

Solo Singing Etiquette for Women in Ancient and Modern Egypt

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Throughout the ages, people have shown great interest in music and singing of all kinds, giving these expressive forms great importance in different eras. This article aims to comprehensively overview the etiquette, customs, and characteristic rules of polite performance in the profession of female solo singing in ancient and modern Egypt from a comparative view. This is achieved by reviewing the distinctive themes of female solo singers and their contexts in both ancient and modern Egypt. The article employs a descriptive-comparative methodology to provide a detailed sequential investigation and analysis of all the data collected on the subject and the themes of female solo singers; to discern the characteristic features of female solo singing etiquette in ancient Egypt; and to identify the similarities and differences of these features in the masters and famous models of modern Egypt. One of the main findings is that the distinctive characteristics of female solo singing in ancient Egypt have been inherited in the style of oriental but not western singing, and the greatest and most widely known model of the former style is “the Oriental singing lady Umm Kulthum”.

Introduction

Music has played a role in various social fields from ancient to modern Egypt. In ancient Egypt, singing was practiced in both public and private places: in temples, in palaces, during religious processions and burials as part of the funerary cult, and during private festivals and military parades. There were at least twelve musical specialties in ancient Egypt, and singing was one of the main categories¹. In modern Egypt singing has been widespread and influential since the Early Arab Period, and the *Majalis al-Ghina'* (assemblies of singing and music) of the Umayyad era have been mentioned in several sources. In addition, many sources have stated that there were many singing assemblies in the Abbasid era². The Tulunids also encouraged singing; where the walls were decorated with many drawings of female singers³. The Ikhshidis were also fond

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1. The 12 categories were singing and playing harp, lute, lyre, long flute, oboe, double oboe, double clarinet, trumpet, tambourine, percussion instruments, and rhythm instruments (Emerit Sibylle, *Music and Musicians*, UCLA, *Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2013), 9).

2. Al Asfahany, Abu El Farag, *Ketab El Aghany*, vol. I (Cairo: Dar El Kotob, 1992), 13-14.

3. Al Maqrizi, *Al Mawaz wa El Etbar Bi Zikr El Khitat wa Al Athar*, vol. I (Cairo: Bolak press, 1854), 316.

of singing and dancing⁴. In the Fatimid era, people, whether rulers or commoners, were interested in the art of singing, entertainment, fun, and worldly pleasures, as singing and dancing assemblies were a feature of palace life. During the Ayubbid period, most of the female singers mentioned performed during the reign of Al-Kamel⁵. The Mamluk sultans and their emirs, as the ruling class, also spared no effort in attending performances by female singers⁶ or building *al-Maghani*⁷.

The slow modernization during Ottoman rule in Egypt after 1517 AD contributed to the dramatic decline in most aspects of artistic and cultural life until the advent of the French campaign. This campaign brought Western civilization with it, including the West's social, economic, and political programmes, which had a clear impact on the fields of science, the arts, politics, administration and others. Egypt subsequently began to keep pace with the surrounding cultures. This period witnessed the emergence of "*Awalim*", or female entertainers (professional female singers and dancers), of which there were two types. The first were those who behaved decently and commanded respect, while the second were those who were downtrodden and whose behaviour was vulgar and devoid of modesty⁸. The other kind of *Awalim* included common dancers who did not have any traditions and whose voices had no charm or harmony.

After the departure of the French and Mohamed Ali's accession to the throne, Egypt began its political project, through which Muhammad Ali sought to bring the civilization of Europe to Egypt. The musical Renaissance in Egypt began in the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha, for he established a school in Jihad Abad village to teach music, along with schools in the Athar al-Nabi and al-Qal'a districts⁹. At the public level, there were various occasions that included singing and music, such as mawlid, wedding parties, and Sebou' (a celebration

4. Saydia El kashef, *Masr fi Ahd El Ekhshdeen*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Matbact Fouad I, 1970), 275.

5. Nabil Mohamed Abd El Azeez, *El Tarab wa Alatoth fi Asr El Aybeen*, (Cairo: Al Matbaca Al Fania Al hadetha, 1980), 22 Al Kamel was the fifth king of the Ayyubid dynasty and ruled from 1218 AD to 1238 AD. Al-Kamel Mohammed was a profound scholar of literature, poetry, and the arts of Hadith and was also a patron of music and singers during his reign.

6. Mohamed Qandeel El Baqali, *El Tarab fi Al Asr Al Mamlukee* (Cairo: El Haeah Al Masria Al amah Li Ketab, 1984), 44.

7. Al-Maghani refers to halls dedicated to entertaining dancing and to singing and music performances by women in particular.

8. Vollito, translated by Zoheer El Shaaeb, *Wasf Masr, Al Mosaqa wa Al Ghenaa cnd Al Masreen Al Mohdeethen*, Vol VIII (Cairo: Al Heaha Al Masria Al amah LL Ketab, 2002), 156-155

9. *The book of the first Arab Music Conference held in Cairo 1932* (Cairo: Al Matbaca Al America, 1933), 16

held seven days after a child is born). Women's roles were more colourful than men's, and parties were held for women at home that men could not attend.

Little attention has been devoted to the history of female solo singing in Egypt. The article argues that the distinctive characteristics of female solo singing in ancient Egypt have been inherited in the style of oriental singing in particular.

In ancient Egypt during the Old Kingdom, there were certain forms of musical performance for chants or hymns:¹⁰

1. Solo singing.
2. Responsorial singing (in which a liturgical chant is recited in parts with a congregational response between each part).
3. Antiphonal singing or singing with a chorus (singing, recitation, or playing alternately by two groups). The chorus was a large organized group of singers.

Two of the three previous forms of musical performance are considered group singing, while just one form represents solo singing, which we focus on in the article.

Music schools for women existed in ancient Egypt, as some sort of institutional teaching was given within the royal court or temples.¹¹ The texts did not clearly mention that there were independent schools for teaching the form of solo singing in particular, in spite there were several themes for the female solo singer that appeared on the walls of the ancient Egyptian tombs from the Old till the New Kingdom periods. There was a school for female singers at Memphis according to one of the Anastasi Papyri in the British Museum. Girls from higher rank or elite families typically received specialized knowledge of ritual music and training in singing by instructors known by the title *Sba* (meaning "teacher"), for example, *Rawer* of the Old Kingdom was a "*Sba ḥsww nswt teacher of the royal singers*"¹², and *Khesuwer* of the Middle Kingdom acted as the "*Instructor of Singers*".¹³ During the reign of king Akhenaten, in

10. Rafael Pérez Arroyo, *La Música en la era de las pirámides* (Madrid: Ediciones Centro de Estudios Egipcios, 2001), 120.

11. Emerit Sibylle, *Music and Musicians*, 9.

12. Jeffrey Pulver, "The Music of Ancient Egypt", in *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 48th Sess., (1921 - 1922), 34; Adolf Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, translated by H. M. Tirard (London: Macmillan, 1894), 252.

13. Several scenes on the walls of ancient Egyptian tombs belonging to musicians show them with their female students. Khesuwer appeared on the walls of his tomb at Kom el-Hisn giving lessons in sistrum playing and hand clapping (Katharina Zinn, "Education, Pharaonic Egypt", in *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient History*, First Edition, Edited by Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner, (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 2319).

the New Kingdom, there was a Theban school of music that was considered to be the Egyptian Royal Academy of Music.¹⁴

The female students would have important musical professions as “*Overseer of Female Singers*”, for example, a singer called *Hemetre* reached a high-ranking position at the end of the 5th Dynasty in the Old Kingdom, as she was able to usurp tomb No. 6 at Saqqara from *Ty* the “*wꜥb priest of Ra in the sun temple of king Sahure*”.¹⁵

As well as in modern Egypt, women music, singing and dancing professionals were supervised by a woman known as “*Daminat al-Maghani*”, who collected taxes from them and from other women working in other professions. She was also responsible for the female preachers, readers of the Qur'an and mourners. Therefore, it can be said that female singers as a group had no syndicate because such a position required a just knowledge seeker well aware of his position, talented in singing and professional in discriminating good voices. Hence, the role of a *Daminat al-Maghani* was to follow the doings of female singers and provide them with training and education. In addition, they worked to introduce them to lute players¹⁶.

