CHAPTER 11
FROM SEKHMET TO SUFFRAGE: ANCIENT EGYPT IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMEN'S CULTURE

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Gender and orientalism

Over the past two decades, an abundance of work has emerged relating to women and orientalism, much of it in response to the neglect of gender in Edward Said's influential 1978 volume of the same name. As Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues, studies of orientalism should not and cannot be devoid of gender theory.[1] From travel writing to popular culture, the Western world experienced a kind of mania for the orient during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, it seems that women were drawn to and aligned with orientalism. While the boom in women's travel to, and writing about, the orient can certainly be attributed to the new-found accessibility of the Middle East due to advances in rail and air travel, women's interest in the orient outside of the context of tourism is much more complex.

Most scholars working in this area agree that the Middle East was associated with femininity. Some, such as Yeğenoğlu and Dúnlaith Bird, suggest that the East was considered feminine in terms of its perceived inferiority to and subjugation by the West, while others, such as Billie Melman, suggest that it also represented femininity, glamour, freedom and sexuality in positive and empowering ways for women.[2] She further refers to a variety of orients, offering a version of orientalist fantasy that was individual to each woman but had the unifying quality of providing a sense of freedom and sensuality that was unavailable to them within the Victorian model of separate spheres.[3] Sara Mills and Mary Louise Pratt examine the complex relationship between imperialism and femininity, paying particular attention to women's travel to the Middle East. Noting the abundance of women's writing about the region, they claim that women were able to critique colonialism by drawing upon their own experiences of subjection.[4] On the other hand, Bird and Yeğenoğlu acknowledge women's views of the Middle East as operating both in opposition to and within a colonial framework, with Bird referring to travel to the Middle East by both men and women as 'the penetration of the feminised East'.[5]

While this essay does not focus on women's travel to the Middle East but rather on recreations of the ancient Near East in Britain, these concepts regarding the femininity of the orient, women's own subjugation by the state and the patriarchy, and orientalist fantasy as escapism are key to exploring how women used archaeology to construct and perform their own femininity and feminism.[6] Furthermore, this essay examines how this

affinity between femininity and the orient relates to women's reception of the ancient world in Britain in the early twentieth century and to recent archaeological discoveries, a connection that has not yet been analysed.

Studies relating to this topic have been dominated by post-Tutankhamun Egyptomania, neglecting considerations of gender and the ever-popular legacy of Cleopatra, whose image has been used and manipulated (largely by men) since the height of the Roman Empire as a symbol of excess femininity and sexuality.[7] Jasmine Day is one of the few scholars who has considered the reception of Egyptian archaeology in a gendered manner. However, as she largely deals with receptions of ancient Egypt prior to 1881 (the beginning of the 'golden age' of Egyptology), many of the specific archaeological discoveries influencing women had not yet occurred. Building on the concept of the East as feminine, Day suggests that the patriarchal imagination feminized mummies in order to objectify and possess them in the same way that the West subjugated the East and man subjugated woman.[8] As a result of this feminization, she suggests, women saw similarities between their own treatment and the treatment of mummies, particularly through the analogy of rape, and were the chief instigators of the mummy motif in popular culture.[9] Although this parallel with theories on gender and orientalism is interesting, it is difficult to relate these ideas to early twentieth-century Egyptomania. Although colonialist oppression was ever-present, the decline of the British Empire and the rise of feminism allowed for new and gendered interpretations of Egypt. In fact, women's emulation of the ancient world seems to have been more concerned with femininity as a force of power and a way to express themselves in the modern world.

Until now, there has been no connection made between the development of archaeology as a discipline and ideas of femininity or the rise of feminism. However, as this essay argues, the abundance of discoveries during this period due to the institutionalization and professionalism of archaeology had a direct impact on women's fashion and beauty trends, as well as on concepts of 'positive' femininity.[10]

The Nile style

Fashion historian Karin J. Bohleke claims that the period between 1881 and the First World War represents the 'glory years' for archaeology; many discoveries and exhibitions prior to Tutankhamun had massive impacts on women's trends, which had included Egyptian motifs since the eighteenth century.[11] Although other fashion historians are correct in attributing the Egyptomania of this period to the 1922 discovery, they – as do Bob Brier and James Stevens Curl – attribute the Egyptomania of the 1920s solely to the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, neglecting to consider the influence of archaeology in the years and decades preceding that singular event.[12] In fact, the discovery of the tomb was merely the catalyst for the explosion of an obsession that had already existed for thousands of years, greatly aided by the ever-increasing dissemination of both information and pictures, and the manufacturing of clothing and beauty products.[13]

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While the discovery had a huge impact on popular culture and was undoubtedly influential on style,[14] it lacked a special historical significance for women.

