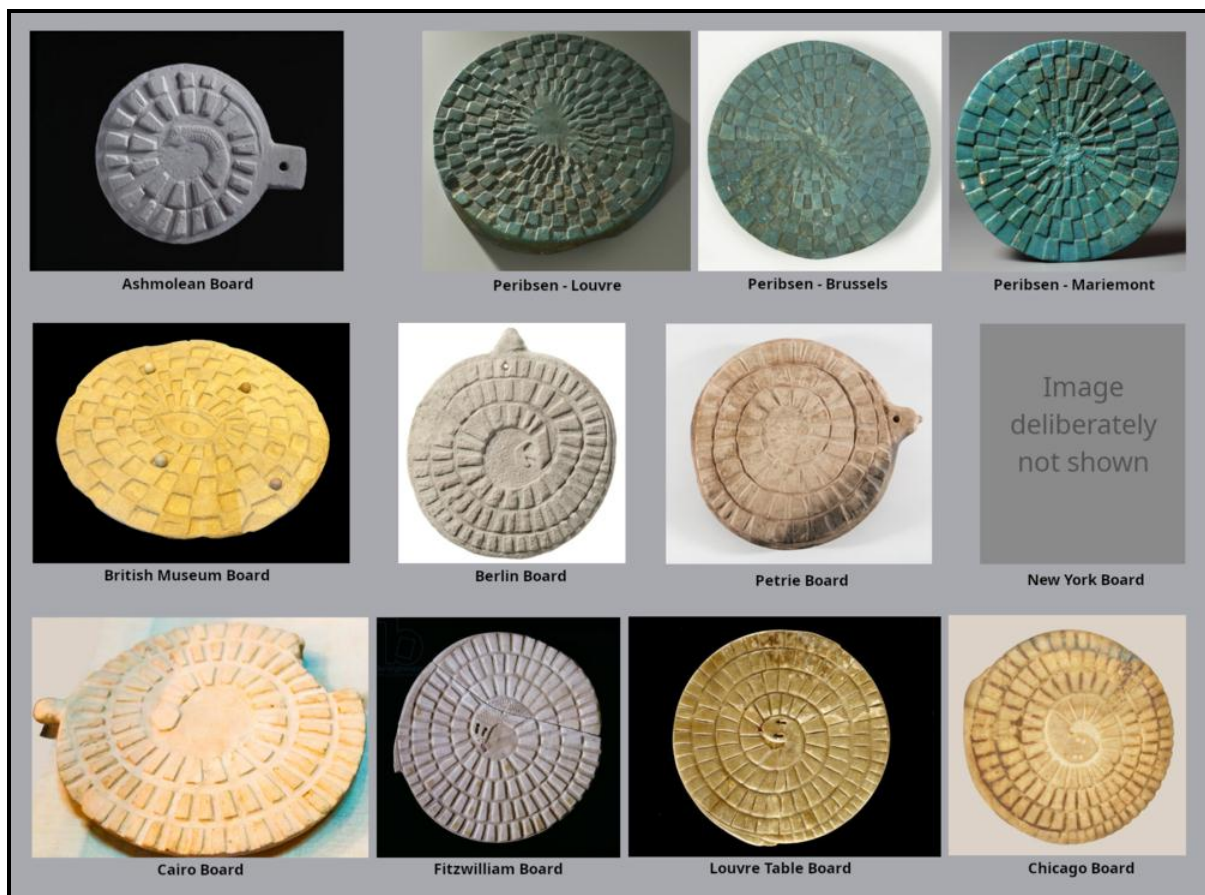
<sup>47</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: 34-35.; Decker, W., 1992: 67-68, fig. 31, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Ḥaiās, Zāhī., 2007: 9.



Moreover, women participated and excelled in dance, music, and singing. Dance was considered a form of sport and art with various styles such as acrobatic dance, which required high physical fitness, ritual dances performed in temples, social dance in festivities, playing various musical instruments, such as the harp, flute, and percussion, and singing in religious and social celebrations<sup>56</sup>. Women also engaged in various crafts such as jewelry making (particularly popular among dwarfs), weaving, pottery, and perfume making, providing them opportunities for artistic and creative expression.

Evidence suggests that women participated in religious festivals and ceremonies, were involved in artistic and recreational activities, partook hunting alongside men, and gardening, which was a particularly popular leisure activity among upper-class women, where they cultivated flowers, aromatic plants, and landscaped small gardens. These diverse recreational, artistic, and religious activities were not merely forms of entertainment but also served as a means of self-expression and participation in the cultural and spiritual life of ancient Egypt.

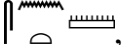




**(Fig. 21)** Multiple models of Serpent/snake game (Mehen).  
Masters, J.F.R., 2024: 19, Fig. 18.

<sup>56</sup> Lexová, I., 1935: 7-8.

## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

### 3-1: Board Games

Board games were popular mental and recreational pastimes among all social classes in ancient Egypt. These games included the circular snake game (Mehen), the dog and jackal game, and Senet  <sup>57</sup>, which is mentioned in the Book of the Dead's 17<sup>th</sup> chapter, described as an occupation for the deceased in the afterlife, and played by both genders, often between spouses <sup>58</sup>.