As noted earlier, *Daminat Al-Maghani* had the same role as the Instructor of Singers in ancient Egypt. Actually, in both ancient and modern Egypt, teaching singing to women was a common act. Society was accepting of the practice, and Egyptians regarded the female singer as an excellent performer who should be encouraged.

This acceptance reflects the importance of female singers in Egyptian history, as the government allowed the teaching of singing to women, and this was not forbidden under Islamic law.

Categories of Female Singers

There were many categories of solo singers in Egypt. Firstly, in ancient Egypt, one of these categories was the temple singer (religious singer), who participated in ceremonies by chanting hymns and prayers during festivals and daily rituals in honour of the god of the temple. For example, “*Sha-Amum-em-su*” was a singer priestess in the temple of god Amun at Karnak (Figure 1). She belonged to the feminine elite of temple singers. She was part of the main group of singers at Karnak, called *heset*. These were lead singers who were sometimes accompanied by a choir of women. The temple singers were not

14. Jeffrey Pulver, *The Music of Ancient Egypt*, 39.

15. Katharina Zinn, *Education, Pharaonic Egypt*, 2319.

16. Mervat Othman Hassan, Taefat Al Maghany fi Al Asr Al Mamlwkee, *AnISI* 43(2010), 384.

obliged to be in the temple all the time. Many participated only in ceremonies such as the annual Opet and Valley festivals of the god Amun.¹⁷

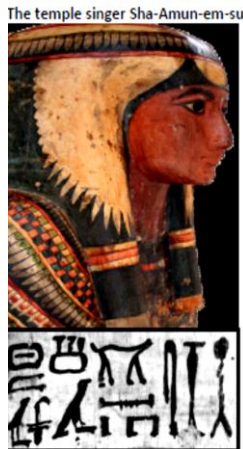
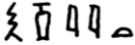
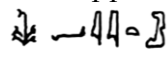


Figure 1. "Sha-Amun-em-su" a Singer Priestess in the Temple of God Amun at Karnak
Source: SESHAT, Brazilian Research Group in Egyptian Archaeology, Laboratório de Egiptologia do Museu Nacional/UFRJ)

The female singer was an important member of the staff of the temple. She was described as *"the one who pacifies the god with a sweet voice"*. The earliest evidence of temple singers dates to the beginning of the Old Kingdom period. Only women filled this role, and their main title was *Hsy.t*  *"singer"*.¹⁸ Many of them were members of an institution called *Khener*, which was a professional troupe of singers and dancers associated with certain deities. Such troupes could be found in palaces, temples, and large private households and performed in both religious and secular contexts. They were organized into certain groups under the supervision of several overseers, either male or female.¹⁹

A new class of female temple singers had appeared by the late Middle Kingdom period. They were called *šmcy.t*  *"Musician"*.²⁰ During the New Kingdom in the 18th Dynasty, female singers were from elite families and were married to priests, while in the 19th and 20th Dynasties they were from humble families and were married to scribes, laundrymen, or military men. In the 3rd Intermediate Period, female temple singers were from the highest social class. A temple singer could be a princess or a daughter of the

17. SESHAT, Brazilian Research Group in Egyptian Archaeology, Laboratório de Egiptologia do Museu Nacional/UFRJ, 1-2.

18. William A. Ward, *Essays on Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom and Related Subjects* (Lebanon: the American University of Beirut, 1986), 12.

19. Ibid, 77.

20. Ibid, 19.

mayor of Thebes. The profession of temple singer continued during the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods.²¹

The 3rd Intermediate Period represents the transitional period between Libyan, Kushite and Saite domination of Egypt, a time of major political and cultural changes. This period of dynamic changes broke the boundaries in front of individual and groups of non-royal elite women and provided them a less restrictive atmosphere to show aspects of their identities free from male control in more powerful and open ways than in the previously periods.²² Meresamun, a temple singer during the 3rd Intermediate Period, began as a low-ranking singer. She advanced to become a singer inside the temple and eventually occupied the highest rank, namely, the temple singer who sang beside the statue of the main deity of the temple.²³

The elite women acquired increasing authority and rank by the Third Intermediate Period. At Medinet Habu the burials of *ḥsy.t n ḥnw n pr-ꜥ Imn* "Singers in the Residence of the Temple of Amun" serve as a clear evidence of the independence and rank of women in several ways; from their own single or numerous chamber tombs in their private cemetery to their occupancy of the inner sanctum of the Great Temple of king Ramesses III.²⁴

Accordingly, there were singers of two kinds in 13th- and 14th-century Egypt. One group included costly and specially purchased slaves, usually of foreign birth, owned by the nobility and upper class; the other group constituted free popular singers, presumably Egyptians who entertained the masses²⁵. It is the latter that are of concern in this article.

The intent of a female singer's performance closely resembles the devotional intent of a private recitation context. In fact, in keeping with traditional Muslim ideals, the professional female reciter is in no sense a public figure. She is neither broadcast over the media nor featured as a personality, nor is she recorded by public or commercial companies. Although some women were known for their recitation and their performances were broadcast to the general public in the 1930s and 1940s, they were also known as singers (the most famous, Umm Kulthum, is focused on in this article). It seems that reciting the Quran has not

21. Emily Teeter, "Inside the temple: the role and function of temple singers", in *the Life of Meresamun a Temple Singer in Ancient Egypt*, edited by Emily Teeter and Janet H. Johnson, the Oriental Institute Museum Publications, Number 29 (Chicago: the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2009), 25.

22. Jean Li, *Elite Theban Women of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries BCE in Egypt: Identity, Status and Mortuary Practice*, A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy in Near Eastern Studies in the Graduate Division of the University of California (California: Berkeley, 2010), 8-9.

23. Emily Teeter, "Inside the temple: the role and function of temple singers", 27.

24. Jean Li, *Elite Theban Women of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries BCE in Egypt*, 131.

25. Edward William Lane, *An Account of Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: William Clowes and sons, 1860), 66.

been common for women in modern Egypt, in contrast to ancient Egypt, where women sang in the temples of gods (religious singing). Indeed, Kristina Nelson argued for stopping the practice of broadcasting women reciters, suggesting that a women's voice makes one think of things other than Allah.²⁶

The Social Status of Female Solo Singers

The position of a female solo singer was highly prestigious from ancient to modern Egypt. In ancient Egypt, the earliest date for the presence of professional solo singers is the mid of the 5th Dynasty in the Old Kingdom period.²⁷ A scene on the false door of the 5th Dynasty tomb of *Nikaure* at Saqqara shows *Iti*, the first known professional solo singer in ancient Egypt, singing with a female harpist (Figure 1 in Table 1).²⁸

Some female solo singers had considerable authority in ancient Egypt. *Sat-tepihu* was a solo singer during the Middle Kingdom. According to a letter found at Lahun, she was requested by name, as one of a group of musicians from the city of Lahun, to go to an unspecified place for an unspecified reason.²⁹ In another example, a solo singer called "*Herere*" bearing the honourable title "*Great One of the Khener and Singer of Amun-Ra*" wrote sharply to a troop commander ordering him to supply rations for the workmen at Thebes warning him, "Do not let (a certain official) complain to me again".³⁰

The female solo singer was among the musicians that celebrated the 30th anniversary of the accession of the king, the Heb-Sed festival. The representation of solo singers is common in the festival scenes of kings Amenhotep III, Amenhotep IV, and Osorkon II.³¹ For example, a scene in the New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty tomb of Kheruef (TT 192) on the lower register of the west portico south of the doorway shows a woman singing to the sound of a flute during the Heb-Sed festival of king Amenhotep III.³² (Figure 10 in Table 1).

26. Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Quran* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 203.

27. Lise Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1991), 120.

28. Edward Bleiberg (ed.), *Arts and Humanities through the Eras*, vol. 1 (USA: Thomson/Gale, 2005), 179.

29. William A. Ward, *Essays on Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom and Related Subjects* (Lebanon: The American University of Beirut, 1986), 77.