The widespread contemporary mass media coverage of these and other important discoveries reached a huge audience, spurring the craze for the 'Nile style'.[15] Nineteenth- and twentieth-century British colonialism and expansion in the Middle East irrefutably sparked a general interest in archaeology, but the enchantment of the ancient past particularly captured women's imaginations. Furthermore, if one considers Judith Butler's notion that femininity only exists through the repeated performance of gendered acts, then it makes sense that women would use established representations of past femininity as reference points for their own performance of gender.[16]

It would be remiss to ignore the strong tradition of orientalist stereotypes and women from antiquity appearing in popular culture, particularly in art, décor, dance, theatre and literature. Cleopatra has been used as a symbol of Eastern sexuality and decadence since her first contact with the Romans, soon becoming a representation of the dangers of femininity, an idea that lasted throughout the early modern period and beyond, largely thanks to Shakespeare.[17] Although fictional, Dido also received the same treatment, featuring in a play by Christopher Marlowe and numerous operas throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The biblical Salome was also a favourite among artists since the Renaissance. It was during the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, particularly in *fin-de-siècle* literature, entertainment and art, that these female figures underwent a sustained and intense revival of interest. The resurgence of Salome in popular culture coincided with the development of biblical archaeology, wherein the search for biblical locations and personas (including her grandfather Herod's palace by the Palestine Exploration Fund during the 1880s) was one of the earliest motivations for archaeology as a discipline.[18]

They, and other eastern women from history and mythology, featured prominently in mid-to-late nineteenth-century orientalist painting, as well as Art Nouveau design (along with classical goddesses), in a newly eroticized and exoticized way. They also resumed their presence on the stage, becoming infamous theatrical figures of the era.[19] It was during this period that Cleopatra became orientalized, culminating in performances by both Lily Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt during the 1890s (see Fig. 11.1).[20] As Christine Peltre notes, orientalism in art became popular largely due to the rising interest in Egyptian art at the British Museum, as well as the development of ancient Near Eastern archaeology during the mid-nineteenth century, with Bernhardt's performance being directly influenced by such.[21] As the following paragraphs highlight, the influence of archaeology on theatre, film and other art forms was instrumental in disseminating ancient motifs into women's everyday lives.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, these figures became overtly sexual symbols of oriental decadence. Their costuming became more risqué and more modern, which both reflected and influenced street fashions.[22] Although Juliet Bellow argues that stage costumes became more modern to mirror women's fashions, it is clear that fashion designers understood the power of theatre and film to affect women's trends and they incorporated many of the oriental and archaeological motifs found in costumes

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Figure 11.1 Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), French, actress in the role of Cleopatra. Ca. 1891, Mary Evans/Everett Collection.

into their lines. Furthermore, top designers such as Paul Poiret and Jean Charles Worth, who were at the forefront of orientalist designs on- and offstage, concurrently produced theatrical costume designs and had their clothing advertised in theatre programmes.[23]

One such production was the Ballets Russes's 1918 *Cléopâtre*, which included costumes made by Poiret's atelier that were both modern and reflective of the decadent ancient Egyptian styles made familiar to the public through archaeological discoveries. One of the costumes (see Fig. 11.2) exhibits this combination perfectly, with colours, geometric patterns and a headdress very similar to those of mummy masks discovered during the late-nineteenth century, as well as an ultra-modern 'hobble' skirt (named for its narrow hemline).[24] British newspaper articles of the day directly compared the hobble skirt – supposedly invented by Poiret – to the type of skirt worn in depictions of the Egyptian queen Hatshepsut that were found during the early twentieth century; even supposedly modern fashion innovations were understood to have had ancient precedents.[25]

As Bellow notes, women become the target audience for theatre, film and consumer products in this period, meaning that advertisements 'manifested this newfound power in addressing themselves directly to a female gaze'.[26] This unprecedentedly opulent production of *Cléopâtre* made waves on its worldwide tour and was performed with great success for over ten years. Influencing women on both sides of the Atlantic, the production enhanced the 'contradictions surrounding women's prominent role as consumers of culture' through its reinvention of Cleopatra as a chic modern woman.[27] The costumes of this production explicitly aligned women with a source of ancient femininity and power to help them understand their new role in modern society.