Tomb scenes depict a tomb owner playing the game while listening to music or enjoying other forms of entertainment. Senet possessed profound religious implications, symbolizing the struggle to attain the afterlife, and winning the game was believed to facilitate the deceased's crossing to the Iaru fields (paradise). Hence, its dual significance—religious and secular—made part of the funerary artifacts supplied for the deceased within their tombs <sup>59</sup>. Moreover, since board games required sitting and relaxation, they were preferred during the hotter months compared to physically demanding games. They were a popular leisure activity for elder men and women to pass time playing in shaded halls in their homes, as depicted in Queen Nefertari's  *Nfirt-Iry-Mryt-n-Mwt* QV66 tomb scene where she is seen playing Senet (Fig. 22) and the scene of Nebenmaat  *nb-n-m3't* and his wife Mertesger in his tomb TT219 (Fig. 23) <sup>60</sup>. Senet boards were made of clay and reeds for the poor, wood and pottery for the wealthy, and ebony, ivory, and gold for royalty <sup>61</sup>. Despite the discovery of many Senet boards, the game's rules remain unclear <sup>62</sup>.

(Fig. 22) A scene depicting Queen Nefertari, wife of Ramesses II, playing the game of Senet. From her tomb, QV66, in the Valley of the Queens.

Decker, W., 1992: 130, fig. 92.; Crist, W & Dunn-Vaturi, A & de Voogt, A., 2016: 56, fig. 3.4.



<sup>57</sup> Needler, W., 1953. 'A Thirty-Square Draught-Board in the Royal Ontario Museum'. *JEA* 39: 63; Faulkner, R.O., 2017: 283.

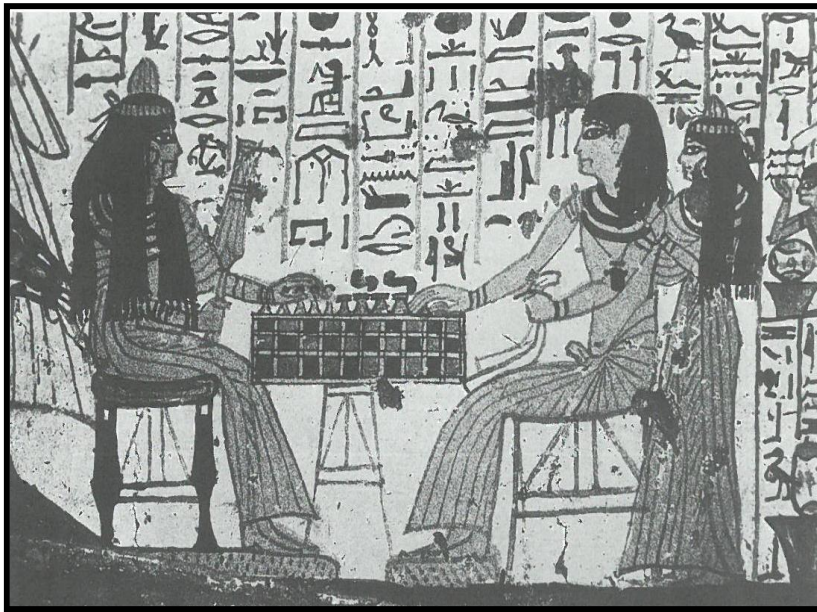
<sup>58</sup> Although scenes of the game of Senet were found in many religious and funerary scenes, and were depicted inside tombs, and multiple models of it were found inside tombs. This is considered sufficient evidence that this game was played in ancient Egypt, and was widespread among princes and members of the royal house, and also among all members of the people. It depended on thinking, and the word Senet means: crossing, and it was one of the games loved by the ancient Egyptians.

<sup>59</sup> Crist, W & Dunn-Vaturi, A & de Voogt, A., 2016. *Ancient Egyptians at Play. Board Games Across Borders*. London, Bloomsbury Academic: 41-44.

<sup>60</sup> Decker, W., 1992: 124-125.

<sup>61</sup> Hunt, N.B., 2009: 53.

<sup>62</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 370-371.



**(Fig. 23)** A scene depicting Nebenmaat and his wife Mertesger, playing the game of Senet. This scene is taken from their tomb TT219, located in Deir el-Medina, which dates back to the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties.

Decker, W., 1992: 130, fig. 91.; Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel, CCCLXXI, Q 3.38.

### 3-2: Dance

Dance  $\text{𓄏} \text{𓄏} \text{𓄏} \text{𓄏} \text{hbb}$ <sup>63</sup> was considered a sport, a form of art, and an essential part of religious and social life in ancient Egypt and accessible to many women from different social classes, who performed various types of dance (recreational, rhythmic, acrobatic, athletic, kinetic, paired, group, war, dramatic, musical, religious, funerary, and banquet dance) in temples and at special occasions<sup>64</sup>.