30. Emily Teeter, "*Inside the temple: the role and function of temple singers*", 27.

31. Suzanne Lynn Onstine, *The Role of the Chantress (Šmcyt) in Ancient Egypt*, PhD Dissertation (Canada: University of Toronto, 2001), 37.

32. Emily Teeter, "*Inside the temple: the role and function of temple singers*", Figure 14, 25; The Epigraphic Survey in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities in Egypt, *the*

In ancient Egypt the professional female solo singers played a great role in spreading the Egyptian civilization abroad. According to one of the New Kingdom Narratives, an Egyptian female singer was in the voyage of *Unamun* to Syria, where in her way she will introduce her songs and thus spreading the Egyptian music abroad. It was also said that the prince of Byblos, which was a thriving Phoenician city in the 2nd millennium B.C., had obtained for himself an Egyptian female singer.³³

Based on the above discussion, female singers clearly held a prestigious status in ancient Egypt. Notably, the prestigious status of the female singer continued throughout Egyptian history. During the Mamluk period, no other female singer enjoyed the rivalry between sultans more than "Ittifaq". She enjoyed unequivocal pleasure and luxury unlike that experienced by any other woman of her time".³⁴ Ittifaq was not the first singer to marry a sultan or a senior prince, as she was preceded by "Ardakin Bint Nokai Bint Qutfan", the female singer who was passionately loved by al-Ashraf Khalil bin Qalawun (1262-1293 AD). The list also includes the female singer Shahd Dar, who was married to al-Maqr al-Shehabi Ahmed bin al-Jay'an, one of the senior Mamluk princes, but she distracted him from managing the kingdom's affairs.³⁵

Some female singers had such an influence on the sultans that they were involved in decision-making. For example, "**Dunia Bint al-Aqaba'i al-Damashqiya**" was extremely famous in her time. Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad bin Qalawun received her and showed favour to her. Then, she visited al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha'ban bin Hussein bin Mohammed bin Qalawun (1363-1377 AD), who showed great interest in her singing. She became his concubine and was one of the main reasons he dropped the tax imposed upon female singers, which he did at her request.

Other sultans and princes were passionate for female singers, such as prince Anouk ibn al-Nasir Muhammad bin Qalawun (1285-1341 AD). He fell in love with a singer called "**Zahra**"³⁶. It is worth mentioning that the Mamluk rulers favoured the female over the male singers, as did the public.

Hence, female singers enjoyed a prominent position during the Islamic era, superior even to that gained in ancient Egypt. It is astonishing to learn that Islam did not prevent singing for women and that it was even encouraged by Islamic rulers.

Tomb of Kheruef Theban Tomb 192, Volume 102 (Chicago: the University of Chicago, Oriental Institute Publications, 1980), 24.

33. Adolf Erman, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians Poems, Narratives, and Manuals of Instruction from the Third and Second Millennia B.C.*, transl. Alyward M. Blackman (London: Routledge, 2015), 3, 66.

34. Sahar Abdallah Mohamed, "Al Jawaree fi Al Asr Al Mamlwkee," *Al-Ostaz Journal* 208, no.1(2014), 388.

35. *Ibid.*, 387.

36. *Ibid.*, 387.

The first female singer in modern Egypt was **Sakna** (Figure 2). This famous singer was born in Alexandria in 1801, and Mohammed Ali³⁷ granted her a badge of honour in recognition of her singing³⁸. **Sakna Bek** came to Cairo at young age and is considered the earliest singer of modern era after the female singers of the Mamluk era. She became well-known during the reign of Mohammed Ali. She sang and entertained at the pleasure nights in Al-Azbekeya parks that were dominated by street performers and military or police choirs and occasionally shadow theatre and folk singing performances³⁹.



Figure 2. *Sakna Bek*

Source: <https://www.elmwatin.com/443998/>

Sakna was said to be educated, tactful, sociable, intelligent, quick-witted, very calm in her speech, strong in singing, and religious. She had memorized the Quran and was capable of reciting it with a pure voice. Therefore, she was frequently invited to palaces to entertain the attendees. She was also invited to the princes' palaces to sing at the wedding parties of Ibrahim Pasha's sons. In the era of Abbas I and Said Pasha, she was so famous that she became the singer of kings. It was said that Said Pasha called her a "Hanim", which angered the ladies of the palace. Therefore, he gave her the title of "Pasha", and she became "Sakna Bek", much to their chagrin. It is also said that the Turks were impressed by her singing, so they called her Sakna Bek. In addition, she was clever and brilliant, so the Egyptians preferred her. She became the woman of her time, just as Umm Kulthum did. "Sakna Pasha", as she was called by the commoners, lived a few meters from the mosque of al-Sayyida Nafisa on al-Khalifa Street in Cairo⁴⁰.

37. The founder of modern Egypt; he ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848.

38. *The book of the first Arab Music Conference held in Cairo 1932*, 17.

39. Ibid.

40. Escad Youneis, *Zai ma Baolak Keda* (Cairo: Dar Nahdt Masr, 2002), 282.

The house of Sakna Pasha on al-Khalifa Street was given to her as a gift by Khedive Ismail in recognition of her unique talent; the house built in 1846 during the era of Mohamed Ali by a French architect.⁴¹ (Figure 3).

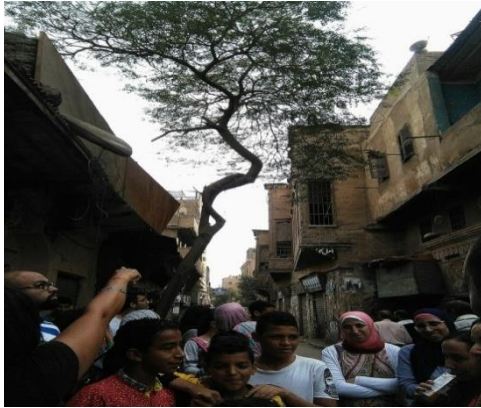


Figure 3. The House of Sakna Pasha in Kjalifa Street in Cairo

Source: <https://bit.ly/338YORD>.

At the height of her fame, a girl called "**Almaz**" came to Sakna, who welcomed her. Sakna involved Almaz in her concerts, but the latter became more prominent and separated from Sakna, who retired from singing⁴². In fact, Almaz's real name was "Sokaina", but people called her Almaz, which means "diamonds", because of her voice's purity and clarity and her beauty. She did not descend from a wealthy family⁴³. She lived in a private suite in the palace of Khedive Ismail and was allowed to leave it only to sing in his presence, so she had a prestigious position among the residents of the palace.

Although the female singers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries belonged to the middle classes, they became wealthy in the zenith of their glory, which indicates that the profession of singing provided them with abundant financial returns in addition to the moral return, i.e., respect from leaders and commoners. In Ismail's reign, a spirit of Renaissance with respect to music and singing prevailed among singers, who followed in the footsteps of their predecessors in terms of style. If this change began in the era of Ismail,

41. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/32/246119/Folk/Along-the-trail-of-lions-revisiting-Cairos-history.aspx>. The house was built on an area covering 880 meters. "Sakna'a" house consists of two stories. The ground floor is divided into 3 suites for the harem and approximately 20 rooms, as well as servants' quarters facing the wooden gate. The halls of the upper storey have marble floors, and the roof is gilded. These halls were dedicated to rehearsals and to hosting Khedive Ismail at private concerts when he wanted to listen to Sakna. There is an Arab-style bathroom with holes in the ceiling decorated with stained glass that is designed architecturally to allow light to enter the bathroom all day.

42. *The book of the first Arab Music Conference held in Cairo 1932*, 17.

