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An Archaeology of Social Relations in an Egyptian Village

Lynn Meskell[1]

Postprocessual archaeology has placed great importance on individuals and social interaction, though in practice this often proves a difficult project to realize. The rich archaeological and cultural data offered in an Egyptian context suggest that it is possible to identify how specific individuals and groups functioned with a domestic context, taking into account the complex vectors of social inequality—age, sex, class, status, and life experience. In the process, this paper seeks to question the narrow construal of gender *as analogous to the domain of women, and show the inadequacies of such an approach. It offers an opportunity to mesh material culture with social theory by linking sociocultural, spatial, and temporal data.*

KEY WORDS: Egyptian archaeology; spatial analysis; social archaeology; ritual space.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I focus on the social life of the villagers of Deir el Medina, a New Kingdom Egyptian settlement (ca. 1500–1100 B.C.) on the Theban West Bank (Fig. 1). Given the paucity of Egyptian case studies in mainstream archaeological literature, this is an important opportunity to demonstrate the potentials of Egyptian archaeology, using both material and textual sources in a dialectical manner. Throughout I have also attempted to mesh archaeological theory and data, by considering the interactions among time, space, and the actions of individuals. This entails moving reflexively between social patterning and mitigating individual choices and preferences.

The richness and variability of the Deir el Medina data prompt an archaeology of individuals and their social relations, rather than the tradi-

[1]New College, Oxford OX1 3BN, UK. e-mail: Lynn.Meskell@new.ox.ac.uk.

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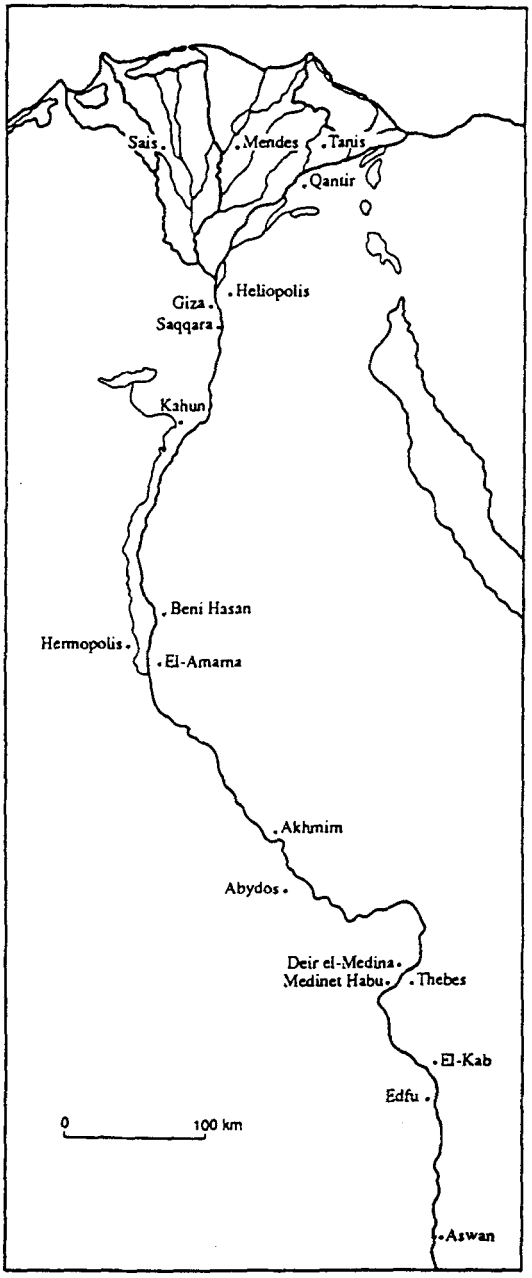

Fig. 1. Map of Egypt showing the location of Deir el Medina.

tional approaches which seek to simply identify nomothetic groups such as *women*. During this analysis the traditional categories employed in *gender archaeology* have been called into question. As a result, throughout the paper I use the word sex, rather than gender, for the following theoretical reasons (Meskell, 1996; Knapp and Meskell, 1997). When archaeologists refer to sex they in fact refer to a complex constellation of expressions and experiences. On one level there is the social construction of biological sex, with all its variable manifestations. Then there is the matter of how an individual chooses to manifest that defined sex, usually referred to as *gender:* they may present themselves to society in a number of ways, according to experience, embodiment, and sociocultural factors. Such a "performance" represents a second level (Butler, 1993; Gatens, 1996). However, even this does not always define adequately sexual behavior and experience. An individual may be an XX female, and may perform in daily contexts as a female, but if she chooses not to conform to a heterosexual lifestyle, then there is an added sexual dimension, that of difference, which needs to be considered. Temporality should also be acknowledged, since individual sexual identity is fluid and may change over the course of one's life. To date, the concept of *gender* has not been adequate to this task.

From this perspective I would argue that the singular study of *women's space* is an inadequate, limited basis for a holistic understanding of social relations. Yet this has been a noticeable trend in archaeology, especially for *gender archaeology*. Current theorizing on sex, and sexed space, should not preclude a study of men and their practices. We cannot ignore many important aspects of men's lives (Yentsch, 1991, p. 196), which have material correlates or historical documentation. In this paper I aim to target specifically individuals on the basis of factors like age, life experience, and temporality. For instance, certain areas of the house will assume specific meanings when a mature woman is menstruating or in labor, and this will obviously be at variance with the experience of a young girl, female servant, or male family member for that matter. I also argue that males of high rank would have operated from their own particular sphere, namely, the room of the divan, which was constructed and decorated to reflect their rank, status, and piety.

The paper opens with an introduction to the site of Deir el Medina in its historical setting. It then considers the dissonance between the materiality of the settlement and the array of social practices which were embedded within those structures. While the archaeology might present one scenario, we must consider other life experiences that leave no tangible trace, and here the documentary record offers important insights. This is followed by a discussion of sexed space and a more detailed analysis of specific rooms which centered on elite women and men of the household.

Again, this is tempered by time cycles and life stages. I then consider other members of the household, particularly lower-class women and servants, and their particular duties and spaces. The paper concludes by stressing the potentials for an archaeology of individuals and their social bonds, rather than simply undertaking categorical studies like those which seek to identify *women*. A study of Deir el Medina households illustrates the problems with such an approach and highlights that inherent individual differences are based upon age, class, status, life stage, and experience, as well as sex.

BACKGROUND TO DEIR EL MEDINA

Knowledge of the site first came to light in 1777 A.D., while its actual location was discovered sometime between 1811 and 1815. Excavations were undertaken by French, German, and Italian schools until the concession was formally given to the French Institute (IFAO) in 1917. Bernard Bruyère directed these excavations between 1922 and 1951. He was then the fifth person to direct work at the site, by which time the archaeology of the village had been significantly disturbed (Bonnet and Valbelle, 1975, p. 434). In 1975 and 1976 a series of trenches was opened by the IFAO under Bonnet and Valbelle, although both seasons were very short. Current archaeological investigation of the site is still being conducted by the French Institute, the last major publication being undertaken by Dominique Valbelle in 1985. Many Egyptologists have deemed the archaeology (as opposed to the texts) of the site unusable because it was undertaken before systematic excavation techniques and recording were developed. However, I would argue that Bruyère's publications and plans merit further investigation and interpretation, and have significant potential for archaeological analyses.

The purpose of Deir el Medina was to house the scribes and workmen who designed and constructed the royal tombs, and their families, in close proximity to the Valley of the Kings. This was discovered by the translation of textual data in 1929 by Jaroslav Černý. The substantial archaeological remains of Deir el Medina encompass not only the enclosed village, but scattered dwellings beyond the walls, silos and storage facilities, some 400 tombs scattered in various necropoleis, chapel complexes, and the Hathor temple (Fig. 2). The first settlement was probably constructed at the outset of the 18th Dynasty, under the pharaoh Tuthmosis I. It was expanded during the 19th and 20th Dynasties, when the team of workmen was increased in line with the changing dimensions of the royal tombs. The official role of the village came to an end during the reign of Ramesses XI (ca. 1098–

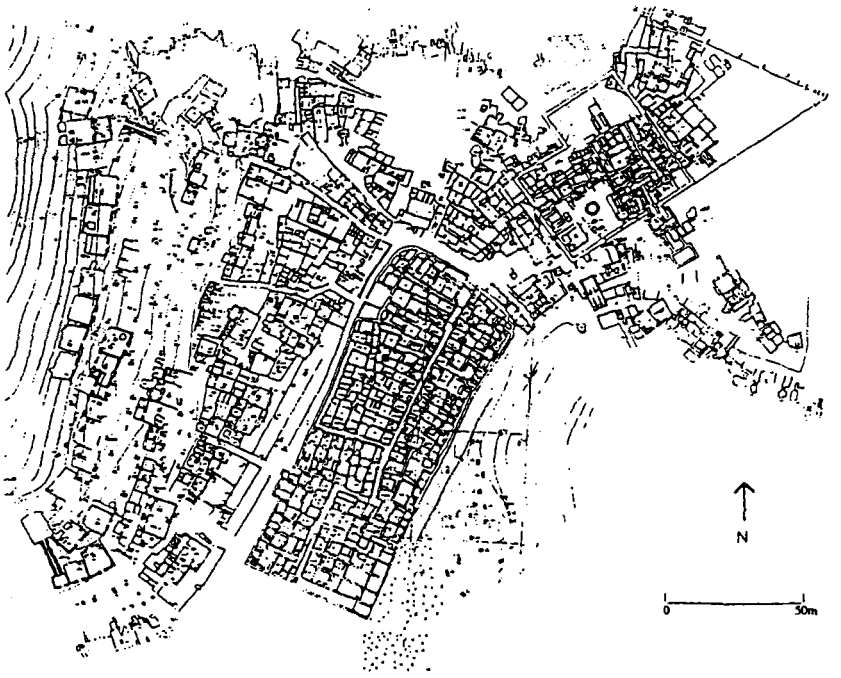

Fig. 2. Map of the site of Deir el Medina illustrating the village, cemeteries, and environs.