Furthermore, dance was an integral part of religious rituals and played a role in temple ceremonies, festivals, and funerals, where dancers wore special costumes and masks to imitate deities and followed specific patterns of movement and rhythm, as well as special dances performed by local magicians. In addition to the sacred dances there were also secular performances. These are depicted in tomb scenes to show the rhythmic and acrobatic movements of professional dancing girls who could be hired to entertain guests at banquets and parties<sup>65</sup>. The oldest known depictions of dance are found in rock carvings and cave paintings dating back to the pre-dynastic period, 4000-3200 BC, during the Badarian and early and middle Naqada cultures<sup>66</sup>, where pottery vessels depicted women performing various dance movements (Fig. 24), as well as figurines of women with protruding bellies, raised arms, and joined thighs performing dance movements (Fig. 25)<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>63</sup> Faulkner, R.O., 2017: 230.

<sup>64</sup> Karam, M.M., 2022. 'Ancient Egyptian dances between past and present'. *IJHLR* 5(1): 6-7.

<sup>65</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 371-372; Spencer, P., 2003. 'Dance in Ancient Egypt', *NEA* 66 (3), Dance in the Ancient World: 111-114.

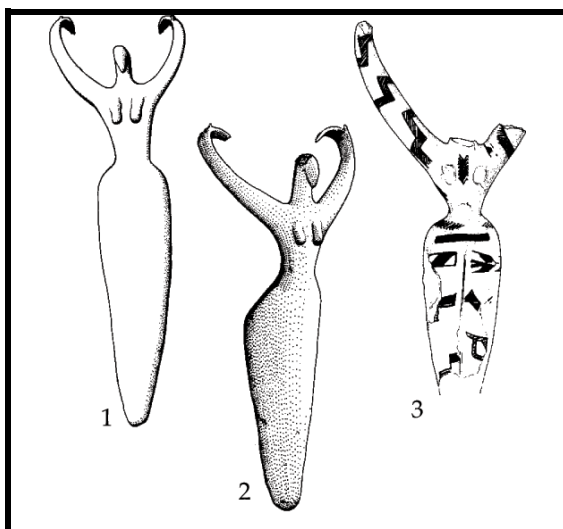
<sup>66</sup> Cummings, J.M., 2000. *Temple dance in Ancient Egypt*. New York University: 3.

<sup>67</sup> Garfinkel, Y., 2001. 'Dancing or Fighting? A Recently Discovered Predynastic Scene from Abydos, Egypt', *CAJ* 11(02): 241-254.

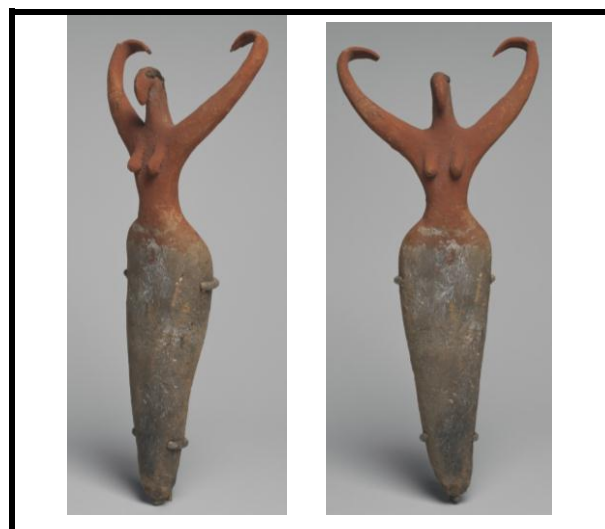
## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

(Fig. 24) A variety of painted scenes on vessels depicting different dance movements.

Garfinkel, Y., 2001: 251, fig. 14.



female figurines with raised hands from the pre-dynastic period.



Female Figure of Naqada II period, 3500–3400 BCE. Brooklyn Museum

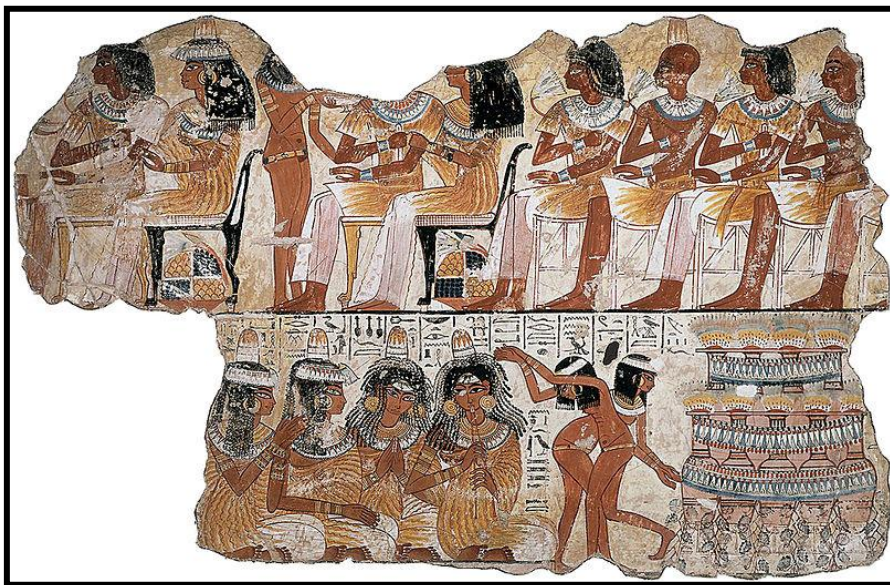
(Fig. 25) A collection of ceramic figurines depicting women with exaggerated physical attributes; distended bellies, raised arms, and joined thighs, dancing.