Both costume design and fashion illustration were the perfect media with which to explore orientalist and archaeological motifs. These motifs' existence in both reality and fantasy allowed designers to experiment before creating everyday wearable garments.

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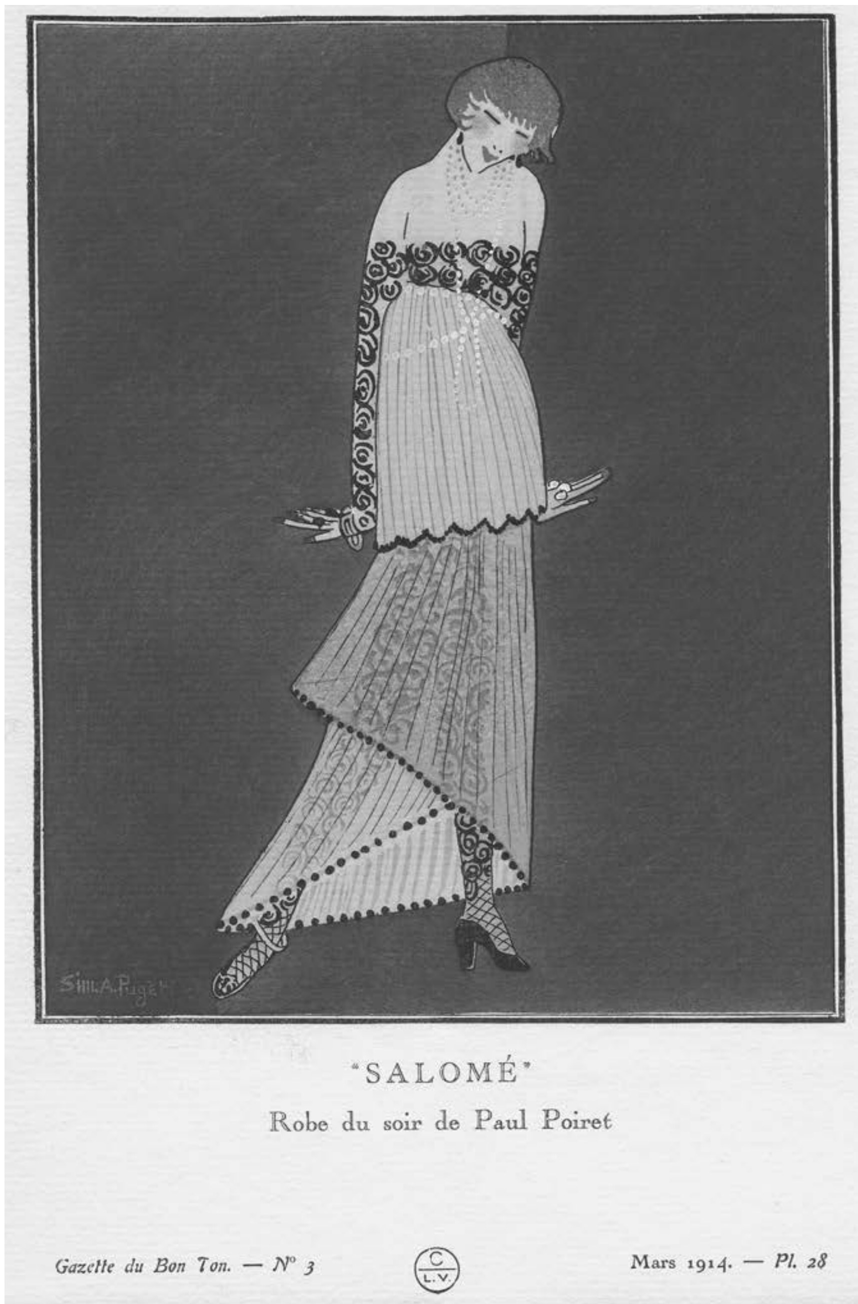