1069 B.C.), when the occupants gradually deserted the site due to civil unrest. However, the site continued to be an important religious and mortuary locale over the following centuries into Christian and Islamic times (Montserrat and Meskell, 1997).

In its final phase the enclosed village took on a subrectangular format some 5600 m^2 in area (Fig. 3). An extension to the south had covered the 18th Dynasty dumps and a portion of the cemetery. Other housing blocks were added to the western border of the village. In total, there must have been at least 12 phases of construction throughout Deir el Medina's settlement history (Valbelle, 1985, p. 442). By examining the village compound, certain propositions may be made about how life functioned on a daily basis. For instance, the dimensions of the major street or the minor alleyways are such that space must have been cramped and movement restricted. This suggests that people may have used areas of contiguous roofing to facilitate movement across the settlement. The majority of residence units have a staircase which permitted roof use and mobility across blocks. At

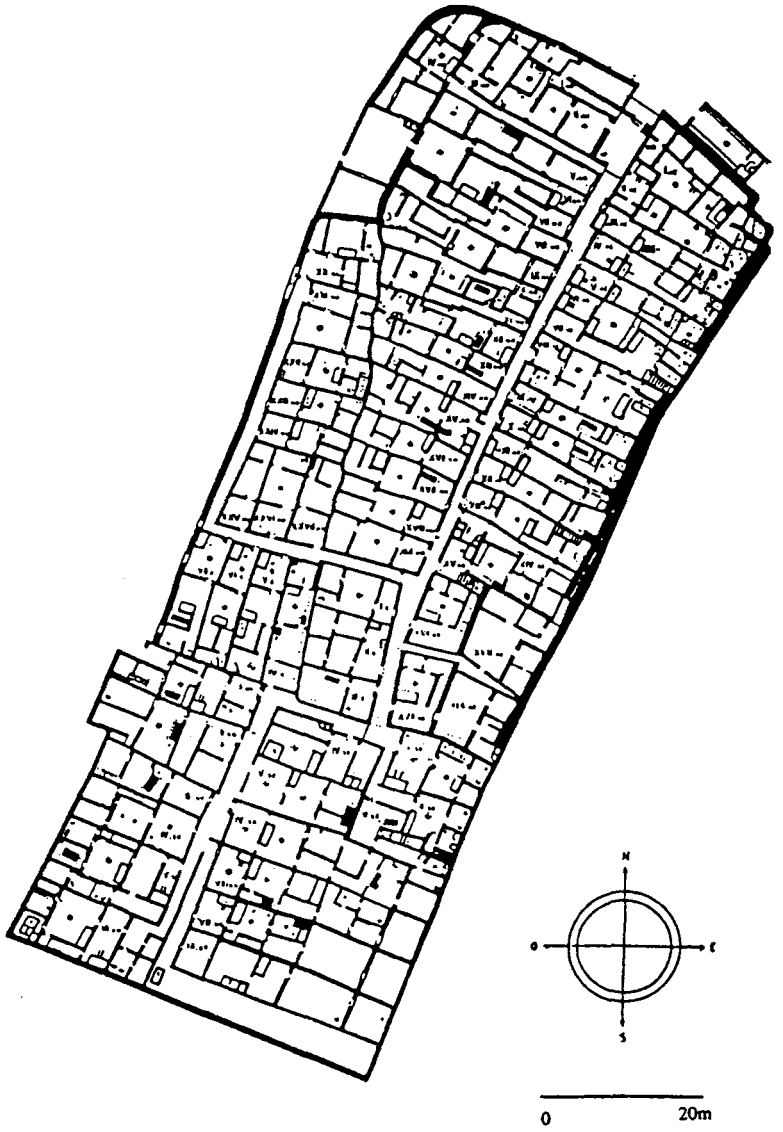

Fig. 3. Plan of the enclosed village, after Bruyère (1939).

the northeast corner, Bonnet and Valbelle (1976, p. 444) identified a passage and stairway which permitted roof access across the precinct and probably led to the south. Numerous activities undoubtedly took place at roof level, much as they do in Egypt today. The roof provided a space for keeping birds, hanging the washing, drying crops, storing goods, or sleeping during summer. Such systems similarly reduce the surface area exposed to the sun, thus lessening the interior temperature within houses. This also potentially offered another entrance to the house. Some roofed areas, however, may have been on different levels, while others were separated by open courts. Roof heights have been interpreted from the placement of supporting columns, and numerous house models of the period also indicate this convention.

In addressing individual residence units, the conditions present at Deir el Medina were reminiscent of those prevailing in the mud brick domestic housing of Egyptian villages and provincial towns today. Houses were intermittently added to, amalgamated, partly demolished and reconstructed, divided and partitioned—according to family considerations, pressing domestic and financial concerns, and the limitations of the material environment. While the documentary data reflect the supposed authority exercised by the state, excavated settlements like Kahun, Amarna, and Buhen all show individual modification of domestic structures to suit the distinct requirements of the inhabitants (Smith, 1972; Kemp, 1980). The villagers of Deir el Medina by their very professions could easily have built and remodeled their own dwellings, and there exist other written attestations of such activities in records of absence from necropolis duties. Texts, written on potsherds or fragments of limestone, like ostracon Varille 13, illustrate this situation: "Year 3, third month of summer, day 16. What the workman Paneb gave to the draughtsman [. . .] . . . for the construction work he did in my house: a workroom and another wall makes 1_ sacks" (McDowell, in press). This would substantiate the notion that the workmen lived a considerably autonomous existence, free from excessive state intervention into their personal daily affairs. Deir el Medina may have been begun as a planned community, but it was gradually transformed to meet the demands of individuals (Kemp, 1977, p. 127), rather than the state. This is manifest archaeologically in the domestic arrangements.

Finally, more information has been gleaned from this community than from any other in pharaonic history, since its highly literate occupants left a wealth of documentary data and because the favorable desertic conditions have preserved both houses and tombs. While the textual data have received much scholarly attention, the material remains of Deir el Medina

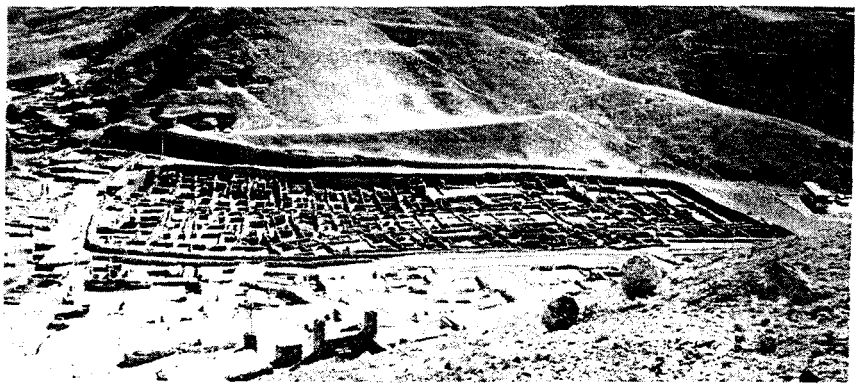

Fig. 4. The village of Deir el Medina. (Photo by the author.)

have not been systematically analyzed (but see Meskell, 1997). Both data sets are necessary before a fuller picture of village life can emerge, and such evidence must be used dialectically, rather simply using the archaeology to embellish the historical record.

MATERIALITY AND INTENTIONALITY

The remarkably preserved dwellings of Deir el Medina (Fig. 4) were discovered complete with wall decoration, ritual and domestic fixtures, and associated finds (Bruyère, 1939). This allows us to analyze their social space as it was manipulated by individuals to create, reinforce, and project social relations. While the material may mirror the social, it also acts recursively, having a consequent effect on the people that produce it. In fact one could posit a triadic relationship between social, spatial and temporal dimensions. The homologous structuring of space, time, and social being affects relations within a household, which are then represented in the dynamics of spatial organization (Alexander, 1992, p. 1). As a result, the materiality of Deir el Medina (e.g., decoration, emplacements) offers different information than the social (e.g., texts, individual histories). That dissonance mirrors the tensions between material and documentary evidence at the site.