Garfinkel, Y., 2001: 250, fig. 12. <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/4223>

Moreover, the walls of Old, Middle, and New Kingdom tombs are filled with scenes of dance and music (Fig. 26 a, b): dance in Ty/Ti  $\overline{\text{ty}}$  and Mereruka  $\overline{\text{mrrw-k3}}$  mastabas/tombs at Saqqara (Old Kingdom); acrobatic and gymnastic dance in the Beni Hasan tombs (Middle Kingdom), and dancers performing fast-paced dances, often wearing little to no clothing in Nakht  $\overline{\text{nht}}$  TT52 and Nebamun  $\overline{\text{nb-Imn}}$  TT181 tombs (New Kingdom) <sup>68</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> LÄ., VI, 1986: 223-224.

(Fig. 26a) A scene depicting women dancing.  
Spencer, P., 2003: 113.



(Fig. 26b) A scene depicting two nude women dancing accompanied by a group of female musicians, from Nebamun's tomb.  
James, T.G., 1986: 29, fig. 27.; Spencer, P., 2003: 113.

### 3-3: Music

Ancient Egyptians loved music and played instruments such as the lute, harp, and various types of flutes and pipes (Fig. 27 a, b, c) and musical performances were often carried out by professionals. The wealthy often held lavish parties with plenty of food, beer, and wine enlivened by singers, musicians, dancers, acrobats, and magicians<sup>69</sup>. Priests also played musical instruments in temples to accompany sacred hymns sung by female singers. Musicians were also employed to entertain the nobility in their homes, and harpists would recite special songs encouraging the living to enjoy life to the fullest when guests shared a meal in the tomb with the deceased in burial ceremonies<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Hunt, N.B., 2009: 53.

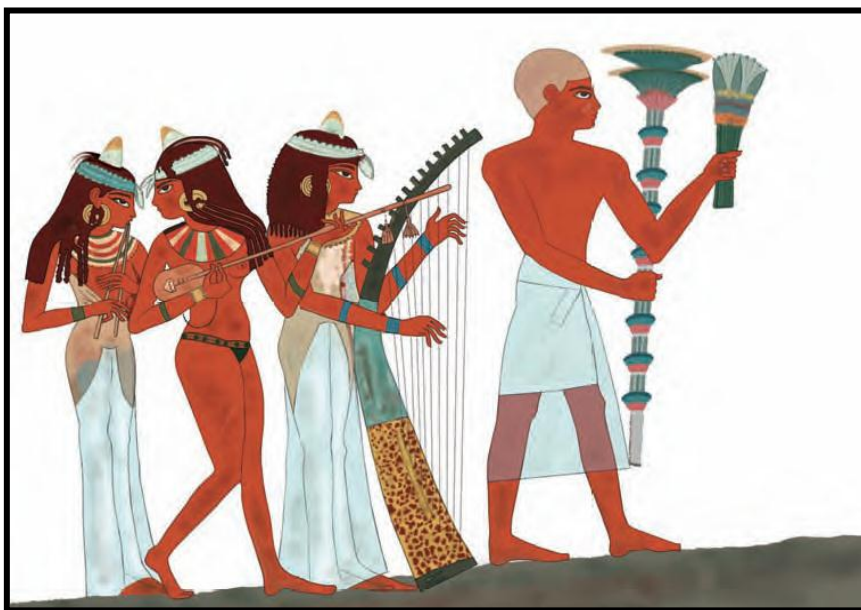
<sup>70</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 372-373.



## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

(Fig. 27a) A scene depicting women playing stringed instruments, from Djeserkareseneb's  $\text{𓂏𓏏𓏏}$  *dsr-k3-rꜥ-snb* tomb TT38, dating to the reign of Thutmose IV.

Wilkinson, C.K., 1983: 111, fig. 30.4.9.; Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel, CDXXXI, S 4.29.



(Fig. 27b) A painted scene depicting female musicians from Nakht's tomb TT52.

Wilkinson, C.K., 1983: 53, fig. 52.; Hunt, N.B., 2009: 53.


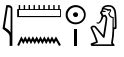

(Fig. 27c) A scene depicting two women playing the harp.

Robins, G., 1998: 96 (34).



Furthermore, women played instruments such as the harp and sistrum as music was a part of social events and religious celebrations as depicted by the many scenes of women playing instruments while others dance, and men and women musicians and dancers participating in temple rituals <sup>71</sup>. Egyptians played various types musical instruments (string, wind, and percussion) such as harps, lutes, horns, flutes, double pipes, drums, and tambourines made of wood, ivory or wooden clappers, in addition to clapping <sup>72</sup>.

### **3-4: Singing**

Ancient Egyptians interactively and interchangeably enjoyed sacred and non spiritual singing and music. Priests recited prayers and doctrinal texts, sang hymns praising deities and their attributes, such as hymns to Osiris  *3sir/wsir*, Amun-Re  *imn-r<sup>c</sup>*, and Maat  *m3<sup>c</sup>t* <sup>73</sup>. On the other hand, tombs are filled with scenes of banquets where music was played and singers performed songs with various themes: nature, gardens, modest or explicit love, labor, or victory to bring joy and pleasure to the listeners.

