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Omm Sety Essay
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The story of Omm Sety is intriguing if a bit unbelievable. Dorothy Eady was born in England in 1904. At the age of three, Dorothy fell down the stairs and suffered serious injuries that led the visiting doctor to pronounce her dead at the scene. However, she later awoke from unconsciousness; the child had changed though, and she seemed confused as she told her parents she wanted to go “home.” Her parents explained to her that she was at her home, but the child remained agitated and tried to describe the home she referred to. After the accident, Dorothy began to have dreams about a place with columns and a garden that she had never seen in life.¹

The next year, Dorothy was taken to the British Museum by her parents where she was immediately intrigued by the Egyptian antiquities. She began to run around the gallery kissing statues, and when it came time to leave, her parents had to drag her from the museum as she screamed and cried.² Later, Dorothy’s father brought her pictures from Egyptian explorations, and included was a photograph of the Temple of Sety at Abydos in ruins. Dorothy claimed that this was the home she had been longing to return to since her accident. Also included was a photograph of the mummy of King Sety; Dorothy told her parents that she recognized and knew the man.³

As Dorothy grew, she began to visit the museum more and became a friend to E.A. Wallis Budge, one of the Egyptologists of the early twentieth century who taught her about Egyptian history and hieroglyphs. When asked why she was so interested in the subject, Dorothy told him, “Because I used to know, and now I must remember it all again.”⁴

One night, Dorothy claimed that a man came to her while she had been sleeping. She immediately recognized him from both the photograph of the mummy Sety and from her

memories.⁵ From this time on, or possibly even earlier, Dorothy was on a mission to get to Egypt to further her studies and make a connection with what she was beginning to believe was a past life. After his supposed appearance to her, Dorothy began to have more recurring dreams about Egypt, this time related to her “past life” in Egypt as a priestess who was being punished for not telling the truth.⁶ Eventually, Dorothy was able to travel to Egypt and to Abydos where she began to make connections and claims about her past life.

Dorothy, who came to be known as Omm Sety after a marriage to an Egyptian man and the birth of a son she named Sety, claimed that she was the reincarnation of a fourteen-year-old virgin priestess called Bentreshyt, who had lived at the Temple of Abydos during the reign of Sety I. As a priestess, Dorothy played a part in rituals related to death and resurrection of Osiris at the temple in Abydos. She also believed that she had a relationship with Sety after they met at the temple, and after she became pregnant with the King’s child she committed suicide to protect the king from the wrath of the priests and gods.⁷

Once she was in Abydos, she told the archaeologists who were working at the site that she remembered from her past life that a garden had existed there. She supposedly told them where to dig, and the garden was found there. She also made claims about the inhabitants of her previous life. For example, when visiting museums she would claim that the statuary and depictions of various people were incorrect, and then she would describe the person as she “remembered.” Omm Sety also claimed to know about Egyptian daily life and practices, as discussed in the section below.

Many people, Egyptologists and laypeople alike, have embraced the story of Omm Sety and critiqued her claims. One book, *Omm Sety's Living Egypt: Surviving Folkways from Pharaonic Times*⁸ edited by Nicole B. Hansen is an example of reactions to her claims. The

book was published by Glyphdoctors, a website run by Hansen to teach people about Egyptology who is, or was, a PhD student at Chicago University. Her online biography explains that, “Nicole also has a strong interest in the use of the Internet to present Egyptology to non-specialists. She worked on a project to digitize historically important Egyptology publications at the University of Chicago library and taught an online course on Egyptian folklore for the Oriental Institute.”⁹ This is interesting information about the Public History of Ancient Egyptian history, but the information presented is somewhat problematic. Many people are attracted to Egypt for its supposed mystical qualities, due to the uncertainty of scholarship and information available. The book is a compilation of information provided by Omm Sety about daily life and Egyptian culture.