Dominant functions are reflected by the material record, yet this does not exclude additional, contingent usages either. Thus, a space which is

replete with ritual signifiers may have been similarly used for sleeping, eating, and general domestic duties for many hours of the day. Trends may be reflected materially, and while the built environment might serve as a mnemonic device with cues that trigger and enhance appropriate behavior (Blanton, 1994, p. 9), these trends should not be perceived as overarching deterministic forces which impel individuals to act, or act in a given manner. And though trends can be illustrated, the degree of internal and individual variation amongst living spaces should not be underestimated. The houses of the enclosure have always been presented as uniform and canonical, yet this ignores the significant levels of variation in terms of spatial area, room number, fixtures, and decoration—not to mention experience of that space in its temporal context (Meskell, 1994). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I am attempting to map intentionality—what spaces were intended to represent—rather than reality. By intentionality I refer to a purposeful construction which has symbolic resonances for individuals within the same cultural milieu. The term is also often linked to the work of Searle (1983, p. 1), who states that intentionality "is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world."

Finally, my analysis suggests that the men who constructed the houses at Deir el Medina created a set of spaces intended to encompass a number of sexed spheres which were designed to convey meanings about sex, status, class and age. This observation is in keeping with recent theoretical formulations from third wave feminist and postcolonial theorists (e.g. Butler, 1993, 1997; Bhabha, 1994; Fraser, 1995). These scholars argue that commitment to a single master signifier, whether it be class, race, or sexuality, will prove to be an inadequate paradigm. Homi Bhabha (1994, pp. 1, 2) suggests that "the move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions—of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation—that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-2). We need to think beyond these initial subjectivities, since individuals cannot be reduced to a list of unequal factors, and focus upon the processes that create cultural differences.

MAPPING SEX

At Deir el Medina there are some 68 houses within the enclosure wall. They encompass an area between 40 and 120 m^2 in size, the average being

72 m^2 in total (Valbelle, 1985, p. 117). The first room of the house averaged an area between 8 and 24 m^2, the second room being generally larger, at 14 to 26 m^2. The second room was at a higher elevation, which allowed light to enter from upper window grilles high in the walls. The other smaller rooms ranged between 3 and 6 m^2 each, sometimes illuminated by a window cut into the wall. A staircase led from the back of the house, designated as cooking areas with ovens, basins, and grinders, to the terrace above (Valbelle, 1985, p. 119).

In this paper, room designations are given numbers which refer to room order after entry and I avoid classifications such as bedroom, living room, etc. When an entry room has two following rooms in tandem, I have classified the room to the right as the second room and the left as the next room or third room. This designation is also influenced by the axial route of the houses, which tends to organize most rooms in a row, with other small ones off to the side. Thus, I have followed the major axial route within the dwellings. We have no idea how the Egyptians may have perceived this situation, although one imagines that my own choice is a cultural product of being right-handed. There will probably be no adequate solution. As for decoration and finds, they have been graphed according to the amount of evidence provided by Bruyère's (1939) reports. In some of the following figures a total of 4 rooms provides suitable information, and in others, as many as 10. Often the end rooms of the house have very little useful description and tend to be without decoration, features or finds. Where evidence is available, fixtures and finds have been provenienced by room and, if more vague, by dwelling unit.

Prior studies adopt a conventional perspective whereby the designations of room structure and subsequent functions have been stylized and standardized into a formula in which room function designations are colored by a 20th-century bias. The ancient dwelling simply becomes a modern *home* retrodicted across time and space. The notion that the division of space and activities for the Egyptian context is equivalent to the modern separation of kitchen, bedroom, and foyer cannot be validated. While it has long been acknowledged that a number of the features such as shrines, querns, and hearths provide some indication of room use, no systematic examination of room contents has been undertaken. The archaeological finds do not exclude the notion that large family groups made use of all available space for sleeping or that animals and birds were housed in various rooms at times. Hence, there is no simple linear equation to represent the relationship between the public, private, and service areas of a house, as one might apply to a Georgian house (Leone, 1984), where order is based on the segmentary dividing of life.

By examining the spatial distribution of material, it is possible to map sexed space in domestic contexts on the basis of specific fixtures, paintings, decoration, ritual activity, and artifacts coupled with textual and ethnographic data. The objects are classified on the basis of inscriptions of names, rather than on gender-based assumptions (i.e., pot = woman, tool = man). They are provenienced by room in Bruyère's records, though the locations of fixtures and decorative features are obviously more reliable. Although stratigraphic recording was not Bruyère's strong point and we could be witnessing compacting of finds from various occupations, the significant locational patterning of ritual activity seems to remain consistent. The majority of finds probably derive from the later Ramesside occupation period (ca. 1292–1108 B.C.), and these, coupled with emplacements, ritual fixtures, wall decoration, and painted lintels, etc., build a quite detailed picture of living spaces and practices. I propose that the house was intended to encompass a number of spheres dedicated to certain groups or activities (Fig. 5), moving from the most ritually potent at the front of the house to the more mundane, practically inspired domestic tasks or processing, toward the rear of the house (see Table I). More specifically, the first room on entry was notionally female-oriented, centered around elite, married, sexually potent, fertile females of the household at Deir el Medina. This enigmatic room, complete with wall paintings, apotropaic imagery, and ritual fixtures, has been the subject of much scholarly debate and a plethora of interpretations has been offered (e.g., Kemp, 1979; Friedman, 1994; Robins 1994–1995, 1996). The second room or divan room would, however, appear to be even more ritually inclined, focusing on the sphere of elite, high-status males of the household—yet it has received little attention if any. This room, I argue, is the ritual and social focus of the house, though one which centers around adult males. What makes this spatial pattern more socially telling is the notion of temporality—who uses these spaces throughout the day . . . day in day out. The abundant texts from the site confirm that the men stayed away from the village, at a camp site (or Top site; Fig. 6) closer to the Valley of the Kings, for days at a time while they were constructing the royal tombs (Fletcher, 1975; Meskell, 1994). This surely had a notable impact upon household relations in both social and spatial terms.

As a last general point on the subject of sexed space, a simple count of recorded names, such as inscribed objects or fixtures, highlights a gross imbalance within the settlement. In terms of sexed differences, many more

Table I. Domestic Organization

Lit clos room	Divan room	Domestic	Processing

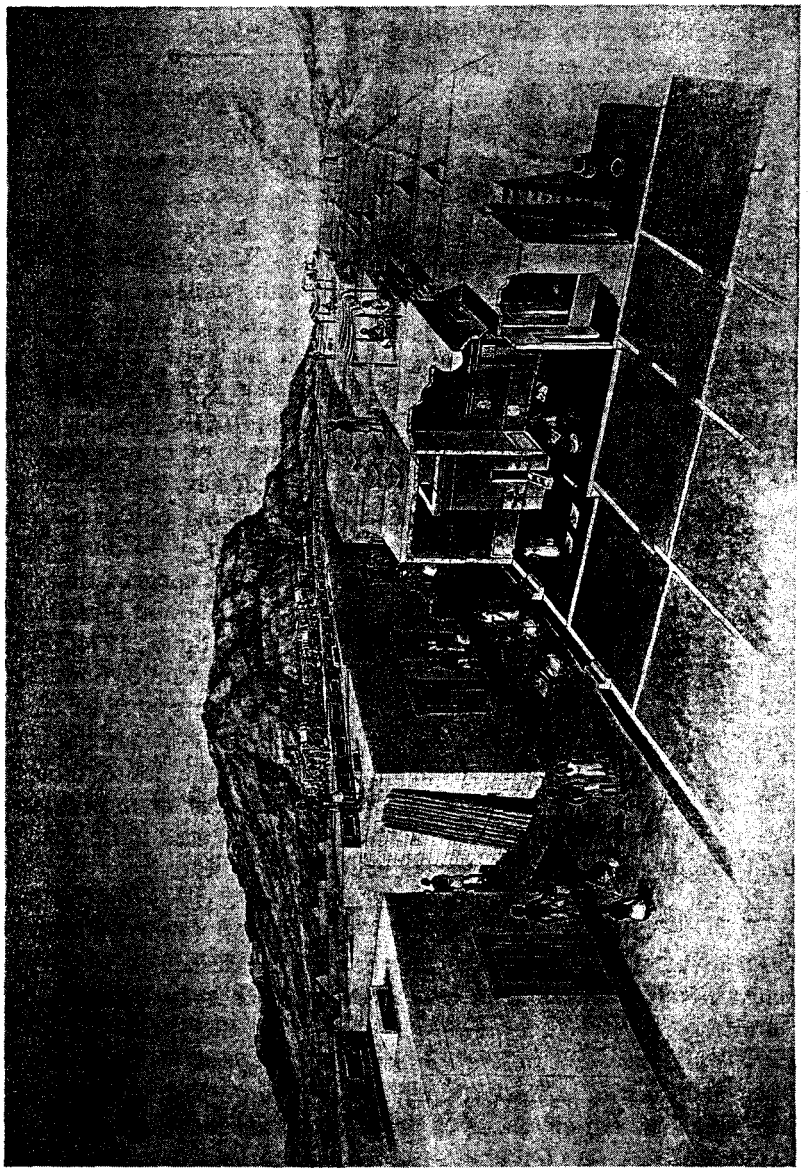

Fig. 5. Reconstruction of Deir el Medina (courtesy of Tomo Narashima and *Scientific American*).