43. Fekree Botros, *Fananoo Alexandria* (Alexandria: Al Heaha Al Amah Li Maktabt Alaskandriah, 2001), 13-14. <https://bit.ly/3bEWqWw>

it deepened in the era of occupation, during which foreign control of all the country's capabilities increased and hindered the project of national Renaissance. The role of the occupation in changing the pattern of Egyptian leadership was clear, and the military abandoned its post. This paved the way for effendis and those wearing the *tarbush* (fez) to disseminate modern political ideas. One such figure was Lutfi al-Sayyid, who promoted the slogan "Egypt for the Egyptians"; Mustafa Kamel urged the youth to call for independence with great persistence. In addition, there was Mohammed Farid, who sought to transform the emotional slogans into a practical reality through the masses in the villages and cities. The art of singing after **Sakna** and **Almaz** relocated to Mohammed Ali Street. It was practiced by "Awalim" (of Almeah). The cafes of Cairo became venues for singing⁴⁴. Then, singing bands spread in Emad El Din Street, including the bands of Ritaiba, Ansaf Roushdy, Suad Mahasen, Alia Fawzi, Naima al-Masriya, and Malak⁴⁵.

The labourers in this field lived and worked all over Egypt, but they were not encouraged to work in such a profession until the outbreak of the 1919 Revolution, which united all sects of the nation and to which many female singers contributed through song. This was followed by Egypt's Unilateral Declaration of Independence on February 28 and its debut as a parliamentary government with the issuing of the 1923 AD Constitution. This led to many economic, social and intellectual changes. In the economic field, Talaat Harb attempted to make Egypt an economic entity, and in the social field, Qassem Amin called for women's liberation, a call that influenced a group of Egyptian women, most notably Hoda Shaarawy⁴⁶.

Importantly, during the reign of King Fuad, the number of female singers increased significantly, with the greatest number of female singers working during this time. This was the direct result of Qasim Amin's call to liberate women, in response to which women went to work in different professions, including singing, which became normal in Egyptian society. The increasing number of female singers was a direct result of Qasim Amin's call and a reflection of King Fuad's interest in the arts.

With the emergence of a women's artistic movement led by the artist Munira al-Mahdiya (Sultana) and **Badia Masabni**, women were encouraged to join the fields of singing and theatre. This provided a huge boost for women in that era as female singers began to perform short songs. At that time, **Umm Kulthum** appeared (Figure 4).

44. Kathleen W. Fraser, *Before they were Belly Dancers: European Accounts of Female Entertainers in Egypt 1766-1870* (North Carolina: McFarland Company, Inc., 2015), 34.

45. Abd El Monecm Ibrahim Al Gmacy, *Tatwar Al Moseqa wa Al Tarab fi Masr Al Haditha* (Giza: Matbwcat Berzm Al Thaqafia, 2005), 7.

46. Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women. The New Woman, Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, transl. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1992), xiii.



Figure 4. *Umm Kulthum*

Source: <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2082389.aspx>

Accordingly, the period from 1926 to 1930 was characterized by a process of selecting the best female singers from the many who appeared in the third decade of the twentieth century. Fans were unanimous in their admiration of three singers, namely, Munira al-Mahdiya, Fethiya Ahmed, and Umm Kulthum⁴⁷.

It is worth noting that the professional singing of women in Egypt was not for ordinary people but was limited to the princes and elite, who held concerts in their palaces or frequented dance and ballet halls. This situation was similar to that in ancient Egypt.

It can be said that a long period of aimless or absurd singing stemmed from this era's interplay of political and social conditions. Such conditions were evaded by Sakna and Almaz, but most of the female singers of the early twentieth century who came after them indulged in them. It was during this time that **Munira Al-Mahdiya** entered the scene. She was the first Egyptian Muslim to stand on stage⁴⁸. Munira al-Mahdiya sang at a professional level and left a great legacy in the field of art. Some female singers turned to singing in the theatres, and she was called "*Sultanat al-Tarab*" or "the queen of singing". She founded a nightclub in Azbakeya that was frequented by the rich, poets and writers. She also introduced young singers of both sexes on her stage.⁴⁹

Here we introduce the most celebrated female singer in Egyptian history: Umm Kulthum. Umm Kulthum's story is that of a successful musician in a complex society, the story of a village girl who grew up to become the cultural symbol of a nation. Her real name was Fatima Ibrahim El-Beltagy. She was an Egyptian singer and actress, born in the province of Dakahlia under the rule of Khedive on December 30, 1898, or officially on May 4, 1908, according to the

47. Ahmed Zaki Abd El Haleem, *Nesaa Fawq El Qemah*, (Cairo: Dar El Faisel, 1987), 118.

48. *Al Akhbar Newspaper*, 18th August 1915; Roazan Anwar Medhat, *Al Drama Al Nesaeh fi Al Masrah Al Arabee Al Hadeeth: masrah Maisoon Hana* (Cairo: Dar Al Ghida Lnashr wa Twazeec, 2013), 34.

49. Abd El Monecm Ibrahim Al Gmeci, *Tatwar Al Moseqa wa Al Tarab fi Masr Al Haditha*, 106.

civil records⁵⁰. She was famous in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Umm Kulthum was born to a modest family in a rural village called Tamay e-Zahayra.⁵¹ She began to sing at the age of twelve, when her father took her to concerts to sing with him. After the judge Ali Bek Abu Hussein heard her, he said to her father, "You have a treasure that you do not appreciate ... it is in the voice of your daughter". He advised her father to take care of her⁵².

Umm Kulthum became famous at young age as she began working merely to increase her family's income. However, she surpassed her father's expectations and became the main breadwinner of her family. Once, Mohamed Aboul Ela, a modestly famous singer, was travelling on the same train as her by chance and heard her singing⁵³. Sometime after 1916 AD, her father met Sheikh Zakariya Ahmad and Aboul Ela Mohamed, who had come to Sinbillawin to celebrate the Ramadan nights, and with much urgency, they persuaded her father to move to Cairo with Umm Kulthum in 1922 AD⁵⁴.

Umm Kulthum sought to establish close political relationships with the then-prominent Egyptian figures, so she managed to sing at concerts attended by senior politicians and rulers. In February 1936, Umm Kulthum participated in a special ceremony for King Farouk's birth anniversary. In 1939, Queen Nazli asked Umm Kulthum to sing at the wedding party of Princess Fawzia and Prince Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran⁵⁵. In 1944 AD, King Farouk decorated her with the highest level of orders (nishan el kamal), an honour reserved exclusively for members of the royal family and politicians. She was labelled "Sahebat al-'Esma" or "Lady of high social standing"⁵⁶. After the July 23 Revolution, everything related to the reign of the former king was dealt with aggressively. Hence, Umm Kulthum was prevented from broadcasting her songs on the radio and was finally expelled from her position as the Musicians Syndicate head as a singer of the bygone era. This was not a decision of the Revolutionary Command Council but was an individual decision made by the officer overseeing the radio⁵⁷. Although Umm Kulthum sang "Gholobt Asaleh fe Rohy" (I'm fed up

50. Lamace Al Mtecee, *Mawswcat Nesaa wa Rejal mn Masr* (Cairo: Dar Al Shrook, 2003), 12.

51. Virginia Danielson, *"the Voice of Egypt". Umm Kulthum Arabic song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: the University of Chicago press, 1997), 21.

52. Lamace Al Mtecee, *Mawswcat Nesaa wa Rejal mn Masr*, 13.

53. Virginia Danielson, *"the Voice of Egypt". Umm Kulthum Arabic song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*, 25.

54. Lamace Al Mtecee, *Mawswcat Nesaa wa Rejal mn Masr*, p.14.

55. Shreen Gaber, "Umm Kulthum bain Al Malek Farouk wa Abd Elnaseer," in *Zakrat Masr Almoasrah* 31-1-.2011

56. Abd El Monecm Ibrahim Al Gmacy, *Tatwar Al Moseqa wa Al Tarab fi Masr Al Haditha*, 95.

57. Virginia Danielson, "performance, political, Identity, and Memory. Umm Kulthum and Gamal cAbd Al Nasir", 111.

with Reconciling to My Soul) for the besieged army in Fallujah during the Palestinian war, including for Nasser and Sadat, she was considered against the revolution because of her title, "Sahebat al-'Esma". This was in addition to her singing for the king more than once and her singing in 1932 in the presence of King Fuad⁵⁸:

Afdihe In Hafeza al-Hawa Aw Dhaya'a : Malak al-Fuad Fama 'Assa An Asna'a

However, Egyptian president Nasser reversed the decision. When Nasser's actions crystallized in the direction of socialism in 1956 AD, Umm Kulthum commissioned several composers to search for songs that fit this ideology. In 1965, Nasser granted her "Qiladat al-Jumhuriya" (the Order of the Republic)⁵⁹. After the 1967 setback, Umm Kulthum took up activism, motivated by patriotism⁶⁰. She sang everywhere and collected money for the war.