Women were allowed to participate in singing songs to honor the gods, entertain the living, and comfort the bereaved at various events and religious hymns, as well as ritual hymns and chants in temples as part of daily rituals or festivals. Palaces and nobility homes hosted professionals to sing and entertain them and their guests. Love songs formed part of official entertainment in the New Kingdom, while songs at funeral processions and tombs were an important part of the mourning process, or specially used to heal the sick in temples. In fields and major construction sites, people sang their own songs to lighten the burden of work and provide a collective rhythm for their physical activities <sup>74</sup>. Dance, music, and singing were intertwined in ancient Egypt as depicted by its art, where dancers performed in synchronized rows, expressing the fundamental aspects of the human body and creating timeless art <sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Robins, G., 1998: 96, 100, 103.

<sup>72</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 372-373.

<sup>73</sup> Darressy, G., 1910. 'Litanies d'Amon du temple de Louxor', *RecTrav* 32: 62-69.; Assmann, J., 'Litanei'. in: *LÄ III*, 1980: 1062-1066.

<sup>74</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 373.

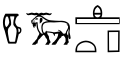

<sup>75</sup> Manniche, L., 1991. *Music and musicians in ancient Egypt*. British Museum Press, 9-23.

### 3-5: *Hunting*

Hunting was considered a recreational activity, often pursued as a hobby to enjoy nature, and as a sport due to the physical and mental skills required, such as precision, patience, and endurance. Hence, royalty, nobles, and commons in ancient Egypt engaged in hunting as a sport, due to its vast deserts (east and west) suitable for hunting animals and birds, the Nile River (south to north), the Red and Mediterranean Seas, and large swamps and delta forests with hippos and crocodiles, providing ample hunting opportunities. This encouraged kings and princes to embark on hunting trips with their wives and peers, using long sharp pointed spears. In addition to fish and birds, Egyptians hunted hippos and crocodiles as they surfaced the waters using boats and spears to strike them and protect themselves from harm <sup>76</sup>.

It's worthy to note that hunting wild animals dates back to the pre-dynastic period, when its primary purpose was to secure food, shelter, clothing, protection from wild animal threats. Later, it evolved into a popular sport that transitioned from hunting on foot to hunting by chariots <sup>77</sup>.

With the establishment of settlements, hunting's significance as a primary food source diminished and acquired an alternative function as a form of recreation <sup>78</sup>. Many scenes depict catching birds and hunting animals in swamps, fishing with spears, or hitting ducks with sticks. Egyptians also hunted wild desert animals and ostriches as favorite pastimes <sup>79</sup>. ancient Egyptian royal families and nobility considered hunting as a favorite sport <sup>80</sup>. Tombs display upper-class women participating in trips catching birds and hunting animals and fishing <sup>81</sup>. A scene from the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, depicts a tomb owner traveling through the Delta or Fayum swamps in his papyrus boat, accompanied by his wife and children <sup>82</sup>.

Furthermore, many scenes depict women participating in swamp hunting, combining spear fishing and bird hunting with sticks. Khnumhotep's  *hnmw-htp* tomb in Beni Hasan (Middle Kingdom) shows scenes of bird hunting by throwing sticks and fishing with spears, while Meketre's  *mkt-r*'s tomb TT280 (New Kingdom) depicts women participating in hunting on boats (Fig. 28) <sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: 65-69.

<sup>77</sup> Saleh, A. K., 1961. *Sports and Games in Ancient Egypt*. PhD thesis, Indiana University: 124.

<sup>78</sup> Decker, W., 1992: 147.; Incordino, I., 2016. 'Hunting at the time of the emergence of the Ancient Egyptian state'. in: Ilaria Micheli (ed.), *Materiality and Identity. Selected papers from the proceedings of the ATRa Conferences of Naples and Turin 2015*, Trieste, EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste: 126-127.





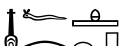
<sup>79</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 370.

<sup>80</sup> Bard, K.A., 1999. *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*. Routledge: 226.

<sup>81</sup> David, A.R., 1999: 370.

<sup>82</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: 70.

<sup>83</sup> Decker, W., 1992: 158-159, 161, fig 124.

There are also scenes depicting tomb owners hunting with their wives, where a man holds a fishing rod and fishes with his wife (Fig. 29) <sup>84</sup>. Another scene depicts Nebamun  TT181 accompanied by his wife and young daughter hunting birds in the swamps (Fig. 30) <sup>85</sup>. Also, a scene from Menna's  tomb TT69, depicts him, his wife, and family hunting birds and fishing in the swamps (Fig. 31). There is also a scene of Nakht  tomb TT52 hunting in the swamps with his wife and family (Fig. 32). Another from Simut's  tomb A.24 depicts him in the tomb with his wife and family (Fig. 33), and a similar scene from Neferhotep's  tomb A.5 (Fig. 34) <sup>86</sup>.



**(Fig. 28)** A model of a wooden boat with a group of fishermen, including a woman, from Meketre's tomb TT280, dating back to the Middle Kingdom.