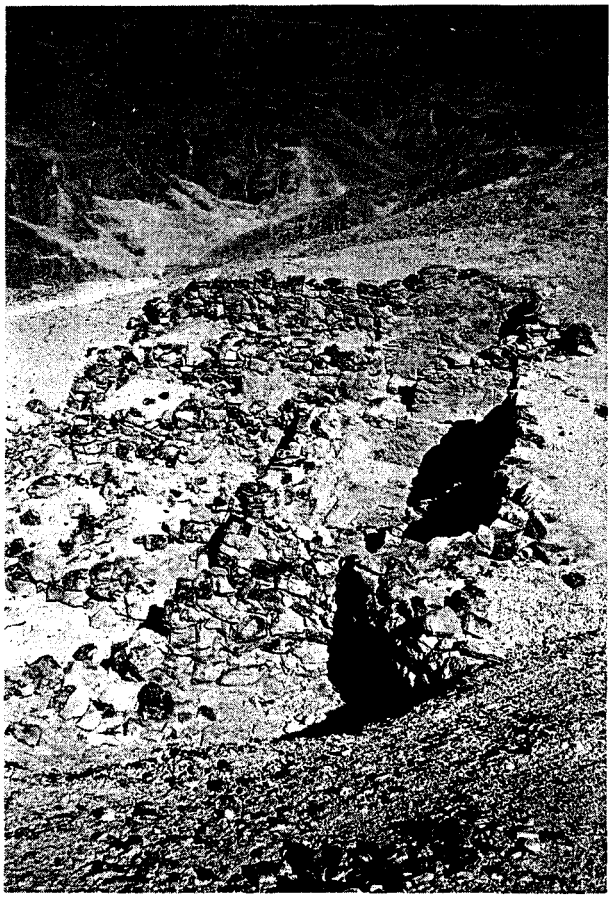

Fig. 6. Top site. (Photo by the author.)

individual men are named on monuments, stelae, lintels, etc., in households—in fact the count is 135, as opposed to 15 instances of named women. The domestic front would then appear to be largely a male concern. Given the notion of temporality, however, which saw women dominate the domestic sphere while the older men were away for long periods working, we know the situation to be more complex. Given such a situation, the mute record of women occupying or controlling this domestic space is a significant concern. The discrepancy might be explained by women's exceedingly low, if not negligible, level of literacy (but see Janssen and Janssen, 1990, p. 85; Sweeny, 1993, p. 523). Many inscribed objects and

Fig. 7. A *lit clos* from the village. (Photo by the author.)

fixtures had ritual functions, and given the power of the written and spoken name, accorded great importance in Pharaonic religious practice (Milde, 1988, p. 15), it prompts the question, How did this affect the ritual life of the visibly unnamed? Such a category included specific women, children, and lower status individuals, like servants, in the household. In attempting to grapple with this material invisibility I first address the activities and iconography revolving around prominent, mature women of the house.

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE BED

The clearest possibilities for locating the activities of mature, middle-class women at Deir el Medina such as Mutemwia who lived in house NE4, or Dwameres in NE13, lie within the first room of the house, usually designated the room of the enclosed bed (the so-called *lit clos*). The majority of houses (approx. 53%) within the enclosure have conclusive evidence of this bed-like structure in the first room off the street (Fig. 7), and probably existed in the poorly preserved dwellings. As Valbelle (1985, p. 444) suggests, they come from the last period of occupation (i.e., Ramesside). Their

dimensions were roughly 1.7 m long, 80 cm wide, and 75 cm high (Friedman, 1994, p. 97), although this does not allow for a full superstructure to the roof. Parallels beyond Deir el Medina are surprisingly absent. Parallel structures are similarly absent in the houses beyond the walls and in the huts at the Top site, suggesting that their only context is a female-oriented domestic one. Variations in the placement, size, and decoration of these structures are notable. In house SE5 the *lit clos* was plastered, with molded and painted Bes figures, the male deity associated with women, sexuality, fertility, music, and magic (Kemp, 1979; Pinch, 1994). Bes predominates in this room throughout the site. House C5 has a *lit clos* with an associated Bes painting, and in the house of the woman Iyneferty, SW6, there are Bes decorations, *lit clos,* and a cupboard for storing cultic objects. Such cupboards have been found at Amarna with ritual items *in situ* (Loose, 1992, p. 23; Robins, 1996, p. 23). The enclosed bed was associated with a constellation of features: white walls, paintings, niches, Bes decorations, cultic cupboards (Fig. 8), shrines, etc. Generally, the structures were decorated, either by simple whitewashing or by elaborate modeling and painting. Neither women's names nor dedicatory texts appear on these structures, and their function and symbolic meaning are open to interpretation.

Bruyère termed them "enclosed beds" (*lit clos*) in the 1930s and the concept of the bed, primarily the birthing bed, has been a pervasive explanation ever since. For Bruyère, the term *lit clos* had a specific meaning in his native French culture: a type of day bed which was hidden away when not in use by a cupboard-like structure. It was not intended for nocturnal sleeping as such, but for short naps during the day. The notion of *the bed* has had a pervasive impact on Egyptological interpretations of the *lit clos* in the decades which followed Bruyère's excavations. Given the size of these structures, the feasibility of sleeping one or two people cannot be ruled out. It may have also acted as a ritual place for sexual intercourse and/or conception. If, as Bruyère suggested, the superstructured enclosure reached to the roof, any activity might have proven to be quite claustrophobic, though this is purely a Western reaction. Moreover, the confined space may have hampered the birthing process. But there are inherent problems with this theory. For instance, there is ample evidence, in the form of illustrated ostraca from the site (Vandier d'Abbadie, 1937), for the traditional birthing apparatus being a stool (or bricks) rather than a bed. Pinch (1994, pp. 126–127) states that, when birth was imminent, "the expectant mother was isolated from the rest of the household, or at least its adult males . . . to the pavilion in which the birth [wa]s taking place. Painted ostraca show women suckling children in an airy pavilion whose columns are wreathed with columbine or bryony." The birth arbors shown in these representations might be specially constructed outdoor buildings; their temporary nature has

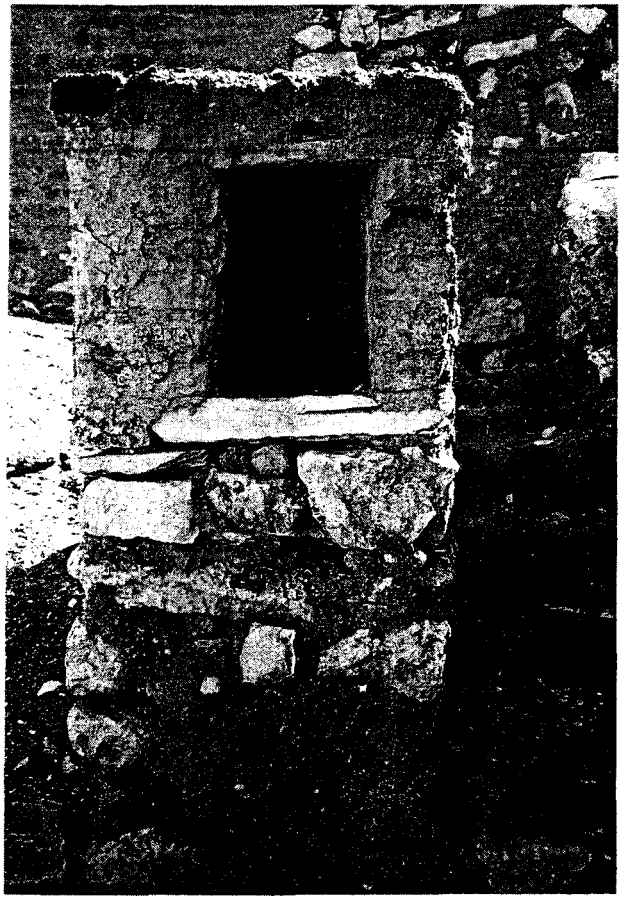

Fig. 8. Cultic cupboard from one of the village houses. (Photo by the author.)

precluded archaeological discovery. Other scholars have suggested that they may have been constructed on roof-tops (Loose 1992, p. 23). These representations do not resemble the *lit clos*. To date only one magical text, P. Leiden I 348, spell 33, documents a birth pavilion; but unfortunately it is not from Deir el Medina (Toivari, 1998).