Kent Weeks provided some information about Omm Sety and his reactions to her in the foreword to the book. He succinctly says that, “I don’t think that any Egyptologist who knew Omm Sety believed she had firsthand knowledge of life in the court of Sety I, but none ever doubted that she was absolutely convinced this was so. And the stories she told about her life in ancient Egypt were always filled with perceptive remarks about the scenes on the walls of the temple at Abydos; she clearly had read and reflected at length on the meaning of their religious texts.”¹⁰ This suggests that many Egyptologists do not consider or value Omm Sety’s work, which is likely and reasonable. Most Egyptologists view “pyramidiots” and “Egyptomaniacs” as invaluable and irrational. However, Weeks does not claim that he does believe her claims, but rather concedes that he is sure that *she* thought her stories were true, and that she was well-informed on the subjects from her studies.

In the introduction to the same book, edited by Hansen, a quote from John Wilson of the Oriental Institute to the American Research Center in Egypt states that, ““Omm Sety is a

responsible scholar (or should be treated as such), and her text should be treated with respect.”¹¹ Again, this suggests the attitude of disrespect towards Omm Sety by most scholars and Egyptologists. The introduction also contained an interesting passage that relates to public history and the study of Egypt, ““Her vivid mind, whether through imagination or remembrance, made Egypt a living presence amongst even those who might from time to time miss the flourishing gardens because of the cold academic stone in which they are depicted.”¹² This is reminiscent of discussions regarding public history and the public’s view of Egyptian history. While Omm Sety’s information is questionable, it does bring people closer to the historic Egyptian people, even if the information is incorrect. This does cause some problems, but the presentation of the Egyptians as human, and not “cold academic stone” is also valuable, and if historians are able to present the “real” information in a model of Omm Sety’s presentation, perhaps more people would be interested and informed by Egyptian history.

Another informative source on society’s view of Omm Sety was found on the New York Times website. A letter to the editor about Omm Sety was published in the New York Times in 1987, and the author has rather a scathing opinion of those who believe Omm Sety’s story. Anne Barbeau Gardiner states that, “It would seem to me, rather, that Dorothy Eady was a victim, infested by some wretched vampire of a dream. She gave up the only life she ever really had, as an Englishwoman in the modern world, to live with miserable obsessiveness the life of a creature who, if she existed at all, committed suicide several millenniums ago after violating her duties as a priestess.” She continues, “Dorothy Eady deserves our pity. She needed psychological help, if not the ministry of an exorcist. Instead of being fascinated by her story, we ought to take it as a cautionary tale and not let our dream life suck out the blood of our real existence.”¹³

Information on the web about Omm Sety and her followers is seemingly endless, and

reviews on amazon.com of Hanny el Zeini and Catherine Dees' *Omm Sety's Egypt* are no exception. "Khefre" on amazon.com is a self-proclaimed believer in reincarnation and offers praise for the book and the story of Omm Sety, "Traumatic injuries or near-death experiences might rupture that seal somehow, perhaps even provide a "link" to another place/time, as in Omm Sety's case. We know so very little about the "soul", but every testament like Dorothy's opens up a new window of exploration, and adds a missing piece to the puzzle of life."¹⁴

However, another reviewer, Michelle Buchanan read the book as a skeptic, "I wanted to know if she was just delusional or psychotic, but now I believe she was truly being visited by her long dead lover."¹⁵ Both of these reviews are written by people who actually, truly believe in the story of Omm Sety as told by Hanny el Zeini.

A final web source related to Omm Sety and her followers is William Henry's website. This is another Omm Sety believers' gem that may be found on the internet. His article about a trip to Egypt from February 2008 also mentions Omm Sety. A tour led by this individual titled "Stargate Egypt Tour" has a lot of information related to esoteric and New Age study of Egypt. Aside from the woman who, "wanted to bathe in the shaft of light pouring through my crown chakra"¹⁶, the author also mentions that Abydos "called" him to return. Omm Sety's story has inspired Henry in many ways, and he leads tours to sites related to her. He also makes the claim that Jackie Kennedy Onassis, "popularized the 'flip' hairstyle of the Egyptian goddess Hathor. Was she a reincarnated Egyptian priestess as her connection to the Isis temple suggests?"¹⁷ He goes on to claim that Sety was able to visit his lover from another lifetime because of his use of the "Osiris Stargate Device" and wormholes. Unfortunately, Henry's interpretations of Egyptian art seem to be based on wishful thinking rather than art-historical interpretation. His website is,

if nothing else, entertaining, and it is an example of the impact Omm Sety is still having on the world today.