Decker, W., 1992: 161, fig 124.; Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel, CCXLIV, K 2.112. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544126>

<sup>84</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: 73-74, fig. 36.

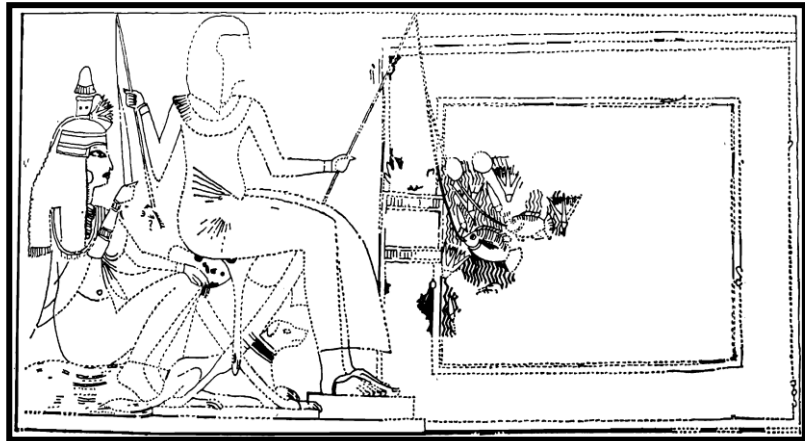
<sup>85</sup> James, T.G., 1986. *Egyptian Painting and Drawing in the British Museum*. Harvard University: 26-27, fig. 25.

<sup>86</sup> Wilkinson, C.K., 1983. *Egyptian Wall Paintings: The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Collection of Facsimiles*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: 56-57, fig. 63.; Decker, W., 1992: 163-165, fig. 129.; PM., 1970, I: 454.

## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

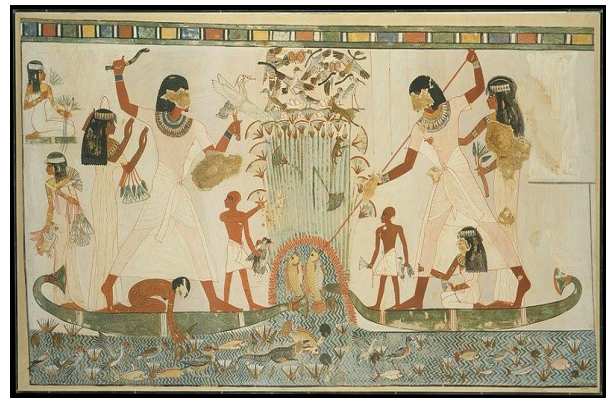
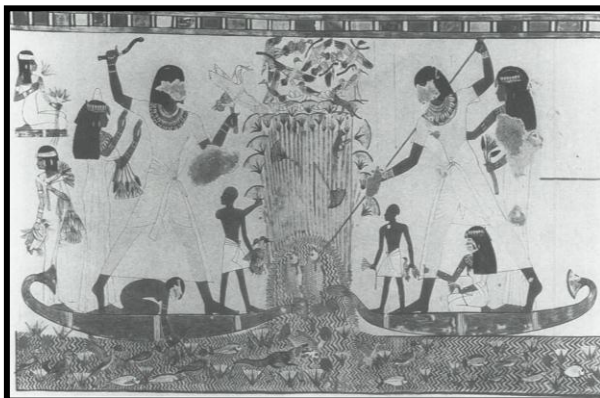
(Fig. 29) A scene depicting a man, and his wife engaged in fishing.

Touny, A & Wenig, S.,  
1969: 75, fig. 36.



(Fig. 30) A scene from Nebamun's tomb TT181 depicting him, his wife, and daughter engaged in bird hunting in the woodlands and marshes. This scene dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

James, T.G., 1986: 26-  
27, fig. 25.

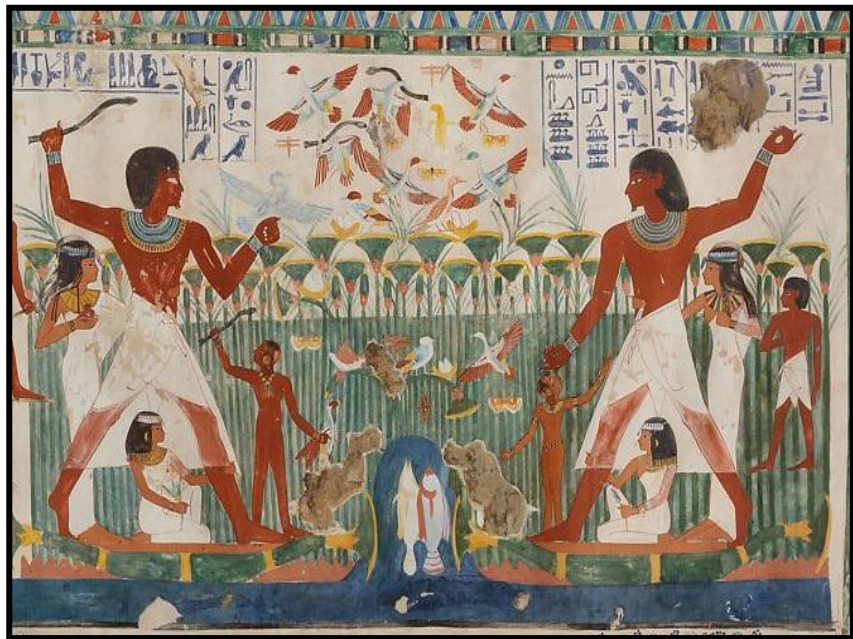


(Fig. 31) Menna, his wife, and family engaged in a marsh expedition hunting birds and fishing. This scene is taken from his tomb TT69, located in the Sheikh Abd el-Qurna necropolis.