It seems plausible to assume that births took place in the privacy of the house, though the arbor could be replicated with screens made of light wood or raffia and wrapped with leaves. This structure may have been erected in the first room of the house, taking advantage of ventilation and, more symbolically, the pervasive Bes imagery which was invaluable protec-

tion at this liminal phase of both women's and children's lives. The rest of the household would similarly need to be protected from the demons and spirits who might be attracted by the danger and pollution of childbirth (Pinch, 1994, p. 128). Janssen and Janssen (1990, p. 6) have gone as far as suggesting that the birth pavilion itself suggests sexual segregation. Such a placement at the front of the house, however, prompts us to question Egyptian conceptions of privacy, and suggests that they were very different from our own. Segregation of women is usually confined to the inner rooms of the house, rather than the prominent first room like the *lit clos*. At this juncture the modern Egyptian practice of *sebou* may offer possibilities in terms of sex segregation in and around the period of pregnancy and childbirth (Atiya, 1984). I argue below that while the room may have been loaded with conceptual meaning, it either could have functioned rarely in daily scenarios (like parlors at the front of working-class houses in Victorian England) or, on the contrary, might have been used regularly for rather mundane purposes.

In addition to the above evidence, representations on ostraca from Deir el Medina clearly illustrate women reclining on wooden beds, some suckling newborn children, thus challenging the original interpretation of the birthing bed. Toivari (1998) argues that they are indeed women's beds and as such, are mentioned in the Deir el Medina business transactions (e.g., O. Gard. 105 rt.1, O. Michael 13 vs.1, O. Varille 13 1.2). She suggests that these beds were purchased for the birth and postpartum period, and could be easily dismantled after use. One bed is purchased along with a delivery amulet (O. Gard. 91.5), thus strengthening her argument. In addition, there are illustrated ostraca which represent a genre of postbirthing representations which incorporate an erotic component (erotic within an Egyptian scheme), through motifs such as grooming, wigs, hip girdles, and nudity itself (e.g., O. DM 2337, O. DM 2338, O. DM 2340, O. MM 14070). Such overtones do not appear to be hampered by the presence of a child. The beds on which they recline are not the enclosed, superstructured type but traditional, wooden beds with four legs—often carved—that have been found at the site. The composite clay beds with female figures, either with or without child, might also fit into this genre, yet they too fail to emulate the *lit clos*. Their accompanying beds might not possess legs, though this is probably because of the clay medium rather than any specific symbolism (Pinch, 1993). This representational evidence does not suggest the interpretation of the *lit clos* as exclusively a birthing bed; a broader cultic interpretation is more plausible.

In a recent paper, Robins (1996, pp. 29–30) attempts to link the household altar (at Deir el Medina, the *lit clos*) with female figurines and iconography located in the first room. The associations of the deities Bes and

Taweret and representations of women with newborn infants suggest that the rituals performed at the domestic altar related to female fertility, procreation, and the continuity of the family. She draws on evidence from Amarna, where female figurines were apparently found in the same room as the altar (though this was not exactly the same as the *lit clos* of Deir el Medina), and one was discovered in a cupboard under an altar together with two model beds and a stela decorated with the figures of a woman and boy before the image of the goddess Taweret (Robins, 1996, p. 29). Taken together, Robins' argument is convincing and she offers a multivalent interpretation of the range of data present. It is also possible that many practices, both ritual and profane, existed side by side and could be incorporated into a single space without too much problem. At Deir el Medina, the *lit clos,* wall paintings, and ritual objects could each signify aspects of daily life and daily ritual which were eclectically accommodated together.

Archaeological evidence for linking cultic practices with the *lit clos* can be found in individual houses at Deir el Medina. In NE11 Bruyère excavated a *lit clos* containing several items: a limestone headrest; a wooden Atef crown which came from a statue, and a fragment of a female statuette in limestone. In front of the *lit clos* was an offering table, inscribed with a fragmentary, possibly male name. A similar situation was present in C7. In NE15 the *lit clos* is built with an associated cultic cupboard, as it was in Iyneferty's house, SW6. This suggests a more generalized cultic function, and one which may not exclude men, given the number of finds which name men of the house: associated limestone offering tables or stelae often bear a male name, rather than a female. Room 1 assemblages consist of primarily ritual artifacts (Fig. 9); stelae, shrine busts, offering tables, and statues were counted. Taken together, this evidence warrants the general conclusion that a household cult, centered around mature females, focused in the front rooms of Deir el Medina houses. More practically, this space could have been utilized on a daily basis for domestic activities since troughs and mortars were also located in NE14 and SW1.

Any interpretation should contextualize ritual fixtures and objects within the entire room (as in Fig. 9), beginning with the overall decoration. The extant data suggest that the front rooms were heavily decorated, having whitewashed walls with female-oriented paintings, scenes of nursing or grooming, and deities pertaining to women's lives. In SE8 workman Nebamun must have commissioned a mural, for either himself or his wife, of a nude female musician with a tattoo on her upper thigh. She plays a double flute and is surrounded by convolvulus leaves, which the Egyptians considered symbolically erotic (Vandier d'Abbadie, 1938). This representation would have been immediately obvious to anyone entering the house, though how it was received by various groups is unknown. The contradictory nature

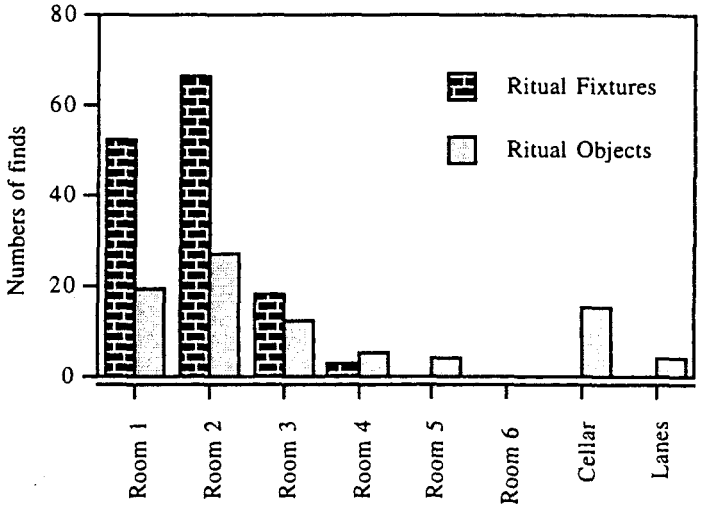

Fig. 9. Location of ritual finds in households.

of sexual perceptions and attitudes is illustrated in many cultures, especially in the Middle East today (Atiya, 1984; Attir, 1985, p. 122). In SE1 there was a wall painting showing a woman breast-feeding, in C7 a scene of a female grooming with her attendant, and in NW12 a person on a papyrus skiff, probably female (see also Bruyère, 1923). A little-known, now lost painting recorded by Möller in his 1911–1913 excavations in the house of the guardian Khawy depicted the feet and wings of a goddess in black on the white plaster (Anthes, 1943, p. 56). Though individual preference presumably determined the precise choice of decoration, the paintings generally tend to revolve around the lives of women, and the sexual lives of mature women at that. Perhaps it is here that we see greatest union between iconography and temporality, where the presence of women is predominant in the domestic sphere.

From Bruyère's excavation records, it is possible to reconstruct the frequency and uses of color, painting, writing and decoration. For example, red was a very powerful color often used in magic and linked to the solar eye goddesses and fire (Pinch, 1994, p. 81). The use of red as the most ritually powerful color could indicate how specific men and women operated in that space, given attitudes to women as dangerous or pollutants at certain times in their lives. Figure 10 illustrates the distribution of red decoration. The highest concentration of red occurs in Room 2, which was the ritual and social focus of the house—especially for men. The heavy focus

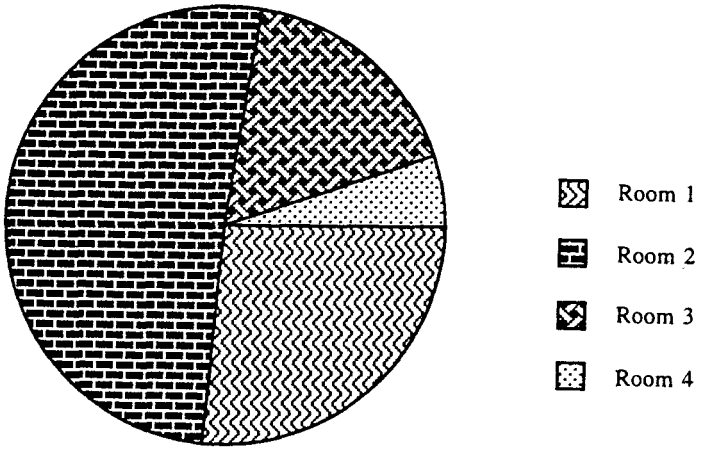

Fig. 10. Red paint on doors, walls, and fixtures.

of red on the doorways leading from Room 1 to Room 2 may also be related to the role of Room 2. In many cultures steps, thresholds and door posts are liminal spaces. They symbolize dangerous zones, because transition is indefinable, neither one state nor the next; such danger is controlled by ritual (Douglas, 1966, p. 97; Bourdieu, 1977, p. 130, 1979, p. 146). Bourdieu's study (1979, p. 124) of the Kabyle household may offer an ethnographic parallel for this sexual separation and the attitudes of various family members—though it can offer only one possible interpretation. For the most part, anthropology is an untapped resource for Egyptian archaeology.