Figure 11.2 'Salomé – Robe du soir de Paul Poiret', plate 28 from *Gazette du Bon Ton*, Volume 1, No. 3, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

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Despite Poiret's denial at the time, Peltzer argues that Poiret took direct inspiration from Bakst's 1908 costume sketches for *Salome* for his designs, once again highlighting the importance of the theatre as a link between archaeology and fashion. Poiret's 1914 Salome dress mirrors Bakst's layered, flowing fabrics but modernizes Bakst's concept into fancy attire rather than fancy dress.[28]

Peltzer attributes the revival of oriental-style fashion from 1900 onwards to Bakst and Poiret, particularly in terms of the way such pieces were gendered and eroticized, though she ignores many of the other cultural factors contributing to the trend such as colonialism and women's sense of affinity with the East.[29] Furthermore, Bakst's and Poiret's interest in antiquity played a key role in their designs, with Peltzer contending that their well-known love of antiquity manifested itself through oriental-style apparel.[30] She adds in a footnote that Poiret recognizes that much of his inspiration was drawn from a visit to Victoria and Albert's Asian Collections in 1908.[31]

Although Peltzer does not develop this point, the anecdote about the Victoria and Albert Museum is significant; it shows that as a British institution popular with women this museum had a direct impact on contemporary fashion and ideals of glamour. Moreover, fashion illustration still played an important role in maintaining notions of femininity that could transcend the boundaries of what was real and, according to Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, be 'connected in important ways with the modernity of contemporary life'.[32] These fantastical fashion illustrations featured prominently in influential magazines, such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* throughout the 1910s and 1920s, and were the ideal medium through which to explore the boundaries between reality and ancient Near Eastern aesthetics. The class-specific 'high femininity' presented by the magazines allowed for the decadence associated with the orient, even during the war.[33] As Buckley and Fawcett point out, the 'otherness' of these illustrations as exotic and oriental designs (in their example, harem trousers) brings an element of sexuality to an otherwise 'vulnerable' figure, reminiscent of cinematic images.[34]

The connection with cinema runs deep, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s. The Hollywood aesthetic of that era took considerable inspiration from the decadence of ancient Egypt; J. Gordon Edwards's 1917 film *Cleopatra* stunned British audiences with Theda Bara costumed in a variety of exotic and ever-more revealing ensembles. Adam Geczy notes that this representation is the first time Cleopatra is shown as an entirely Eastern symbol of sexuality, instead of the more historically accurate portrayals seen in previous centuries which were classically styled but with oriental elements.[35] Both this *Cleopatra* and Cecil B. DeMille's 1934 *Cleopatra*, starring Claudette Colbert (Fig. 11.3), were both heavily inspired by archaeological discoveries and had a massive impact on women's concepts of beauty.

Following these, and a host of other Egyptian- and ancient Near Eastern-inspired films, ancient women became almost synonymous with beauty and glamour.[36] Beauty products, ancient Near Eastern-inspired perfumes and advice reflecting on ancient femininity, were ubiquitous. For instance, Guerlain's perfume Shalimar, inspired by the woman for whom the Taj Mahal was built, was a number-one seller of the 1920s and 1930s.[37] Contemporaries also attributed the iconic bob haircut to cinematic

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Figure 11.3 Claudette Colbert in *Cleopatra*, directed by: Cecil B. DeMille, USA 1934, Mary Evans/SZ Photo/Scherl.

representations of Cleopatra which, as previously mentioned, were not historically accurate but based on the imitations of pharaonic masks discovered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the mummy mask of the high-profile Egyptian woman Satdjehuty.[38] Although many variations on the bob style emerged, the 'Cleopatra bob', as it was called, clearly has the same length and fringe style as the masks, proving that this early twentieth-century version of Cleopatra, which has influenced ideals of femininity and sexuality ever since, was created directly from the archaeological discoveries that were so popular at the time.