Worth mentioning that the same act happened in ancient Egypt as previously mentioned. She sang in Bamanhour and collected 283,000 LE. In addition, she sang in Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan, Lebanon, Kuwait and Paris⁶¹. She died in Cairo on Monday February 3, 1975, at the age of 76 years. She was and still is the voice of Egypt.

The details provided above clearly indicate the important position attained by female solo singers in the course of Egyptian history; though most of them were from the lower classes, after achieving fame through their careers, they gained prestige. It appears that Egyptian rulers broadly encouraged female singers. In both ancient and modern Egypt, female singers were widely respected by both rulers and the general populace.

The Characteristic Features of Female Singers

There are certain model examples for the themes of female soloist in ancient Egypt. Their number is ten; one dates to the Old Kingdom period, another one dates to the First Intermediate Period, seven date to the Middle Kingdom period, and the last example dates to the New Kingdom period. The main information and details for these themes, concerning the tomb in which the theme is found and its date, the site of the theme in the tomb, the main context of the theme, the individuals represented in the theme, the way of depicting the singer

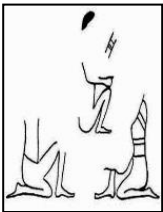
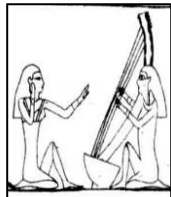
58. Ibid., 112.

59. <http://nasser.bibalex.org/Days/DaysAll.aspx?CS=5&x=5&lang=ar>

60. Laura Lohman, *Umm Kulthum. Artistic agency and the Shaping of an Arab Legend 1967-2007* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 6.

61. Abd El Monecm Ibrahim Al Gmecy, *Tatwar Al Moseqa wa Al Tarab fi Masr Al Haditha*, 93.

(attitude), and the song inscribed in the theme, are discussed in the following table (Table 1).

No .	The site of the theme	The Date of the theme	The Context of the theme	The individuals in the theme	The Attitude of the singer	The Inscription in the theme	he theme
1.	Tomb of <i>Nikaure</i> at Saqqara. ⁶² Left outer jamb of the false door. ⁶³	Old Kingdom, 5 th Dynasty.	Entertainment for the wife of <i>Nikaure</i> .	Duo; the singer and a female harpist.	Seated, Kneeling on one leg.	Names of the singer " <i>Iti</i> " and the harpist " <i>Hknu</i> ".	
2.	Tomb of <i>Ankhtifi</i> at Mo'alla in Upper Egypt. ⁶⁴ Northern part of the eastern wall of large chamber.	First Intermediate Period, 9 th Dynasty.	Festival and banquet scene for the owner of the tomb and his relatives.	Ensembles of three individuals; the singer and two male musicians.	Seated, Squatting attitude.	Nothing.	
3.	Tomb of Khety No. 17 at Beni Hassan. ⁶⁵ Eastern half of the northern wall.	Middle Kingdom, 11 th Dynasty.	The "Maa theme", where the theme is included in the outdoor crafts and activities that are observed by the large scale figure of the owner of the tomb. ⁶⁶	Duo; the singer and a female harpist.	Seated, Kneeling on one leg.	Nothing.	

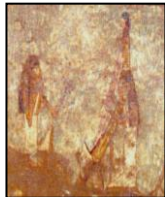
62. Jaromir Malek and Werner Forman, *In the Shadow of the Pyramids Egypt during the Old Kingdom* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 99.

63. The false door is now preserved in the Egyptian Museum at Cairo CG 1414 ; Abeer el-Shahawy and Farid Atiya, *The Egyptian Museum in Cairo A Walk through the Alleys of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: Farid Atiya Press, 2005), 89, Figure 56.

64. Vandier Jacques, "*Mo'alla. La tombe d'Ankhtifi et la tombe de Sebekhotep*", IFAO, *Bibliothèque d'études*, Tome XVIII, (1950), Figure 49.

65. P. E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan, Part II*, (London, 1893), pl. XIV, 58, 60.

66. The representation of musicians in the context of the "Maa theme" was so popular in the Old Kingdom scenes. Its main purpose is the entertainment in the course of inspection for both the tomb owner and his wife or daughter. L'ubica Hudáková, *the Representations of Women in the Middle Kingdom Tombs of Officials: Studies in Iconography* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 572.

4.	Tomb of Khety No. 17 at Beni Hassan. ⁶⁷ Eastern half of the south wall	Middle Kingdom, 11 th Dynasty.	The "Maa theme".	Duo; the singer and a female harpist.	Seated, Kneeling on one leg.	Nothing.	
5.	Tomb of Baqet III No. 15 at Beni Hassan. ⁶⁸ On the north wall of the main chamber.	Middle Kingdom, 11 th Dynasty.	The "Maa theme".	Duo; the singer and a female harpist.	Seated, Kneeling on one leg.	The title <i>Hsyf</i> .	
6.	Tomb of Antefoker and his wife Senet TT 60. ⁶⁹ On the south wall of the passageway.	Middle Kingdom, 12 th Dynasty.	Entertainment with music and dance for the celebration of the festival of goddess Hathor.	Duo; the singer and a female flutist.	Seated, Kneeling on both legs.	A praise song: "Come, Sobek, to Antefoker. Make everything that he likes".	
7.	Tomb of Sarenput I at Qubbet el-Hawa in Aswan. ⁷⁰ On the northern half of the façade of the tomb. ⁷¹	Middle Kingdom, 12 th Dynasty.	Festival and banquet scene.	Ensembles of three individual; two male musicians, and the female singer.	Seated, Squatting attitude.	Nothing.	

67. Abd El Ghafar Shadeed, *Maqaber Bani Hassan fi Masr Al Wasta*, first edition (Cairo: Al Markez Al Qawme Iltargma, 2016), 51.

68. Newberry, *Beni Hasan*, Part II, Pl. IV, p. 47.

69. Davies Norman de Garis, Gardiner Alan H, Davies Nina de Garis, *The tomb of Antefoker, vizier of Sesostris I and of his wife Senet*, The Theban Tombs series, second memoir, EES (London, 1920).

70. Müller Hans Wolfgang, "Die Felsengräber der Fürsten von Elephantine aus der Zeit des Mittleren Reiches," *ÄgForsch* 9 (Gluckstadt-Hambourg-New York, 1940), 29-31.

71. R. B. Parkinson and D. Franke, "A song for Sarenput: Texts from Qubbet el-Hawa Tomb 36", in Z. Hawass and J. Richards (eds.), *the Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt II* (Cairo, 2007), pp. 219-235; R. B. Parkinson, *Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry among other Histories*, (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 14, Figure 104.

8.	Tomb of Sarenput I at Qubbet el-Hawa. The south eastern corner of the outer hall. ⁷²	Middle Kingdom, 12 th Dynasty.	Festival and banquet scene.	Duo of two female singers.	Seated, Squatting attitude.	A praise song for the sake of Sarenput I and his relatives.	
9.	Tomb of Wahka II at Qau el-Kebir. ⁷³ The upper register on the eastern wall of the inner wide chamber.	Middle Kingdom, 12 th Dynasty.	A fragmentary scene with female dancers and tumblers.	Two individuals; the singer and an acrobatic female dancer.	Striding and dancing as well.	"...strong upon you, in your beautiful face, that you might see your god of your town, rejoicing in you ..."	
10.	Tomb of Kheruef TT 192 in the Theban necropolis. ⁷⁴ The bottom sub-register on the south wall of the west portico of the tomb.	New Kingdom, 18 th Dynasty.	Ceremonies for the first jubilee festival of king Amenhotep III.	Ensembles of four individuals; the singer and three female flutists.	Seated, Kneeling on both legs.	A praise song to goddess Hathor.	