Among the Kabyle, the preserve of the house, the inside, is the domain of women: they are impure, vulnerable, natural, sexual, and the bearers of malevolent powers. Men are associated often with the outside and with public and social exchanges: they are protective, potent cultural beings who are the bearers of beneficent powers. In this system the threshold symbolizes the power of malignant forces and ritual which surrounds marriage, fertility, and child bearing. These aspects of life are directly affected through contact with the threshold. Bourdieu (1979, p. 148) reports that a "woman must never sit near the threshold holding her child; and a young child and a bride should not tread it too often." He argues (1979, p. 151) that

> the importance and symbolic value given to the threshold within the system cannot be fully understood unless it is seen that it owes its function as a magical boundary to the fact that it is the site of a logical inversion and that, as the necessary meeting

> point and the locus of passages between two spaces that are defined in terms of body movements and socially qualified crossings, it is logically the place where the world is reversed.

This heavy elaboration of red paint could be seen as a way of protecting men from the unknown dangers of women, especially upon entering their space. The color red was not itself sex-associated, but apotropaic and ritually potent. Room 1 has the next largest concentration of red, since it is another ritually inclined space. Segregation of some form, however limited, may have been operative; ritual fixtures, decorated thresholds, color, and even floor levels may have formed part of this repertoire of negotiations. Indeed, floor levels traditionally indicate the nature of space, elevation signifying sacredness as one sees in Egyptian temples. At Deir el Medina, the majority of first rooms are below street level and all data for second rooms show a stepping up to a higher level. Even in the simplest of terms, this implies that men, passing through spaces filled with female imagery, stepped up to a higher "plane" upon reaching their own socio-ritual space. This, coupled with their crossing a red-painted threshold and doorway, might have signified the move from a liminal zone. While this might represent symbolic intent, in daily practice such a move was probably nondiscursive.

MEN'S SPACE, MEN'S BUSINESS

Since I argue that an analysis on the basis of *sex* is not to be simply identified with the study of women, I have also investigated the domestic spheres of elite men, notably house owners such as Sennedjem in SW6, Khawy in NE15, and Nebamentet in SE7. Whereas the first room appears to be a notionally female sphere, I suggest that the second room or divan room had a predominantly elite male focus (Fig. 11). This room, which is often the largest, with central columns, has more intense use of ritual colors, fixtures, and objects and is generally a higher level, indicating the approach to an enhanced ritual space.

Parallel evidence from wealthy Amarna houses indicates that this main room had symbols which would impress the visitor, namely, the use of columns and decorated lintels. Columns are status symbols in themselves, often made from exotic exported wood. In addition, they can be plastered and painted with the names, titles and achievements of the house owner (Crocker, 1985, p. 58). There are also ethnohistoric parallels for such a space, with accompanying emplacements, in early 19th century Islamic Egypt, recorded and illustrated by E. W. Lane. In this context, the divan is an elevated rectilinear seating area often padded with cushions, which

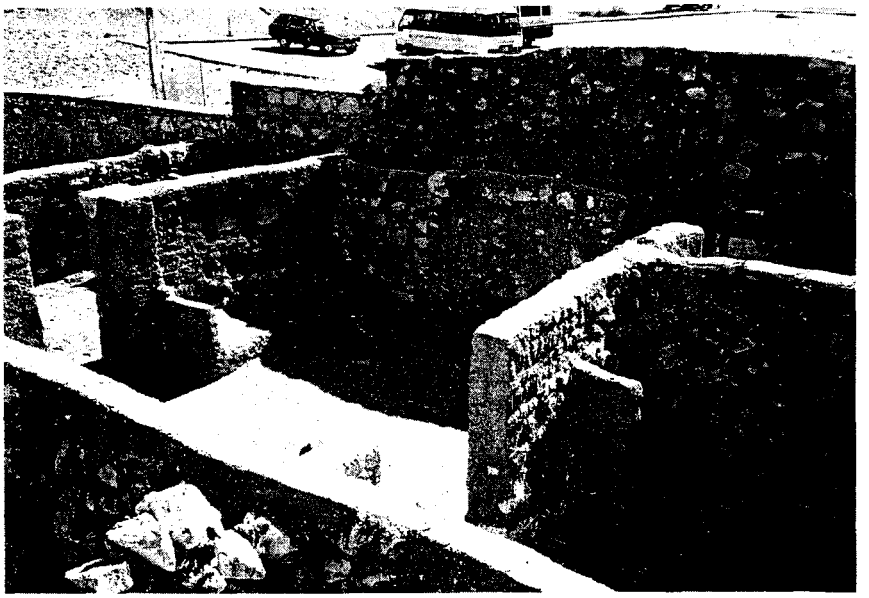

Fig. 11. A divan from the village. (Photo by the author.)

is situated at a higher elevation than the rest of the room. Having such a divan was a mark of status and civility. Lane ([1836] 1989, pp. 23–28) remarked on the high ceilings in these rooms, generally the highest in the apartment, adding a lofty nobility to the room. At Deir el Medina, too, the divan room is the largest with a higher roof. Finally, it should be noted that in Lane's Egypt this space, in 19th century terms, was reserved for men and their entertaining of other men. However, in an Islamic context sex segregation is well documented.

The central focus within the elite male sphere would be the divan itself, which has a long history in later Egypt and the Middle East as a symbol of male activity, status, power relations, and hospitality among other elite males. Only a few divans are present in the scattered houses beyond the village walls of Deir el Medina, though such houses were not as well preserved as those from the enclosure. These houses may have been used in the Ramesside period, when the team expanded, by the newly admitted men who had no formal house concessions (see text O. BM 5624 in Blackman, 1926). These young men were probably single, without wives and families. As newcomers they probably did not have the status of the regular workmen who had hereditary jobs. This fits the pattern of divan usage and

might help to explain why these structures lacked the *lit clos,* with all its attendant female imagery. Yet divans have been recorded at the Top site, where only the workmen were permitted to stay. Similarly, there is no evidence for *lits clos* at the Top site (Meskell, 1997). In general, I suggest that elite *men's business* was heavily linked with sociability and continued male contact in a purposefully constructed domestic environment.

If we examine the context of the divan in Deir el Medina house NE13 (Bruyère, 1939, p. 259), belonging to the sculptor Ipy, the full impact of the room and its decoration becomes clear. One would enter the room, after passing through Room 1 with its decorated *lit clos,* through a limestone framed door painted red. The walls of the divan room were brick and stone and decorated with white skirting to a height of 90 cm. In the north wall above the skirting, a rectangular niche was inset, 25 cm × 35 cm, and 28 cm (deep). The ground was stuccoed, and a column rose in front of the divan. The divan itself was constructed of brick and painted white. It had flaring armrests reminiscent of a column capital: the flaring part in yellow, the inside white with a red band. There was also a small stove with a brick curb, filled with ash and potsherds. The stone curb was a few centimeters above floor level with an attachment to the divan, so that Ipy could stand food containers there without direct contact with the fire. The overall effect of the painted divan in this columned room with a niche, probably containing a bust or stela, was no doubt quite impressive. One might reconstruct a scene in which Ipy conducted personal business transactions with other villagers, perhaps accepting a commission for a mortuary statue or stela, and carrying out the necessary acts of hospitality. Such an image is obviously colored by modern Egyptian practices, where business is often conducted in the home over numerous cups of tea.

These divans were constructed in brick, sometimes stone-lined, and always abut a major wall. Just as Room 1 with the *lit clos* has a constellation of associated features signifying its ritual focus, the divan room has its own specific markers (Fig. 12). In NE12 it is a cultic cupboard, in SE6 an altar, and more frequently we see false doors painted red and yellow. Nebamentet in SE7 had a false door and a wall painting; Nebamun, next door in SE8 (Bruyère, 1939, p. 275), had a divan bordered by stone with two pilasters against the western wall, plus red false doors with a central yellow band. These false doors had overt religious significance in mainstream mortuary practice, being niched structures through which one's spirit (or *ka*) could move back and forth freely to receive offerings. Such structures have a long history, dating back to the beginning of the historical period, but they do not generally feature as part of the domestic repertoire. Plausibly, these doors may have facilitated contact with the spirits of ancestors,

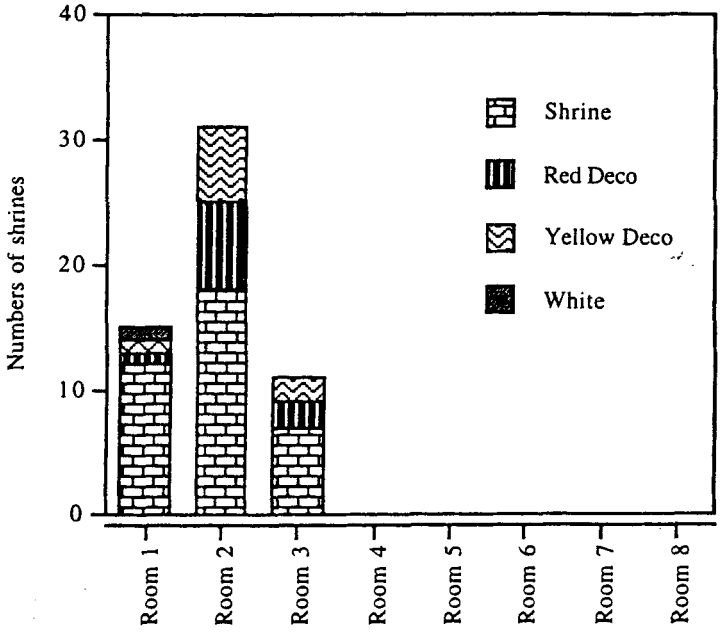

Fig. 12. Shrine placements and color in households.

especially in view of the frequency of other ancestor-related artifacts in this room, as discussed below.