The influence of Hollywood did not end with actresses and costumes: films and cinema spaces also went on to influence ordinary British women in a multitude of ways.[39] Around 75 per cent of cinema audiences were female, so the cinematic experience was geared towards women, not just the way in which movie stars represented the ideal of beauty.[40] Jacky Stacey contends that 'the glamorous interiors of British cinemas … provided the cultural space for the consumption of Hollywood's glamorous femininity'.[41] These exteriors and interiors were heavily influenced by opulent 'otherness' and exoticism, most notably ancient Egyptian or North African motifs.[42]

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Domestic opulence

Stacey picks up on the role of woman as responsible for the domestic space, along with her relatively new role as the chief consumer of the household, particularly among the middle classes, contending that the visual spectacle of the cinema space was enjoyed in a gendered way.[43] To replicate this style, Egyptian-style furniture became popular among the largely female domestic consumer market. For example, the 'Thebes' range of stools and chairs became a top seller for Liberty's for over thirty years.[44] Other popular furniture pieces, particularly during the 1920s, were replicas of actual ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern furniture found or displayed in museums during the period (see Fig. 11.4).[45]

If we consider recent scholarship regarding domestic interiors' effect on how middle-class British women performed their identities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the fact that these ancient styles were so popular indicates that the ancient world played a huge part in identity formation and domestic femininity.[46] An article from 1923 states, 'no up-to-date Englishwoman's writing table is complete to-day without a copy of a little Egyptian god as a paper-weight', further solidifying the notion that in

Figure 11.4 British New Kingdom type low chair, 1920s, from the Egyptian Revival Sale, Bonhams, 23 January 2008, Lot 8.

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order to be a modern woman, one had to look to the past.[47] Furthermore, as Judy Giles has argued, the early twentieth century saw the professionalization of the housewife and housework, which was also related to archaeological themes in periodicals, with advice given to women that included how to look after one's glassware like the Egyptians and Phoenicians.[48]

These correlations between fashion, cinema and the reception of the ancient world were part of a wider boom in women's consumerism during the early twentieth century. As Ruth Iskin has argued, shopping, particularly shopping in department stores, was a key factor in women's emergence from the private into the public sphere. The store environment allowed women to feel comfortable in a domestic-type interior within a public space.[49] Unsurprisingly, the ancient influence was not restricted to cinema interiors but also became a feature of department stores such as Selfridge's. On a smaller scale, an even more direct connection between archaeology and the influence of department stores on women and their tastes exists. In 1925, John Spedan Lewis hired Miss F. M. G. Lorimer, an Indian archaeology specialist with no experience in retail, as a buyer of Oriental artefacts at Peter Jones (now known as John Lewis).[50] Her experience in archaeology, including nine years' employment at the British Museum, influenced trends at the store heavily, as well as, presumably, those of other London department stores. The 'fascinating white silks' she introduced in 1926, for example, became extremely fashionable.[51]

Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern motifs dominated advertising during this period. Kathy Peiss has noted that 'advertisers created narratives about beauty culture throughout the ages, bypassing Graeco-Roman tradition in favour of Egypt and Persia', highlighting the fact that these ancient cultures were seen as the epitome of femininity.[52] This is not to say that advertising was the sole reason women associated themselves with the ancient Near East, however, they had been creating similar narratives related to femininity, and feminism, since the late nineteenth century. Yet the ubiquity of ready-to-wear clothing provided easier and cheaper access to fashion items for those below the upper and upper-middle classes. The rising interest in archaeology and the ancient world came at just the right time for its influence to spread to mass consumerism, allowing women to have a piece of luxury at a lower price, whether it be clothing, jewellery or home décor.