Table 1. *The Themes of Female Solo Singer in Ancient Egypt*

Source: Designed By Authors

There were a number of characteristic features for the vocalists (both singers and chanters) in ancient Egypt (as was shown in the previous Table 1);⁷⁵

72. L'ubica Hudáková, *The Representations of Women in the Middle Kingdom Tombs of Officials*, <https://bit.ly/33eirrK>.

73. Wolfram Grajetzki, "Qau el-Kebir", in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Los Angeles. <https://bit.ly/35lle3A>, 2012), 2; W. M. F. Petrie, *Antaeopolis: The Tombs of Qau* (London, 1930), pl. 24; Ellen Morris, "Paddle Dolls and Performance", in *JARCE* 47, (2011), 81, Figure 4.

74. Nims Ch F, Habachi L, Wente E.F, and Larkin D.B, *The Tomb of Kheruef, Theban Tomb 192*, the Epigraphic Survey in Cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Egypt, (Chicago: Illinois, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1980), 102, pl. 34.

75. Heidi Köpp-Junk, "Textual, Iconographical, and Archaeological Evidence for the Performance of Ancient Egyptian Music", in the study of Musical Performance in Antiquity:

1. Representing with a straight back and the body is in a forward position to allow much deeper breathing and thus singing the long passages in the song comfortably.
2. Representing the face with a slightly opened mouth.
3. Placing one hand on the ear.
4. An accompanying inscription in the musician theme.
5. Clapping the hands as a usual custom to mark the time.

Singers in the music scenes depicted in private tombs from the Old and Middle Kingdom are usually represented holding their hands behind their ears as if listening. There are certain gestures in these scenes that indicate that a singer is listening:⁷⁶

1. The head is turned with one ear directed toward the incoming sound, often supported by a corresponding eye movement.
2. The sound volume is enhanced by cupping one hand behind the ears.

The different postures of the hands and arms of the singers denote the presence of a system of musical notation based on chirognomy or gesticulations. This system was a way to indicate to the musicians the musical intervals.⁷⁷ (Figure 5).

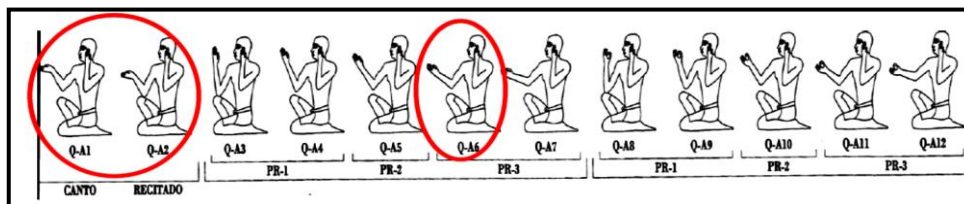


Figure 5. *The Different Postures for the Hands and Arms of the Singers*

Source: Carlos Bonete Vizcaíno, *Música, danza e instrumentos en el Antiguo Egipto*, (Madrid: Universidad CEU San Pablo, 2015), Figura 11

One of the most positive resemblances between the traditional Egyptian and the ancient Egyptian musical characteristic features performed by the female singers is the use of hand signals "chirognomy". The stylized attitudes of the hands; either placing a hand on the ear while partly extending the other arm with elbow bent and the hand held up parallel to the head; or using the same extended arm and hand attitude but resting the opposite hand on one knee instead of

Archaeology and Written Sources, Edited by Agnès Garcia-Ventura, Claudia Tavolieri, and Lorenzo Verderame (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 96.

76. Albert Mudry, Wolfgang Pirsig, "The ear in the visual arts of ancient Egypt", in *The Mediterranean Journal of Otolaryngology*, The Mediterranean Society of Otolaryngology and Audiology, (2005), 81, 83.

77. Emerit Sibylle, *Music and Musicians*, 6.

placing it on the ear were used in singing and teaching the chant in the 20th century. Such traditional gestures are still practiced by female singers.⁷⁸

During the New Kingdom female singers, among the other musicians, when hired to attend a party or a banquet, they were usually three or four behind the dancers either stood in the center or at one side of the festival chamber, and some sat cross-legged on the ground.⁷⁹ The same act appeared for modern Egyptian female singers.

However, the *majalis* during the Islamic era were famous for their lute, flute, and tambourine players. This is represented also on a collection of pottery wares preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. It is worth mentioning that the female singers would sit in the men's assemblies and were dressed in modest and respectful clothing. Though it was the custom of that period to sit behind a curtain, this practice may have developed later. In the Ayyubid era, some female singers were music and lute players. For example, during the reign of al-Malik al-Kamel, "**Ajiba**"⁸⁰ often played the tambourine.

The evening entertainments attended by women began with a dinner accompanied by singers and *takht*, followed by the singing of songs. Some of these performances included female dancers. Songs and chants developed into popular songs and then into parts and *taqtūqa*⁸¹.

One of the most important female singers of the Mamluk era was called "**Khadija al-Rehabiyya**". She sang for men and women and even sang in public for commoners. People talked about the charm of her voice and her charisma, which ensnared everybody of her time⁸².

Another female singer was called "**Asil al-Qal'eya**"; she tended to sing short songs, which was an exclusive feature of her art. Asil al-Qal'eya was well-known and favoured among dignitaries and the public⁸³ because of the universal interest in listening to her short songs. Another female singer called "**Haifa al-Laziza**" would sing long songs⁸⁴. Other female singers were "**al-Rayesa Badreya Bint Jurei'a**" and "**Dina Bint al-Iqna'e**"⁸⁵.

78. John Gillespie, "*The Egyptian Copts and their Music*" (Article available from www.Tasbeha.org and www.Copticchurch.net, 1967), 11.

79. Jeffrey Pulver, *The Music of Ancient Egypt*, 39; Ana Ruiz, *The Spirit of Ancient Egypt*, 60.

80. Nabil Mohamed Abd El Azeez, *El Tarab wa Alatoḥ fi Asr El Aybeen*, (Cairo: Al Matbaca Al Fania Al hadetha, 1980), p.22.

81. *Taqtūqa* is a genre of light Arabic vocal music sung in regional or colloquial Arabic.

82. Ibn Eyaṣ, *Badac El Zhoor fi Waqac El Dohoor*, vol. II (Cairo: El Haeah Al Masria Al amah Li Ketab, 1331), 207.

83. Ibn Eyaṣ, *Badac El Zhoor fi Waqac El Dohoor*, vol.III, 311.

84. Mohamed Qandeel El Baqali, *El Tarab*, 84

85. Khaleel El Badawi, *Matwsact Shaḥerat El Nesaa* (Jordan: Dar Osama Llnasher, 1998),

The backup musicians in Islamic Egypt were women, and women also initially sang behind a curtain to uphold decency by adhering to the traditions of the time. The progress of the twentieth century was accompanied by women's singing on stage, especially after the 28 February Declaration, the independence of Egypt from the Ottoman Empire and Qasim Amin's call for women's liberation. All this strongly encouraged women to sing, especially with the rulers' patronization of female singers in this era and the establishment of several theatres. Moreover, when Egyptian Radio began broadcasting, the society's view of female singers shifted.

Hence, it appears that religious chanting with roots in ancient Egypt and the singing of the elite coexisted with the singing of *Awalim* that filled the cafes.

On May 31, 1934, after the launching of Egyptian Radio, Umm Kulthum was the first to sing there in 1943 AD. She founded the first syndicate of musicians and led them as president, a position she maintained for ten years.

According to the discussion above, the tradition of backup players accompanying the solo singer was inherited from ancient Egypt, and the famous Umm Kulthum is a reflection of Iti, the ancient Egyptian singer.

