

CHILDHOOD. The Egyptians had two terms for child/children: *ms/ms.w* and *hrd/hrd.w*. Both boys and girls were welcome in ancient Egypt, though a first-born son was preferred. The first century BCE historian Diodoros Siculus (80.3 ff.) informs us that no child, not even the child of a slave, was looked on as a bastard, because the father was regarded as the creator and the mother as the source of nourishment. The execution of a condemned pregnant woman could be delayed until her confinement ended. Exposure of a child was considered monstrous. The Greek authors Strabo and Diodoros marveled at this because in Greece poor families abandoned unwanted children, especially girls. If a couple remained childless, they could adopt a child. In its mother's womb the child was regarded as a living being developing under the protection of a god or goddess. In the sun hymn of Amarna, the god Aten is described as he "who makes seed grow in women, who creates people from sperm, who feeds the son in his mother's womb, who soothes him to still his tears." The child was thought to belong to both parents. Formed by the father's *ka*, the father transmitted to his child part of his *ba*-soul and part of his *akh* power. According to the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, and the *Book of Going Forth by Day (Book of the Dead)*, the heart, the site of a person's character, feeling, and intellect came from the mother. A belief from the Persian, preserved through the Ptolemaic period and also known among central African tribes, held that the semen went from the father's bones into the bones of the child; and in the Jumilhac Papyrus (third century BCE), we read that the bones were formed by the semen, while the flesh and skin of the child came from the mother. In filiations, Egyptians often preface the name of the father with the phrase "made by" and the mother's with "born to."

The birth of a child was attended by the female members of the household. The existence of midwives in ancient Egypt is not certain. Some deities were associated with pregnancy and childbirth; in the Westcar Papyrus, births are attended by Meskhenet (the personification of the birthing stool), Heket (a birth goddess), Isis, and Nephthys. Taweret, a hippopotamus goddess, protected the pregnant woman, while the bandy-legged dwarf god Bes protected women in childbirth and young children; he was also associated with fertility.

The mother or a nurse breast-fed the child for as many as three years. The Egyptian wet-nurse came to live in the child's home. The Egyptians believed that a relationship

between the child and its nurse was established through the milk, and a king acquired the gifts of a goddess when suckled by her. In noble families the nurse might remain with a child while it grew up, becoming its teacher. Royal children had many nurses, often from noble families, and their children grew up with the princes and princesses. These nurses were highly esteemed: Thutmose III married the daughter of his nurse, and Ay, husband of the nurse of Queen Nefertiti, became king after the last male offspring of the royal family had died. Male instructors were also called "nurse" (*mn't*, written with the breast as a determinative). According to later contracts written in Greek, a child was sent to live with the nurse. This seems to be a Greek fashion, since according to the only contract between an Egyptian and a nurse from the same period, the nurse came to live in the child's father's house. From the Old Kingdom on, reliefs and statuettes show simple women nursing their children, holding them in their laps.

In spite of all this, children were threatened by all kinds of diseases. With prayers, amulets, magic spells, and medicines—many of them belonging to a dubious pharmacopeia—parents tried to protect their children. They lamented desperately if they died. The sage Ani says: "When death comes, he steals the infant who is in his mother's arms, just like him who has reached old age." When small children died they might be buried under the floor of their parents' house, in special children's cemeteries, in their own tombs in a cemetery for adults, or together with one or both parents; the last indicates the close relationship between parents and children.

The Egyptians seem to have registered birthdays from an early time. An official, Sobek-hu, mentions the twenty-seventh year of Amenemhet II as the year of his birth, and some officials of the eighteenth dynasty have their ages noted at their death. According to Ramesses IV, the living counted the days and months of their lifetime. An exact age to the day is preserved from the twenty-first dynasty, and an exact birthday from the twenty-sixth. During the Ptolemaic period, registers of births and deaths were kept in the House of Life. Texts from Deir el-Medina seem to indicate that a workman could take a day off to celebrate his own birthday or that of a family member. An invitation from a man to the birthday celebration of his son survives from the Ptolemaic period.

The child received its name at birth. The name could be chosen by the father, the mother, or both parents. It might refer to a king, a god, or a feast during which the child was born. The child could be named after another family member or after an animal, or it might simply get a number: First, Second, etc. Sometimes the name was composed of the words the mother uttered during her labor, imploring the help of or giving thanks to a god or goddess. A name like "They placed him in front of the god

NN," known from the Late period, may indicate exposure in a temple; a name like "May (the god) Khonsu kill them" points to opposition against foreign rulers. During the Old Kingdom, a child had a "big" (*rn i*) or "beautiful" (*rn nfr*) name, composed with the name of a king, a second name composed with the name of a god, and a pet name. The "big" name was given up in the sixth dynasty. In the Middle Kingdom it is replaced by a "name by which he is named," which disappeared in the New Kingdom but is revived in the Third Intermediate Period. A "name of his mother" is always placed at the beginning in lists.