Jewellery

The growing interest in archaeology also coincided with cheaper jewellery production methods, thereby broadening the avenue through which women could experiment with archaeologically themed pieces. Curl notes that the 1920s allowed 'aspiring sisters' to follow the trends of their more privileged counterparts with 'less perfect jewellery'; although he does not go into detail, one can assume that he means the mass-produced jewellery that was newly available during the early twentieth century.[53]

A 1926 *Vogue* article entitled 'Jewels of the Ancients' explains that because of the predilection for ancient styles, it no longer mattered whether jewellery was made

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of precious or imitation materials if it was full of 'colour and adornment, charm and individuality'.[54] The invention of Bakelite in 1907 allowed for a greater number of women to purchase jewellery and home accessories that looked opulent at low prices. Bakelite became a key material for Egyptian revival pieces as it was the perfect durable material for emulating flashy oriental styles, particularly due to the variety of bright colours in which it could be made (see Fig. 11.5). In addition, its smooth finish was ideal for recreating the highly stylized strong lines and geometric motifs found in both ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern art and architecture, as well as in modernist design: Art Deco design and architecture too were influenced by their ancient counterparts.[55] Other inexpensive materials used included celluloid (invented in 1856) and chrome plating (first used during the 1920s), while items in pressed glass (particularly from Czechoslovakia) and silver provided an economic middle ground.

Figure 11.5 English Art Deco 'Egyptianesque' Bakelite and Celluloid necklaces, 1930s. From The Egyptian Revival Sale, Bonhams, 23 January 2008, Lot 135.

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Although Egyptian revival jewellery had been fashionable in preceding decades, the expense of these items had made them unattainable for most women. Rather than emulating luxury, they were often made from truly precious materials themselves, Cartier's range being the most notable.[56] Judy Rudoe classifies these items into two types: those prompted by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the interest in the discoveries that followed, as well as revival of interest in earlier discoveries, and those appearing after the internationally renowned Franco-Egyptian exhibition at the Louvre in 1911.[57]

To distinguish their creations from the new influx of Egyptian-themed jewellery that emerged after the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, Cartier began producing an even more expensive and unique range of pieces during the mid-1920s that incorporated fragments of actual Egyptian antiquities (see Fig. 11.6). The *Illustrated London News* article on these pieces states: the 'women interested in Egyptology, who desire to be in the Tutankhamen fashion, can now wear real ancient gems in modern settings as personal ornaments', indicating that women's interest in Egyptology was not niche, but was a common enough interest for it to be mentioned without need for explanation. This strongly suggests that interest in archaeology was a widespread trend among women.[58] Women's desire to wear genuine ancient fragments indicates their reverence for archaeology or at least an interest in learning about it, rather than blindly following trends that simply included unrealistic ancient-style motifs. Furthermore, the ownership of antiquities by women relates to a wider trend of women being collectors, a holdover from the Victorian period.

Women had a long history of collecting and curating practices, which peaked during the Victorian period, as a way of taking ownership of something when they had no property rights of their own.[59] Even for those who could not afford such precious pieces, there still appears to have been a keen interest in exploring femininity through replicating genuine ancient jewellery and learning about how ancient women expressed their own femininity. For example, the *Vogue* article referred to above depicts a variety of 'feminine accessories … to give one an idea of the amazing similarity between women's fads today and long ago'.[60] The fact that ancient and modern femininity are compared so directly further highlights the idea that during the early twentieth century, women were keen to align themselves with, or to emulate, their ancient counterparts.

Femininity and feminism

It was not only the femininity of exotic ancient women that the 1920s woman would have wanted to emulate; their rights and power would have also seemed attractive. While women's rights advocates often had their femininity stripped from them by their critics – particularly through depictions of the 'mannish' New Woman and comparisons to Amazons – they were able to consolidate feminism and femininity through ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern women who were considered both beautiful and powerful.