The nature of the ritual finds warrants further examination, particularly the stelae showing ancestors termed *3ḫ ikr n Rʿ* or "effective spirit of Re." There are approximately 60 examples from Deir el Medina (Demarée, 1983). Examples have been found in houses C6 (Baki, Mose), SW5 (Khamuy and Pennub), and SW2 (Khonsu, Sherire). They are small round-topped limestone stelae, generally less than 25 cm high. They were dedicated to one, two, or three individuals, usually without mention of their relations: no wives or children occur, except in a few cases, as offerants or dedicators (Demarée, 1983, p. 174). These entities were the potent dead, who were capable of interceding benevolently or malevolently in human affairs. They were human beings who had been admitted to the afterworld, but more personally they were deceased relatives who could be called upon in times of need. Their effectiveness was sustained in a reflexive manner by the ongoing practices of their descendants in the family cult (Demarée, 1983, pp. 276–277). From the archaeological evidence this practice occurred in the second room or divan room since most ritual finds emanate

from there, as do the ritual fixtures and niches into which the stelae were placed. The materiality of the stela acted as a *conductor* for transactions from this world to the next, establishing contact between family members past and present. The fact that more men are named as dedicants and deified ancestors sits well with the location of these objects in the divan room, the area of greatest male potency. Coupled with the additional finds of ancestral busts (Friedman, 1994; see also Vandier d'Abbadie, 1946), libation basins, and offering tables, the *ỉḫ ỉḳr n Rˁ* stelae highlight the prominence of male individuals, both alive and deceased, in this second room.

OTHER SPACE

John Baines (1991, p. 134) has suggested that the "basic family unit was probably large, consisting of parents, children (including married ones, often with their own children), unattached and widowed relatives, perhaps grandparents, and, among the relatively well-to-do, servants or slaves." At Deir el Medina dwelling space incorporated the extended family as well as a number of servile individuals of low status provided by the state. In the textual record, the voices of high status individuals are prominent, whereas low-status groups are almost silent. The latter might be accessed from the material data. For instance, it could be argued, textually and archaeologically, that the back rooms of Deir el Medina houses were spaces reserved for lower class women or slaves, attached to specific village families to perform domestic duties such as preparing bread and beer (see Černý, 1973, pp. 175-181). To date, we cannot tell whether these individuals resided permanently in these houses or went there on a daily basis. Sixteen is the maximum of female slaves known to be attached to a single household (Valbelle, 1985, p. 123). Earlier I situated these rooms within a pattern of decreasing elaboration and ritual importance, beginning in the front two rooms and rapidly declining toward the process areas bordering the village wall. For the most part, these rooms were never whitewashed or decorated with paintings. Their only surface treatment consisted of a layer of grey paint on the walls. Similarly, they are lacking in ritual fixtures and objects, having only processing equipment and emplacements. This is suggestive of activities such as breadmaking, brewing, and cooking.

Table II shows the distribution of food processing finds from the plans of the original excavation (Bruyère, 1939). These could be seen as more reliable data but represent a much smaller number than existed in reality. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate a clear pattern of back room utilization, given that many houses have only four rooms.

Table II. Processing Finds in Deir el Medina Households

Room No.	Oven	Bin/grinder	Basin	Mortar	Water storage
1		2	1	4	4
2			1	3	3
3	2		3	13	2
4	8	2	1	14	2
5	13	1		6	4
6	3	1	1	4	
7	5		1	2	1
8		1	1	1	2
9					
10	2				

In attempting to trace these domestic activities like bread preparation, I draw on the work of Samuel (1994) at Deir el Medina and Amarna. She argues that mortar and quern emplacements tend to be associated within the houses, thus linking their associated activities to specific spaces. She argues that winnowing and sieving probably occurred near the quern emplacements, since cereal processing installations tend to be grouped together (1994, p. 175). Animals may have been fed from the chaffy by-products of cereal processing, which were presumably housed at Deir el Medina as they were at Amarna. It is unlikely that these back rooms were roofed with anything other than permeable material, rushes or straw, especially in view of the proximity of ovens and cooking activities. Samuel (1994, p. 278) looked specifically at the spatial arrangement of NE5 where all the elements of cereal processing were present in the rearmost room. A mortar was set roughly in the center, and a quern emplacement in the southeast corner of the room. A stairway rose just outside the door, providing convenient access to the rooftop or, perhaps, a second story. There was a cylindrical oven in the northwest corner and the entrance to a cellar in the northeast. She suggests that all the daily processing and baking could have taken place in this one self-contained room, possibly with cereal drying and grain cleaning being undertaken upstairs.

Since Samuel's evidence supports the notion that domestic activities took place in the back of the house, what might we infer from this about social interactions within the domestic context? Some households may have produced their own bread and beer, while others have no evidence of such processing, so might have been involved in independent relationships with other households. As Samuel points out, there are problems with reconstructing the activities of female household servants (or slaves) in various households. The fact that they were paid in rations suggests that they were not chattels (see texts O. Gard. 72, 3; O. DM 189, II, 2). The number

assigned to a workman varied from 1 to 15 (Černý, 1973, p. 176). These individuals probably worked in the back rooms (Černý, 1973, p. 177) or processing spaces discussed above. It is impossible to tell whether these women were attached to individual houses or were shared on a rotating basis (see Černý, 1973, pp. 177–181). On a social level, people who were regularly assigned to a specific household, and thus their members, would become implicated in the social fabric of that family, whether or not it was desired by either party. In a sense they might become extended members of the family, which is not inconceivable since adoption texts illustrate that servants could be upwardly mobile in this way (see Millard, 1986; Eyre, 1992, pp. 211–218). Consider the text (O. OIC 16996) translated by Toivari (1998), which states that a servant had given birth to a male child fathered by a sculptor in the village, thus raising her status through childbirth. That explicit reference is made to provisioning her properly suggests that this might not be the norm in other circumstances.

If servants represented an ever-changing stream of individuals, rotating on a daily or weekly basis, then social and kin-like bonds would be significantly harder to form. One can envisage these people as necessary interlopers. Their separate placement in the rear rooms would serve to reinforce their social status and the hierarchical relationships of the household. This is not to say that women of the house did not participate at any level with these tasks. In any case, higher status women interacted with their servants concerning their duties: they certainly would not have been isolated from such spaces. Furthermore, some must have had to carry on the work themselves when they exchanged the duties of their servants for commodities, for which textual evidence exists (e.g., O. IFAO 1106, 5; O. Gard. 123, 1, in Černý, 1973). For instance, in text O. Turin 6361 the workman Kasa sells "*his day of servant,*" receiving only a basket and sieve in return (Černý 1973, p. 180). Any analysis of slaves in this context is hampered by some confusion over terms such as *servant,* which can refer to free people. The term servant could also be used in a humble and reverent way, especially before the law court or God himself (Černý, 1973, p. 180).

Another aspect of sexed space and temporality within the household is connected to the small rooms Bruyère termed *débarras.* Precise measurements were not given by the excavator, but plans indicate they range between 3 and 6 m^2 in area. These rooms were almost never decorated with white skirting. Their evenly gray walls are constructed with less care than those of preceding rooms. Bruyère called them *débarras* because of their size and construction. The finds are of a mixed nature such as household items, tools, food provisions, clothes, and sketches. The absence of doors might also suggest an area of rest or storage. Bruyère claimed that papyrus, sketches, drawing, and sculpture models were found there along

with outlines traced on the walls. He also assumed on the basis of finds that women did weaving and food preparations there.

This unusual space might also relate to sexually mature women of the household (probably excluding servants) during menstruation only. Although this matter is highly contentious and somewhat enigmatic, it seems that some menstruating women may have utilized space toward the rear of the house and separate from ritual spheres. There is both archaeological and textual evidence for spaces assigned to menstruating women. The major work on this aspect of Deir el Medina life has been undertaken by Wilfong (1998; see also Montserrat, 1996, p. 48), in translating and interpreting the text O. OIM 13512 of ca. 1204 B.C., and it is necessary to discuss his interpretations in detail. This translation reads as follows:

> *Year 9, fourth month of the season of Inundation, day 13: The day when the eight women came out [to the] place of women when they were menstruating. They got as far as the rear of the house which . . . the three walls.*

Wilfong cogently argues that the text documents women from the village leaving the walled enclosure and going to a hut or structure of sorts, the *place of women,* which was a space designated for the time of menstruation. Such practices are common in many cultures and Wilfong claims that this had no negative connotation in the Egyptian context, although magical and didactic texts such as the "Satire on the Trades" give another impression altogether (see Pinch, 1994, pp. 56–57, 76). He goes on to discuss post-Pharaonic menstrual spaces, which were usually found under the stairs of multistory domestic structures. Though this occurs in post-Pharaonic times, Wilfong maintains that the practice is essentially an Egyptian one which may have been operative in the Pharaonic period.