A baby was carried in a sling at its mother's breast, seldom on the back. Older infants rode astride the hip of a mother, elder sister, or servant. During the Old Kingdom, the status "child" was expressed in art by nakedness; in the Middle and New Kingdoms, children were depicted either nude or clothed. The sex of girls was sometimes indicated by small breasts and a marked pubis. Garments, some of which have survived, protected them against the cold. Small animals made of clay or wood, dolls with movable limbs, balls, and tops were common toys for children. Boys in images often carry a bird hanging down by its wings, while girls may hold a chicken or duckling nestled in their palms in front of their chests. Boys usually suck the middle finger, but girls very seldom do. Their hair is shaved, except for a sidelock or a braided plait with the end rolled up; this plait was first worn only by boys, but from the fifth dynasty on also by girls. The gods Horus, Khons, and Ihy were depicted as child gods with a sidelock or plait. This hairstyle was also worn by Iwenmutef "Pillar of his mother" the priest, formerly a god representing the eldest son in the royal cult and later in the cult of the dead. The hair of girls was either totally shaven or worn in a pigtail, which became the fashion for girl dancers. During the New Kingdom, the sidelock became broader for girls as well as for boys. A wide sidelock became the fashion for the royal children and the high priest of Memphis, who was often a prince.

The close relationship between parents and children is expressed through all periods. During the Old Kingdom, children are represented with their parents inspecting activities on the estate. In the New Kingdom, we can see the whole family on a pleasure trip in a papyrus skiff, hunting birds and catching fish. An elder son goes hunting in the desert with his father. Children are present at the festival of the deified king Amenhotpe I and at the Valley festival when families visit their deceased in the necropolis. They dance with the musicians when a noble receives the gold of honor, or at the festival of the goddess Bastet. They participate at the burial of a parent or relative: the youngest is carried in a sling, toddlers hold onto their mother or an elder sister, and young girls mourn along with the wailing women. With their parents, they adore the gods.

Children were considered to be ignorant, innocent, and without sin. "Nobody is born wise," the sage Ptahhotep states, and in the Insinger Papyrus we read that humans live for ten years before they can tell life from death. The scribe Djehutimose, who fell ill on an official mission, writes to his colleagues to take the little boy to the god Amun and to pray for his recovery. According to Egyptian belief, as the Greek historian Plutarch related, innocent children were closer to the gods and had prophetic gifts: children told Isis where she could find the coffin of her murdered husband. Other authors wrote that during a procession of the bull god Apis, children started to give oracles. As in life, so were children close to their parents in the hereafter. From the Old Kingdom on, they can be seen taking the funerary meal with their parents, thus being provided for in eternity, and in New Kingdom representations they accompany their parents on a boat ride on the river of the hereafter.

Children grew up close to their mother, who cared for them while they were small and while they went to school. Nefertiti, as we read on a boundary stela from the city of Tell el-Amarna, was under the guidance of the king, Akhenaten, and their children, the princesses Meritaten and Meketaten, "will reach maturity under the guidance of their mother." A father was not only obliged to nurture his children, he was also supposed to protect them from physical and psychic difficulties, he needed to know about the disposition of his child and help him in time of need; but if a son opposed his father, he could be rejected.

When the children of nobles accompanied their parents to inspect their estate, they learned by seeing and listening. From the fifth dynasty on, youths intended to become high functionaries were educated at residential schools, or together with the royal children at the palace, to become loyal followers of the future king. From the end of the sixth dynasty, boys coming from the lower class could attain high office. They were educated by an official who was called their (mental) father. The first mention of a school is around 2000 BCE. The didactic method was to listen, obey, and learn the teaching of the master by heart (to memorize). But the sage Khety teaches his son "A good son, whom the god gives, is one who adds to that which his teacher told him."

Student ostraca in the Hieratic script, corrected in red ink, show that besides learning how to write, school pupils were taught conjugation, orthography, literary style, grammar, geography, astronomy, mathematics, geometry, and sometimes even foreign languages like Babylonian, Cretan, or Nubian. Behavior was important: the ideal was the "silent one," the one who could listen well. The boys were instructed in behavior toward superiors and subordinates, as well as in table manners. Laziness was punished by beating. That students sometimes had their feet

locked in the stocks is recorded. Besides mental training, upper-class youths had physical training, such as swimming, shooting, or running. Old and Middle Kingdom tomb walls show naked boys high-jumping, wrestling, whirling around holding one another's hands, balancing, or throwing sticks. Two boys try to force each other's forearm down; teams try to pull each other down. They were also trained in dancing and music.

