



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Marriage traditions and the stem family in ancient Egypt: a study of marriage contracts, social structure and family life

Gompel, S.M.T. van

Citation

Gompel, S. M. T. van. (2025, June 11). *Marriage traditions and the stem family in ancient Egypt: a study of marriage contracts, social structure and family life*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4249984>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4249984>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Propositions

accompanying the dissertation entitled:

*Marriage Traditions and the Stem Family in Ancient Egypt.
A study of marriage contracts, social structure and family life*

by S.M.T. van Gompel

1. A single structural economic basis for marriage underlies all known types of Egyptian marriage documents: a marriage payment provided by the wife (and her family), in return for regular support from the husband (and his family).
2. Egyptian marriage documents express the same economic basis for a marriage in different ways. However, they use contract-type specific terminology to describe the initial marriage payments (*šp n s.ḥm.t*, *s^cnh* and *ḥd n ir ḥm.t*) and other transactions between spouses.
3. The formats of Egyptian marriage documents, and the legal clauses used within the different formats, were determined by local scribal tradition rather than by the marrying spouses and their families. This is deduced from the fact that document format(s) and clauses differ between cities, while marriage documents produced in the same city (in Thebes: in the two parts of the city with their own scribal bureau) use the same format(s).
4. The dominant and preferred family system of Egyptian families, in the social classes that have left written sources, was the patrilineal stem family with corporate property. Egyptian families tried to adhere to both stem ideology and stem practice in daily life.
5. The Egyptian patrilineal stem family singled out one child from all other children to be the main heir, and thus did not discriminate against female children as a sex-based category. This explains the oft-noted comparatively 'high' status of Egyptian women in the family, which was to some extent projected outwards into society.
6. The marriage gift *šp n s.ḥm.t* consisted of two parts: a part that was given or pledged at the start of marriage, and a part that was only given if the husband initiated a divorce. It is not clear from the wording of marriage documents that the *šp n s.ḥm.t* became a fictional sum after 230 BCE, as was proposed by Pestman.
7. While historical studies currently emphasise the diversity of individuals and their agency in the past, when considering the customary and dominant behaviours of large groups in ancient societies, such as marriage and household formation, a functionalist macro-level approach remains valuable.
8. While the high quality of research and argumentation in Egyptological written discourse should be maintained, discussion in the field would improve if publications and journals showed some leniency in contributions from advanced students who may not meet the writing, structure and styling standards yet or require more assistance than experienced writers.
9. Egyptologists must resist the influence of political ideologies in the discussion of race and ethnicity in ancient Egypt. While political ideologies may have a place in broader cultural and social discourse, scientific discourse must only deal with facts.
10. Publicly funded museums must present exhibitions that adhere to broadly accepted and current scientific insights and should resist pressures to massage the truth in order to attract or appease a certain audience, satisfy governmental regulations and aspirations, or pacify social media.

11. To maintain a free and just society, banks, credit card companies and other payment processors must be legally obliged to provide services to any person who runs a legal business or foundation and has not committed a criminal act that would disqualify them from the use of these services.
12. The documentation of Internet 'lolcow' Christine Weston Chandler is the most extensive crowd sourced anthropological study ever made of a single individual, equally fascinating and deeply unethical.