Decker, W., 1992: 164-165, fig. 129.; Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel, CCLXV, K 2.172. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548437>

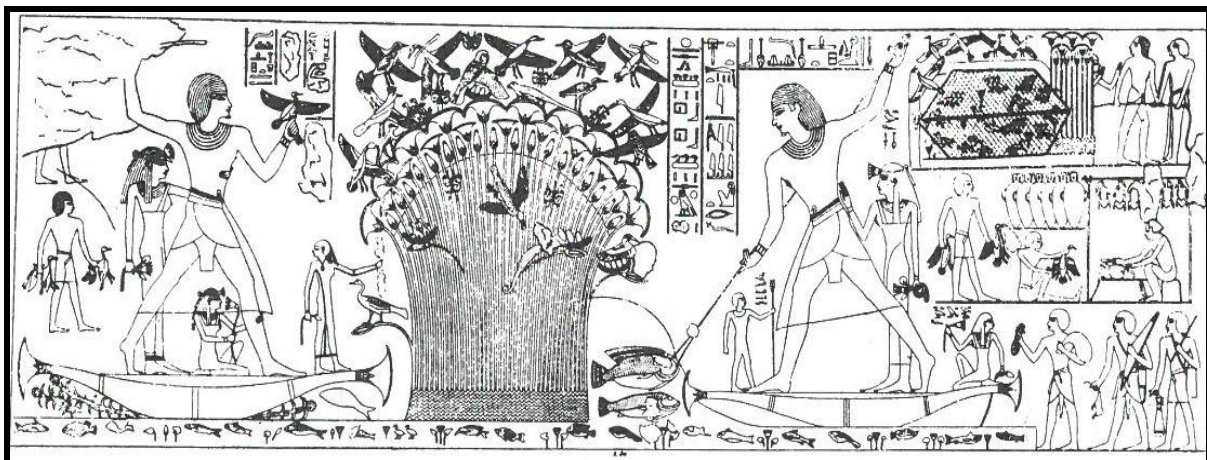
(Fig. 32) Nakht engaging in a marsh hunting expedition with his family. On the left, he is shown hunting ducks with a throwing stick, while on the right, he is depicted spearing fish. This scene is taken from his tomb TT52, located in the Sheikh Abd el-Qurna necropolis.

Wilkinson, C.K., 1983:  
 56-57, fig. 6.



(Fig. 33) Simut engaged in a marsh hunting expedition with his wife and family. This scene is taken from his tomb A.24, located in the Dra Abu el-Naga necropolis.

Decker, W & Herb, M.,  
 1994: Teil 2, Tafel,  
 CCLXVI, K 2.179.



(Fig. 34) Neferhotep engaged in a marsh hunting expedition with his family. This scene is taken from his tomb A.5, located in the Dra Abu el-Naga necropolis.

Decker, W & Herb, M., 1994: Teil 2, Tafel, CCLXI, K 3.141.

## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

### 3-6: Gardens and Orchards

Gardening  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆐}$ ,  $\text{𓆑} \text{𓆒} \text{𓆓}$  *hsp*<sup>87</sup> was a recreational activity for upper-class women, who enjoyed cultivating flowers and aromatic plants. We realize that Egyptian women played a vital role in gardening during the early Neolithic period, sowing seeds, weeding, and harvesting<sup>88</sup>, indicating their interest and love for agriculture. In the New Kingdom, tomb paintings depict gardens surrounded by walls and protected from the wind by several rows of trees, with a central pool, as in the garden of Nebamun  $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆐}$  *nb-umn* TT181 (Fig. 35)<sup>89</sup>.




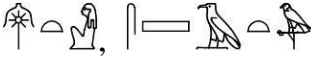


**(Fig. 35)** A sacred pond within Nebamun's garden, adorned with palm and sycamore trees. The sycamore goddess is enthroned in the upper right corner, surrounded by her divine offerings.

James, T.G., 1986: 30, fig. 28. [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA37983](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA37983)

<sup>87</sup> Dickson, P., 2006: 263-264.

<sup>88</sup> Graves-Brown, C., 2010: 22.

<sup>89</sup> Wilkinson, A., 1998. *The garden in Ancient Egypt*. London, Rubicon Press: p. 7.

The goddess Wadjet  *w3dyt*, also known as “Lady of Swimming.” is considered the patron goddess of sports in Old Kingdom inscriptions. Whereas the goddess Seshat’s name  *sš3t* titled “Lady of Birds and Fishing”, suggests she is a goddess of marshes. Plus, the goddess Bastet ,  *b3stt* was a goddess of archery, although she was only associated with archery once<sup>90</sup>.