Titles Related to Female Singers

Among the titles that are associated with solo singers in ancient Egypt are and *mr.t*, *hsy.t*, and *šm^cyt*.⁸⁶ Concerning the title *mr.t*, its earliest mention dates back to the 4th Dynasty in the Old Kingdom period. The temple reliefs usually show the holder of the title standing with raised hands to greet the king as he approaches the temple. These reliefs were accompanied by an inscription of a song referring to the arrival of king. The main duties of the *mr.t* title holder were playing music in the presence of gods, and participating in some of the Jubilee festivities.⁸⁷

The other popular titles; *hsy.t*, and *šm^cyt* were previously mentioned in the categories of female solo singers. The theme in the Middle Kingdom tomb of Baqet III No. 15 at Beni Hassan (Figure 5 in Table 1) indicates that the title *hsy.t* was inscribed above the solo singer. The title here is translated as "singer".⁸⁸ It describes the style of melodic music that is frequently accompanied by wind or stringed instruments, such as flute and the harp that is proved by the presence of the female harpist accompanied the solo singer in the theme.

Most of the themes for the solo singer in the Old and Middle Kingdoms (Table 1) show the singer with the female harpist. Such musician duo was

86. Jean Li, *Elite Theban Women of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries BCE in Egypt*, 31.

87. A. M. Blackman, "On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy", *JEA* 7, (1921): 8–30.

88. Wb. III, 165.

generally titled “*Hsy.t m bn. t*  the singer-harpist”.⁸⁹ The holders of this title were considered to be professionals that received musical education like the first professional solo singer **Iti**.⁹⁰

The title *hsyt* could be used in the secular contexts, not only the religious ones, like the title *šmcyt* adopted by the religious solo singer, to describe an activity rather than a title. This activity is mostly secular in nature like entertainment at banquets,⁹¹ and this was also approved in the theme of Baqet III, where the theme of the solo singer was included in the daily outdoor crafts and activities.

During the Fatimid era, the sources do not mention any female singers by name except **Al Tabbalah** (the drummer) from the era of al-Mustansir, who gave her land beside al-Khalij al-Gharbi (the West Bay). This was called Ard al-Tabbalah (the Drummer's Land) after that female singer. It seems to have been called so because she would sing with drums⁹². Also for Sakana the first singer in modern Egypt as mentioned previously she had the title of Bek, throughout Egyptian history she was the only woman gained such title.

Umm Kulthum is also known by several titles, most notably Umm Kulthum. These titles include Thouma, al-Jame'a al-Arabiya, al-Sett, Sayedat al-Ghina' al-Arabe, Shams al-Asil, Sahebat al-Essma, Kawkab al-Sharq, Qaitharat al-Sharq, Fananat al-Sha'b, The Lady of Arabic Singing, and Shams El Asil.

This is indication of similarity between both ancient and modern Egypt as giving titles for the female singer is an ancient Egyptian tradition.

Songs Sung by Females

In the ancient past, especially the period before the Middle Ages, songs were preserved by memory and tradition (the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way). Musical notation did not exist before the Ptolemaic Period. It started to be developed approximately between the 5th and 4th century B.C.⁹³ However a written script of the songs (hymns) was used in the various ancient Egyptian rituals, for example the recorded texts of the Beautiful Festival of the Valley and the Opet Festival

89. William A. Ward, *Essays on Feminine Titles of the Middle Kingdom and Related Subjects*, the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, 1986, p. 12.

90. Silvana E. Fantechi, *Singers and Musicians in New Kingdom Egypt*, 28, 29, 35.

91. Suzanne Lynn Onstine, *the Role of the Chantress (Šmcyt) in Ancient Egypt*, 15.

92. Nareman Abd El Kreem Ahmed, *Al Marah fi Al Asr Al Fatmi* (Cairo: Al Heah Al Masryia Al Amah Ll Ketab, 1991), 113, 115.

93. Eleonora Rocconi, *Music and Dance in Greece and Rome*, 82.

suggests that the words of the song may have been transcribed in order to be passed on from one generation to the next.⁹⁴

A female singer called Baket appeared among a group of three musicians on the eastern wall of the second room of the 18th Dynasty tomb of Amenemhat TT 82 playing a harp and singing a song addressed to god Amun and his bark in the context of celebrating the Opet festival during the reign of king Thutmose III (Figure 6); "*wbn.k wbn n3 n h3.wt n Imn-Rc* "Even as thou shinest forth, so shine forth the faces of Amun-Ra".⁹⁵



Figure 6. The Female Singer Baket in the 18th Dynasty Tomb of Amenemhat TT 82

Source: <https://bit.ly/3hewulA>

Another female singer is represented in a similar scene of musicians in the same tomb of Amenemhat, called Ahmose, appeared singing and playing harp at the same time like Baket. Her song started with a reference to visiting the temple of god Amun-Ra in the Festival of the New Year and finished with mentioning the Calendrical Festivals.⁹⁶

An example for the songs recalling the love poetry of the Ramesside Period that were sung by women and girls in ancient Egypt is found in the papyrus of Harris. A girl sang a song for her beloved during her trip to the

94. Suzanne Lynn Onstine, *the Role of the Chantress (Šmcyt) in Ancient Egypt*, 60.

95. Nina de Garis Davies, Alan H. Gardiner, "The tomb of Amenemhet (No. 82)", dans Norman de Garis Davies et Alan H. Gardiner (éditeurs), *The Theban Tomb series*, Tome 1, (London, 1915), 63, Pl. XV.

96. John C. Darnell, "The Rituals of Love in Ancient Egypt: Festival Songs of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the Ramesside Love Poetry", in *Die Welt Des Orients*, vol. 46, no. 1, (2016), 40-43.

Heliopolitan country side to attend the festival of the opening of a new canal to allow flood water to flow. The song comprised the following words;⁹⁷

iw.i r f3 i(t).i r shs bn gr.i

sh3 3ty.i p3 R^c

k3 ptr.i p3 ‘q n sn.i

iw.fr pr.....

"I shall raise myself to run without stop, and my heart shall remember the god (Ra), then I will see my brother's entrance, while he is heading to the park..."

The song is ended with the following sentence;

iw.i m špst nbt tzwy iw.i hn^c.k

"I am the noble one, the lady of the two lands when I am with you."

For modern Egypt, political events did not affect the singing of women but did influence what they sang, which varied from religious songs in the seventeenth century and love songs in the eighteenth century to the tasteless and vulgar songs of the beginning of the nineteenth century and the national songs of the second half of the nineteenth century.

At the intellectual and cultural levels, there were several prominent poets, including Ahmed Shawki, Hafez Ibrahim and Khalil Mutran, who spoke in their poems about the pharaohs' glory and emphasized the idea of national revival. All these developments were reflected in the artistic arena and the complex elements of the creative processes that were associated with Egyptian society in general and singing and theatre in particular. On the basis of the slogan "Egypt for the Egyptians", Egyptian music came to the fore. Female musicians were also clearly present in the era of King Farouk. There is no doubt that the emergence of radio led to the rapid spread of songs and encouraged female singers to find their way⁹⁸.

Conclusion

Therefore, it can be said that women's role in the field of singing has been manifested throughout Egyptian history. Their position as singers blossomed at times and faded at others. One of the most important categories of female singers in ancient Egypt was the religious singer, whose main role was chanting hymns and prayers during the festivals and daily rituals in honour of the god of the

97. F. Haikal, "Thoughts and Reflexions on the Love Songs in Ancient Egypt", in *Vicino Oriente Quaderno*1, (1997), 83-84.

98. Mohamed Qabeel, *Mwsocat Alghnaa Almasry fin Al Qrn Al Eshreen* (Cairo: Al Heah Al Amah Li Ketab, 1999), 12.

temple. She was of considerable authority and had honorable titles. Her title "Chantress" is very similar in its religious symbolism to the modern one "Sheikha" that was adopted by modern solo singers like Umm Kulthum. Another category for female singers but secular in its nature, which was so popular in ancient Egypt, was the itinerant singer that was hired in the ancient Egyptian wealthy banquets and parties to amuse and entertain the guests. The same for modern Egypt women singers were divided into classes, with those who sang for rulers and the aristocratic class on the one hand and the *Awalim* or ill-reputed *Ghawazi* on the other. Throughout history, kings and sultans showed favour to the women singers. The female singer in ancient Egypt participated in all the important royal ceremonies like the Heb-Sed festival and presented her musical performances abroad, this act continued till modern era.