It is possible that we have evidence for this later tradition in the last phase of some Deir el Medina houses. This does not negate the text's description of utilizing a menstrual hut, since both practices may have been current at the same time. The presence of a household space for menstruating women may be indicative of the status or wealth of the owners. Each of these *débarras* rooms is toward the rear of the house, well away from the heavily decorated ritual spaces of both men and women. In NE3, a large house owned by the wealthy scribe Ramose, Bruyère (1939, pp. 244–245) designated two *débarras* rooms, one having traces of a bench or bed and a staircase designated leading to the terrace or upper floor. This seems to be in the correct position for such a usage and the inclusion of the bench/bed may support this interpretation. In houses NE9 and NE10 other similar rooms are situated adjacent to the staircase, yet they also have an entrance to the cellar. No internal fixtures were preserved or described. Other houses with these enigmatic rooms, simply labeled storeroom by

Bruyère, were NE13, NE14, NE16, SW5, NW14, and NW17; all of these are located adjacent to an internal staircase. Storerooms certainly existed in other positions in the house, for example, in SE6 and SW2: not every room for which a function is not obvious represents a possible menstrual space. However, given the post-Pharaonic evidence for menstrual spaces in these locations, these rooms in specific residences at Deir el Medina may represent earlier examples.

PUTTING PEOPLE IN THEIR PLACE

The extant domestic data from Deir el Medina can never provide a full picture of the village dwellings, with all the varied contents and myriad activities they housed. At this juncture it is tantalizing to refer to a single text, O. Cairo 25670, where a villager asks a neighbor to watch his house in his absence and in the process outlines the goods left within it (Wente, 1990, p. 138):

> *To inform you of the items left behind by me in the Village: three khar-measures of barley, one and a half khar-measures of emmer, twenty-six bundles of papyrus, two beds, a clothes hamper (?), two couches for a man, two folding stools, one chest, one inlaid (?) box, a stool, two griddle-stones, one box (?), two footstools, two folding stools of wood, one basket of lubya-beans (amounting to) three oipe-measures, twelve bricks of natron, two pieces of iker-furniture, one door, two seteri-pieces of sawn wood, two offering tables (?), one small offering table (?), one mortar, and two medjay-containers. They are what are with Pashed and the woman Sheritre, all recorded. A further matter for Sheritre: Please let Amenemwia dwell in my house so that he may keep an eye on it. Please write me about your condition.*

This 19th Dynasty text presents yet another partial picture, listing foodstuffs, furniture and bits and pieces hanging around the house. For example, it does not take into account emplacements and fixtures, some of which were no doubt of a ritual nature. We undoubtedly require a host of data sources to provide a fuller account of domestic life: archaeological remains of the dwelling with fixtures and emplacements, records of household items and contents, and textual data about daily events and specific incidents and individuals.

At the outset I stated that this exercise is one which maps intentionality rather than reality. This is not simply a relativistic statement on the position of archaeology. Rather it reflects the more mundane assertion that individuals' actions are highly variable, despite being in a spatial setting which presents only one clear scenario. For example, a domestic context may be the site of industry and manufacture, the housing of farm animals, or preparation of the dead, and may be the stage for all of these activities over a period of time. Within the house a room replete with ritual signifiers might

be utilized for that purpose for only a limited time in the life of a household. The unusual sociodomestic situation at Deir el Medina makes temporality an even more significant factor, because the high-status men of the house were away for days at a time. Their own social and ritual space, the divan room, might not be used for 10 days at a time by a householder or his sons. When they were in residence, the space might be used socially at certain times of the day, and quite rarely for ritual activities. The cultic specificity of this room may have reached its apex on feast days, or perhaps in times of crisis or celebration. Such a scenario represents intentionality as constructed by individuals such as Sennedjem, Khabekhenet, Nebamentet, Pashed, and Nebamun in their respective households.

Though this is the case in theory, a valuable space such as the divan room could conceivably be used during men's absence by women and children of the household. Spatially, the significance of the room would change, as would the activities taking place therein. In NE13, Ipy's wife Dwameres might have prepared food which did not require cooking, woven cloth to exchange for other goods, or socialized with other neighboring women. Even when Ipy was in residence this room might have been overrun with small children, adolescents, and other household members. No doubt antisocial acts also took place in specific homes: the texts document the case of the notorious foreman Paneb and his son Aaphahty, the former being accused of having intercourse with married women such as Tuy, Hunero, and her daughter (P. Salt 124 in Černý, 1929, p. 245; Eyre, 1984, p. 94). In text P. DeM. 27, we read of a man called Meryshemet, son of Menna, who was caught in the bed of a married woman in the village (Janssen, 1982, pp. 119–120; Toivari, 1997, p. 12). On an ostracon we learn of a woman repeatedly thrown out of the house by her husband and taken in by friends (O. Ashm. 1945.39, in McDowell, in press). There were also instances of house-breaking or burglary, as in the case of Khaemwaset, documented in O. DeM. 339 (Borghouts, 1982, p. 123). Leaving aside the minutiae of social interaction, the general premise is that even ritualized space may have been the site of varied and often mundane activities. Our reverence for such religious contexts does not preclude the villagers performing a myriad of activities, with their associated experiences, within the temporal sequence of the house.

Just as I have discussed the divan room, one could make a similar case for the room of the *lit clos*. It could be argued that various tasks took place there, though I still suggest that they had a more female focus. Mature women may have felt that this was a space more conducive to their own socializing or entertaining, being elaborately decorated with pertinent images and farthest away from the servants and their duties. It is usually the second largest room, and its door on the street meant access to light,

ventilation, and a view to outside activities. Such a space might have been the most appropriate for female members of the family to spin, weave, sew, etc. In NE1, NE9, and SE2 there are amphora emplacements, SW1 has a trough and mortar in limestone, NW1 another trough, and in NE19 there is a trough structure for grinding grain and an oven. Harnefer's house, SE3, has a partition in Room 1 which forms a narrow gallery containing an oven and three mortars. Taken together, this would suggest that quite ordinary domestic activities were carried out here, possibly by female family members or by various household servants throughout the day. Whilst the overriding feature for archaeologists might be the ritual decoration and fixtures of Room 1, the mundane practices of daily life conducted in this space must also be highlighted. Archaeological remains can provide salient clues to aspects of social life, yet material residues can reflect only part of the picture, since much social behavior leaves no tangible trace. It is important to remember that the dwelling is a material embodiment of social life and an understanding of memory and individual lives. According to Game (1995, p. 202), our bodies do not forget. There is a passionate liaison between the body and the house: the remembering body is housed, and the body houses. Following Bachelard, one might say that an entire past comes to dwell in a house.

The rich suite of data from Deir el Medina offers us a valuable opportunity to employ a dialectical approach between contemporary social theory and archaeological material, allowing us simultaneously to examine social process, materiality, and individual agency. Archaeology's concern has always been with representativeness, seeking to uncover generalizing practices and behaviors rather than individual embodied responses: this cannot facilitate an archaeology of difference. The evidence from Deir el Medina, an historic milieu with multileveled data, challenges past assumptions and suggests that we can construct an archaeology of individuals and their intimate relations. A close examination of these data reveals patterns of fluidity in terms of age, sex, class, status, marital status, etc., rather than the rigid operation of a single structuring principle. Following feminist anthropology (Moore, 1988, 1994), archaeologists should recognize that just as men and women are different, so are individuals, generations, races, etc. It is now axiomatic that there are no natural or prediscursive bases for difference. I am arguing not for pure difference but, rather, for culturally constructed distinctions that we can deconstruct. Nor am I advocating a simplistic approach of identity politics whereby individuals are reduced to a list of categories (Elam, 1994, p. 74)—of which first-wave feminism was perhaps guilty. We should not see identity and difference as based simply on categorical groupings but, rather, on processes of identification and differentiation (Moore, 1994, p. 2). Instead I would hope that people from

the past are represented fully as embodied individuals, who consist of many fluid identities, which are subject to change over time, and who have the power of agency, choice, and volition. As Butler (1993, p. 168) has argued,

> . . . though there are clearly good historical reasons for keeping "race" and "sexuality" and "sexual difference" as separate analytical spheres, there are also quite pressing and significant historical reasons for asking how and where we might read not only their convergence, but the sites at which the one cannot be constituted save through the other.

Hopefully this study illustrates that archaeological theory and data can productively combine to shed light on social relations among men, women, and children as they existed within the social matrix of the village.

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