



“Women’s Rights in Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Egypt”
Alison Wilkinson

Sponsored by: Dr. Kara Cooney

Lecture: February 8, 2025 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

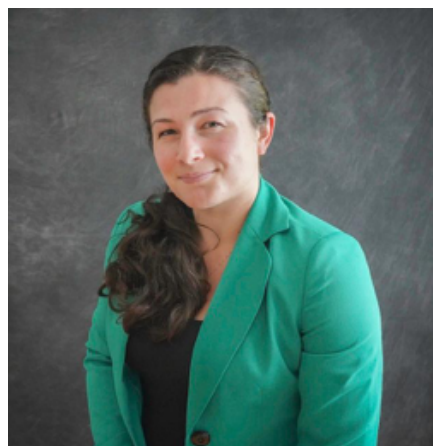
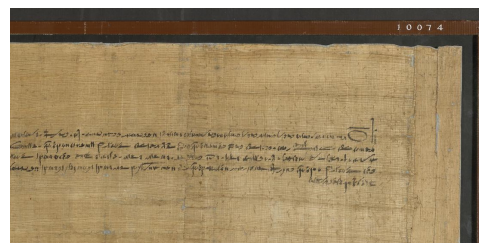
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Alison Wilkinson is a PhD Candidate at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland. She graduated with a Bachelors of Art with First Class Honors in Egyptology at the University of Liverpool, Liverpool, England in July 2018. She obtained her Masters of Art with Distinction in Egyptology at the University of Liverpool in November 2019. Her Master’s Thesis, “The Language of ‘Divorce’ in New Kingdom Egypt,” presents textual analyses into the cultural perceptions of marital separation. This research inspired Alison’s current Doctoral work on Hieratic and Demotic correspondences written by and to women. The aim of this research is to analyze gender dynamics through linguistic methodologies. In April 2024, Alison presented her paper “A Case of Adultery, or a Woman’s Choice to Leave? A New Interpretation for O. DeM 439” at ARCE National, Pittsburg. This paper re-examined the transcription, translation, and interpretation of Ostrakon DeM 439 in order to argue the case of a woman leaving a marital union. For this paper, she was awarded First Place in the Best Student Paper Competition.

This talk presents a deep dive into the textual evidence for marriage and marital separation with a focus on the question: What rights did women have in these processes? New Kingdom and Demotic legal records together with New Kingdom letter correspondences are examined for the answers. The talk incorporates a recently reanalyzed Ostrakon Deir el-Medina 439 for insights on a woman's rights in divorce during the New Kingdom. The focus on textual sources aims to extrapolate the contemporary perspectives of marriage and divorce. The lexical and grammatical analysis presents insights into the process, social implications, and consequences of these social acts. Subtle differences arise in the role of men versus women, most especially within the context of divorce. This "marriage" of gender studies and linguistic analyses uncovers subtle nuances concerning marital unions and separations within the culture of ancient Egypt.

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