There were tutors for female singers in both ancient and modern Egypt. The custom of singing has remained similar to that in ancient Egypt, with its backup band. The first female singer of the modern era was Sakna, who appeared in the 19th century. The honours she enjoyed indicate the notable shift in rulers' attention to female singers, as they began to bestow gifts and titles upon them. For example, the title "Bek" had not been given to a woman in the history of Egypt until Sakna, and her house in Cairo still witnesses the luxury she lived in. Despite the multiplicity of female singers in the twentieth century, Umm Kulthum has remained the most famous, for she enjoyed the respect and appreciation of many people worldwide. She was able to change the role of female singer from someone who was patronized by the state to a supporter of the state by donating the returns from her concerts to the army after the July Revolution.

The ancient Egyptian themes for solo female singers show her as a member of either a musical duos or ensembles of three or four musicians. The duos included just females the singer and the musician, while the musical ensembles could include male musicians together with the female singer. The ancient Egyptian theme of the 9th Dynasty tomb of Ankhtifi shows the female singer sitting in a higher level than the members of the musical ensembles, who are males. This is similar to our modern times where the singer usually precedes her musical ensembles. In the ancient Egyptian themes of musical duos, the female singer is sat either to the right or the left of the theme, while in the ensembles she appears standing in the center of the theme in front of the musicians.

There are certain features concerning the way of depicting the solo female singer in the ancient Egyptian themes of musical duos;

1. Usually sitting with a straight back and the body in a forward position except for the head, arms, and legs. A unique example for a solo female singer in a standing attitude is found in the 12th Dynasty tomb of Wahka II at Qau el-Kebir.

2. Kneeling either on both legs or on one leg, or being represented in a squatting attitude.
3. Wearing either a short cut wig that was popular during the Old Kingdom or a long wig that appears either a single mass hanging on the back or with a part hanging on one shoulder. In all cases the ears are exposed.
4. Either the right or the left hand, according to the orientation of the singer in the theme, with extended fingers placed either on the cheek close to the ear or on the lower tip of the ear. The other hand with extended fingers towards the female musician.
5. Wearing the traditional tight sheath dress (a wraparound robe and the shoulder straps are independent elements of the robe that could be worn or not) without straps or provided with either two or one strap exposing the chest.
6. The jewelries are usually a broad collar and bracelets.

All the themes of the musical duos in ancient Egypt show the solo female singer accompanied by a female harpist except for two examples, in the 12th Dynasty tomb of Antefoker TT 60 and the 18th Dynasty tomb of Kheruef TT 192, where the musician is a female flutist. It is observed in these two examples that the flute was used as a main musical instrument in the female musical duos theme that was related to the context of festival scenes in honor of a god or a king and the type of the song performed by the singer is a praise one, while the other examples used the harp were all included in the private secular contexts of entertainment where no songs were inscribed in the theme just the name or the title of the singer and the accompanied musician. These features are similar to those of modern Egypt; placing one hand at ear, accompanied by lute player, and wearing jewelries which are usually a broad collar and bracelets. This is an evidence that that the distinctive characteristics of female solo singing in ancient Egypt have been inherited in the style of oriental singing in particular.

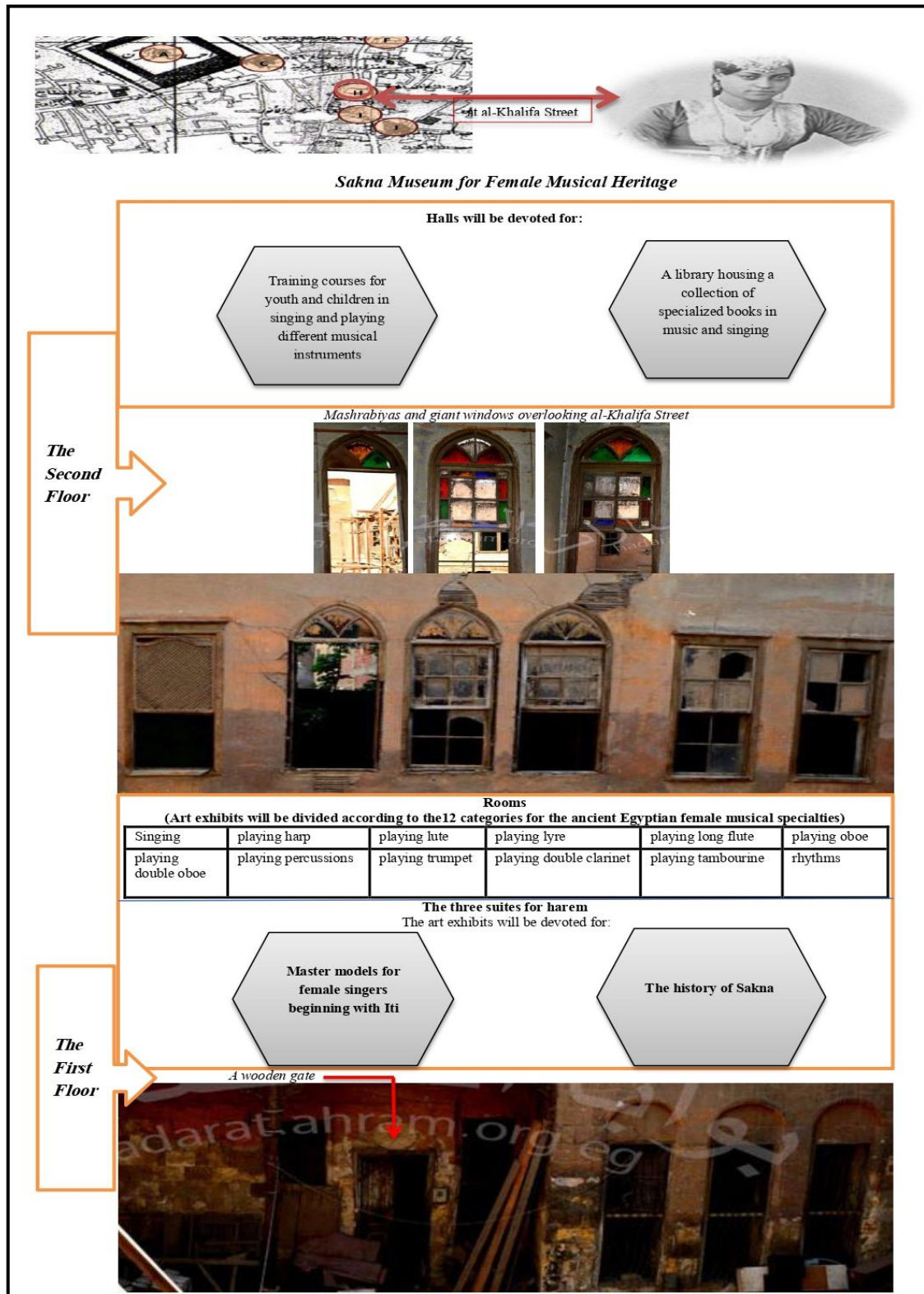


Figure 7. A Schematic conceptualization of Sakna museum and its contents

Source: Designed by the Author

Recommendations

The study recommends turning the house of Sakna Bek into a museum showcasing the history of women's singing in Egypt from ancient Egypt until modern times (Figure 7 a Schematic conceptualization of Sakna museum and its contents). It is a valuable place that was presented by a ruler to the first female singer in the history of modern Egypt and the only female singer given the title "Bek". Such a museum should focus on the history of women in singing, pictures of female singers, and the most important instruments that accompanied their singing. In addition, this place should be promoted because of its great cultural value in reflecting the civilized ideas of the Egyptians, who respected the artistic productions of women and their abilities and immortalized them in history. Weekly concerts should be organized featuring female singers representing an era of history. Finally, there should be touristic promotions of these events to present them as significant and prestigious social activities.

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