

## KINGSHIP, POWER, AND LEGITIMACY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

In this book, Lisa K. Sabbahy presents a history of ancient Egyptian kingship in the Old Kingdom and its re-formation in the early Middle Kingdom. Beginning with an account of Egypt's history before the Old Kingdom, she examines the basis of kingship and its legitimacy. The heart of her study is an exploration of the king's constant emphasis on his relationship to his divine parents, the sun god Ra and his mother, the goddess Hathor, who were two of the most important deities backing the rule of a divine king. Sabbahy focuses on the cardinal importance of this relationship, which is reflected in the king's monuments, particularly the pyramid complexes, several of which are analyzed in detail. Sabbahy also offers new insights into the role of queens in the early history of Egypt, notably sibling royal marriages, harem conspiracies, and the possible connotations of royal female titles.

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KINGSHIP, POWER,  
AND LEGITIMACY  
IN ANCIENT EGYPT

FROM THE OLD KINGDOM  
TO THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

LISA K. SABBAHY

American University of Cairo



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## PREFACE

This book presents a history of the Old Kingdom and the re-formation of a united Egypt with the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. It is not meant to be a “standard” history in the sense of events, battles, and foreign expeditions; rather, it is concerned entirely with Egypt’s internal history, focusing on well-documented kings and their expression of legitimacy and power. This specific focus came about from an interest in several questions. How far back is there evidence for the king’s close association with the sun god Ra? What about the queen’s relationship with the goddess Hathor? Can a pattern be seen in when the king marries his sister and when he doesn’t? When work on the book began, this last question was the driving force behind it. Unfortunately, at many times the evidence about the women the king marries was so scant, it was impossible to recognize much of a pattern. Not having evidence for understanding the social structure of the royal family or the harem at this time in Egypt was another problem.

The main focus then shifted to the king’s monumental structures and how the layout, decoration, and statuary stated his divine position and legitimacy. Even with the damage these structures have suffered, a great deal of evidence remains. Female members of the king’s family are included in the discussion whenever possible, and high officials in their role of working for and supporting the reign of the king round out the discussion.

Although this book may seem of more interest to Egyptologists and Egyptology students than other readers, the first chapter offers a complete introduction to predynastic Egypt, its formation as a state, and the Early Dynastic Period right before the beginning of the Old Kingdom, so any reader can acquire the background to understand the following discussion.

Ancient Egyptian words are written out in italicized English, followed by Unicode transliteration the first time they are used. After that, the transliterations are not added. Ancient Egyptian names, and most titles, do not have following transliteration.

There are three maps in the book showing the places mentioned in the chapters. The first map is at the beginning of the discussion of Predynastic Egypt (Figure 1), the second at the beginning of the Old Kingdom discussion (Figure 5), and the third at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom discussion (Figure 30).

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