Except in a few depictions, the sexes play apart. Girls are always shown dressed. They learn how to dance, to play music, and to sing, but they also take part in acrobatic games or juggling with balls. Girls grew up near their mothers. Letters from middle-class women from the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina suggest that women too could learn how to read and write, possibly from their fathers or brothers. Princesses had male instructors (called "nurse"). Daughters of noble families probably also had home instructors perhaps the nurses with which some are depicted. Poorer girls learned what they would need when they married by helping their mothers in the household, with poultry and small livestock, or gleaning in the fields. We see bigger girls carrying their younger siblings around. Some might go to work for a noblewoman; scenes show them preparing the bed, caring for their mistress in the confinement hut, or serving and dancing at the meals of the rich. Boys helped with the cattle in the fields, shooed away birds from the crops, climbed palm trees at harvest time, and helped pick grapes or press them. Little boys accompanied their fathers to work. They are depicted at the shipyard, playing and trying to help their father.

Boys who went into the army had to leave their parents at an early age; they began with odd jobs in the camp, such as looking after the animals. We can see boys and girls in market scenes and in processions, carrying goods. In the tomb of the vizier Rekhmire, there is a record of children of slaves being taxed according to the work they could do. Diodoros Siculus wrote that boys who had not yet reached maturity worked in the mines, carrying blocks through low galleries; possibly these were children of slaves working with their parents. Papyri from the Greco-Roman period mention children being rented out to work by their fathers or widowed mothers. The kind of labor the children had to do depended on their masters and mistresses. According to the Egyptian principle of *maat* (justice) monuments only show us children at lighter work. A New Kingdom letter in which a mother complains that her daughter has to work, although she is still a child, may indicate that the mother had rented her daughter out for service under the condition that she should only do light work. The statement that she was exchanged for a servant might indicate that she had to do the work of an adult.

We do not know whether any initiation rites marked the end of childhood. After a ceremony in which a band was knotted around the head (*ts mdh*), a boy took over adult responsibilities, thus ending his childhood. According to texts from the Old Kingdom, Horus set out to avenge his father, and officials took over their first officer, after that ceremony. Ptolemaic texts speak of the deity, Horus ascending the throne after having gone through the *ts mdh*. Old Kingdom scenes showing boys trying to escape from an enclosure while others—carrying a sort of scepter and accompanied by a man in a lion's mask—run away after dancing girls, might be interpreted as initiation rites if not as some kind of game. Whether circumcision was practiced as an initiation is not known either. From prehistory, some men depicted partially nude and some mummies may show circumcision, but others do not. According to a few representations and texts, small boys as well as adult men were circumcised. Whether a Coffin Text refers to circumcised boys and girls is not clear. Texts that clearly mention circumcision of girls date to the Greek period; one of them says that a certain girl had to be circumcised according to Egyptian custom as she had reached the age of marriage.

Children were supposed to love and honor their parents and look after them when they were ill or old. Although it was mainly the duty of the eldest son to bury his parents, care for their funerary cult, and keep their names alive, the other children—boys as well as girls—were obliged to do the same. Children who did not look after their parents could be disinherited.

Orphans and widows of the lower class must have led a miserable life if there was no male relative to look after them. From the First Intermediate Period onward, nobles boast of having taken care of the widow and her child. According to other texts, the lot of orphans was put into the hands of a god, which suggests a kind of orphanage in the temple. Often enough, however they were left to fend for themselves, and older ones might have led a vagrant life.

From the Early Dynastic period, male child gods were venerated. Most important of these is Horus, the son of Isis, later known as Harsiese. As a child with his finger at his mouth, he is depicted in the first dynasty and is documented in many Late period terracottas as Harpocrates. Then too, as Harendotes, he is the avenger of his father, who was murdered by his brother Seth. Horus, the fatherless child, was borne and brought up by his mother Isis hidden in the papyrus thickets of the Nile Delta at Khemmis. Because he had been guarded by his mother from the threat of his uncle Seth, from illness, and from wild animals, he became a savior god and was later assimilated to (Pa)Shed, the savior. From the Middle Kingdom on, he was associated with the child gods Nefertum and

Ihy. Nefertum appears as a newborn child on a lotus flower in the primeval flood and symbolizes the renewal of the sun and the beginning of the world. The musician Ihy, son of Horus of Edfu and Hathor of Dendera, was born in the so-called *mammisi* (birth-house) and enthroned as the follower of his father. He and Nefertum in turn were assimilated with Harsomtus. Khons, the son of Amun and Mut, symbolized the renewal of the moon. Neper personified the new-grown grain and was venerated as the son of the harvest goddess Renenutet. Neferhotep, son of Hathor, symbolized the duration of kingship. In the Late period, even Heka, the god of magic, was worshiped as a child and assimilated to different divine couples.

[See also Birth; Education; and Family.]

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