Therefore, practicing sports was not limited to men only, but was an essential part of women’s lives in ancient Egypt. Women practiced a variety of sports such as gymnastics, dancing, swimming, rowing, and team games. These sports contributed to maintaining their health, fitness, and beauty, and were also a means of self-expression and preparation for life<sup>91</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

- By studying and analyzing archaeological evidence and historical texts on the walls of temples and tombs, it becomes clear to us that Egyptian women practiced all sports and recreational activities, without obstacles or restrictions. They had an effective and active role in ancient Egyptian society.
- Despite some physical, social and cultural restrictions, which may have limited women's participation in some violent sports such as wrestling, fencing, boxing and weightlifting, they have achieved remarkable athletic achievements in sports of strength, flexibility, speed and skill, such as gymnastics, jumping of various types and playing ball.
- Since military activity was an important part of the lives of the ancient Egyptians, women of the ruling families, including queens and princesses, participated in violent physical and sporting activities, as part of military training and preparation for wars.

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<sup>90</sup> Touny, A & Wenig, S., 1969: 82-83.

<sup>91</sup> In addition to sports and recreational games, Egyptian women practiced various simple handicrafts such as jewelry making, basket weaving, and perfume making. They participated in non spiritual and religious rituals and celebrations, which were an important part of their leisure time. Egyptian law granted women several rights, most importantly property and inheritance rights. Women inherited from their parents and husbands and had the right to manage their own property. The dowry was a woman's right, and she could reclaim it in case of divorce or the death of her husband. There were laws against violence against women, and wives could resort to the courts to obtain their rights. Women worked in various fields, such as agriculture, industry, commerce, medicine, and Judiciary.

- Ferreira, A., 2004. *The legal rights of the women of ancient Egypt*. Pretoria, University of South Africa: 1-2, 13, 23, 26, 28, 33, 53.



## Women's Active Role in Sports and Entertainment in Ancient Egypt

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- The archaeological evidence we shared indicates that women participated in group and recreational games such as gymnastics, jumping, dancing, running, ball games, and swimming, activities that were often associated with religious celebrations and festivals.
- Women's participation in sports and recreational activities help break traditional stereotypes about women's role of in ancient Egypt and promotes the presence of gender equality, emphasizing women's ability to compete and achieve success in its various fields.
- It is natural that gardens, orchards, or even visits to fields may have been utilized for recreational activities. Where women used to go to gardens and orchards to spend their free time and enjoy nature, and this was considered among the recreational activities for women in ancient Egypt.
- The presence of many funerary scenes depicting women practicing various sports indicates that these activities were an integral part of their daily lives. The ancient Egyptians believed in the afterlife, and they depicted the deceased practicing the activities they loved in this life, in order to ensure the continuity of these activities in the afterlife. This means that the activities depicted in the tombs reflected the reality of daily life. The artists who engraved these tombs, with their beautiful and detailed scenes, were depicting a reality that was familiar to them.
- The presence of board games such as the Senet game, Mehen, and models of wooden toys, balls, dolls, and musical toys in the tombs. It shows the interest of the ancient Egyptians in these games and the extent of their spread in society. They were not just games, but rather expressed social and cultural customs and traditions. Placing these toys in tombs indicates the desire of the ancient Egyptians for the deceased to enjoy the same activities that he enjoyed in his life on earth, which reflects their belief in the afterlife and its continuity.
- Archaeological studies have shown that women in ancient Egypt had opportunities to practice sports activities, and that these activities played an important role in their social and religious lives. Archaeological evidence and historical texts also confirm that sports and recreational activities were an integral part of the ancient Egyptian culture, and that women were an active part of this context.

**JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHAEOLOGY –VOLUME 28 -  
JANURAY 2025**

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**Abbreviations:**

<b>CAJ</b>	<i>Cambridge Archaeological Journal.</i>
<b>IJHLR</b>	<i>International Journal of Humanities and Language Research.</i>
<b>JAAUTH</b>	<i>Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality.</i>
<b>JARCE</b>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt (Boston, New York).</i>
<b>JEA</b>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.</i>
<b>JFTH</b>	<i>The scientific journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels- Alexandria University.</i>
<b>LÄ</b>	<i>Helck, W &amp; Otto, E., Lexikon der Ägyptologie, 7 bands. Wiesbaden, 1975-1992.</i>
<b>MDAIK</b>	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abt. Kairo (Wiesbaden, Mayence).</i>
<b>MFTH</b>	<i>Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels-University of Sadat City.</i>
<b>MJTHR</b>	<i>Minia Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research.</i>
<b>MMJ</b>	<i>Metropolitan Museum Journal. Metropol. Mus. (New York)</i>
<b>NEA (ASOR)</b>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology. Amer. Schools of Oriental Research (Boston).</i>
<b>PM</b>	<i>PoRteR (B.), Moss (R.L.B.), Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings, 7 vol., 1927-1995 (Oxford)</i>
<b>R. Museu Arq. Etn.,</b>	<i>Revista do Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia.</i>
<b>RecTrav</b>	<i>Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes (Paris). Cf. RT</i>
<b>Wb</b>	<i>Erman, A &amp; Grapow, H., Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache, 1926-1963 (Leipzig, Berlin).</i>

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