The claims made by Omm Sety are interesting and imaginative, but there is no conclusive proof either way about her claims. It does seem extraordinary that she was able to “pinpoint” the location of architectural remains at Abydos, but as an amateur Egyptologist and scholar of the culture and past of Ancient Egypt, she may have easily come across information or texts that could have guided her to her conclusions and theories.

The information about daily life, as presented in the book edited by Nicole B. Hansen, that Omm Sety believed and write about is also interesting, and all scholars can probably agree that it would be fabulous to know the answers to such questions. However, since the information can neither be confirmed nor denied her claims cannot be completely refuted.

Omm Sety was probably, in my opinion, simply a woman who was really interested in Egyptian history. To an extent I agree with the letter to the editor presented above; Dorothy Eady did spend her life chasing her dreams, but it seems to have made her happy. I do not believe that she was actually visited by Sety I or that she had a previous life in Egypt. However, her passion for the subjects is interesting, and she did study the subject vigorously. The Egyptologists whom she studied under were well-respected at the time, but their methods are somewhat questionable today, which also contributes to shadows over Eady’s work.

Ultimately, Omm Sety did contribute to Egyptology, in various ways. Though her message and work seems to attract many “Pyramidiots” and people seeking New Age esoteric knowledge, those people are still learning at least a little bit of actual Egyptian history. Some of the contributors to the discussion of Egyptian history have questionable, at best, knowledge of Egyptian history which raises the problem of what people believe about factual, as we know it,

information. People do still visit her tomb and the sites associated with her, as evidenced in the tour groups and information on the web. One such tour is the tour available through the group Mystical Tours called the “Goddesses Revealed” tour. The tour group visits Abydos and is enlightened by Melissa Riley who claims to be a real “priestess of Isis.” The tour information page explains that, “A special highlight of this trip will be Melissa's presentation at Abydos, sharing Omm Sety's knowledge of the Seti I Temple and the 'mysterious' Osirion.”¹⁸ If nothing else, her name does live on through her many followers and admirers.

¹ Hanny el Zeini and Catherine Dees, *Omm Sety's Egypt: A story of Ancient Mysteries, Seceret Lives, and the Lost History of the Pharaohs* (Pittsburgh: St. Lynn's Press, 2007).

² El Zeini and Dees, *Omm Sety's Egypt*, 11.

³ El Zeini and Dees, *Omm Sety's Egypt*, 12.

⁴ El Zeini and Dees, *Omm Sety's Egypt*, 14.

⁵ El Zeini and Dees, *Omm Sety's Egypt*, 22.

⁶ El Zeini and Dees, *Omm Sety's Egypt*, 31.

⁷ El Zeini and Dees, *Omm Sety's Egypt*.

⁸ Nicole B. Hansen, ed., *Omm Sety's Living Egypt: Surviving Folkways from Pharaonic Time* (Chicago: Glyphdoctors, 2008).

⁹ http://www.thebanmappingproject.com/about/staff_7.html, accessed November 28, 2010.

¹⁰ Hansen, *Omm Sety's Living Egypt*, xiii.

¹¹ Hansen, *Omm Sety's Living Egypt*, xix.

¹² Hansen, *Omm Sety's Living Egypt*, xx.

¹³ <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/16/books/1-omm-sety-s-lost-life-555787.html>, accessed November 28, 2010.

¹⁴ <http://www.amazon.com/Omm-Setys-Egypt-Mysteries-Pharaohs/dp/0976763133>, accessed November 29, 2010.

¹⁵ <http://www.amazon.com/Omm-Setys-Egypt-Mysteries-Pharaohs/dp/0976763133>, accessed November 29, 2010.

¹⁶ <http://www.williamhenry.net/egyptfeb08.html>, accessed November 30, 2010.

¹⁷ <http://www.williamhenry.net/egyptfeb08.html>, accessed November 30, 2010.

¹⁸ http://www.mysticalvoyages.net/november_09.html#gateway, accessed November 30, 2010.