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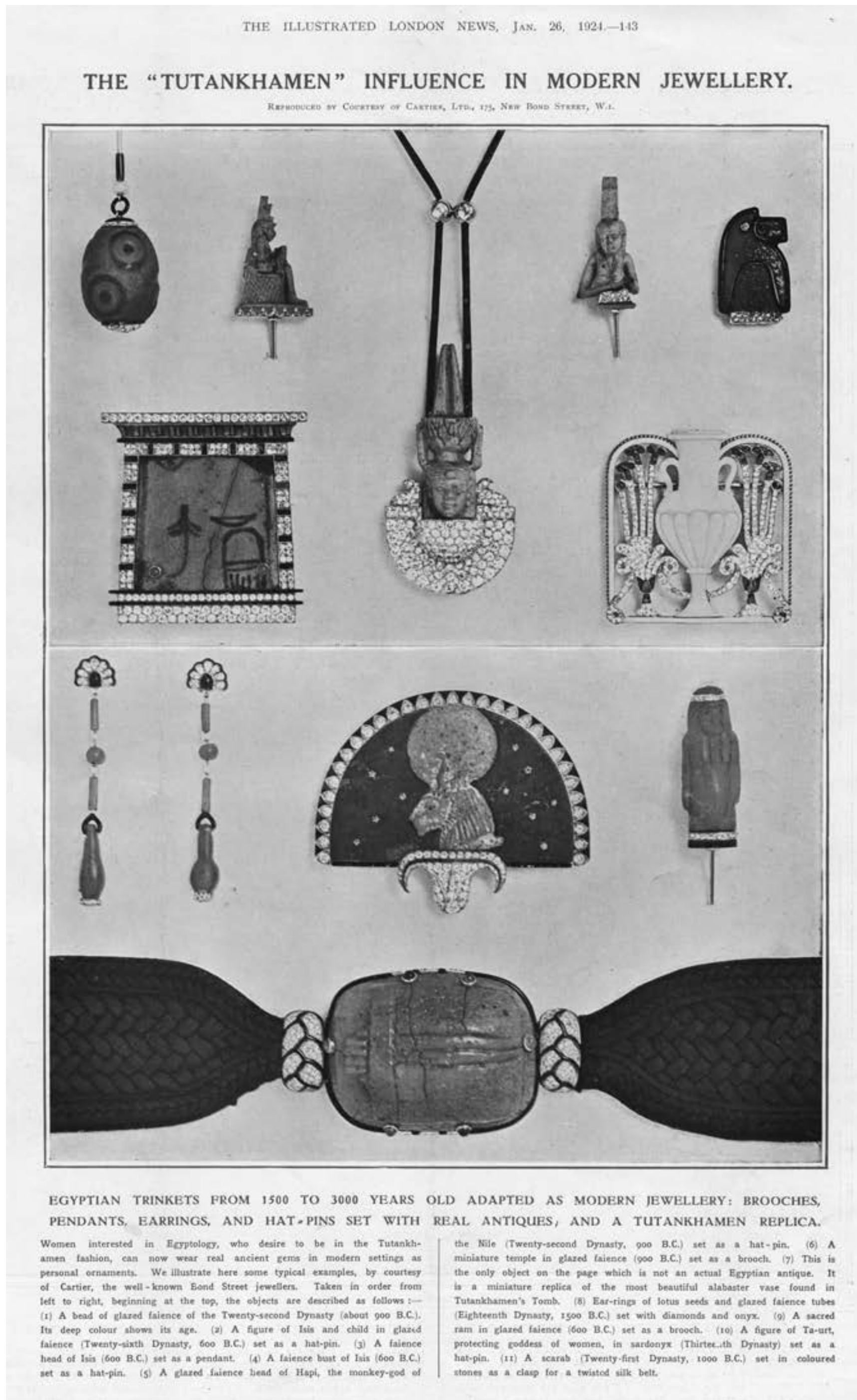

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, Jan. 26, 1924.—143

THE "TUTANKHAMEN" INFLUENCE IN MODERN JEWELLERY.

Reproduced by Courtesy of Cartier, Ltd., 175, New Bond Street, W.1.

EGYPTIAN TRINKETS FROM 1500 TO 3000 YEARS OLD ADAPTED AS MODERN JEWELLERY: BROOCHES, PENDANTS, EARRINGS, AND HAT-PINS SET WITH REAL ANTIQUES, AND A TUTANKHAMEN REPLICA.

Women interested in Egyptology, who desire to be in the Tutankhamen fashion, can now wear real ancient gems in modern settings as personal ornaments. We illustrate here some typical examples, by courtesy of Cartier, the well-known Bond Street jewellers. Taken in order from left to right, beginning at the top, the objects are described as follows:—(1) A bead of glazed faience of the Twenty-second Dynasty (about 900 B.C.). Its deep colour shows its age. (2) A figure of Isis and child in glazed faience (Twenty-sixth Dynasty, 600 B.C.) set as a hat-pin. (3) A faience head of Isis (600 B.C.) set as a pendant. (4) A faience bust of Isis (600 B.C.) set as a hat-pin. (5) A glazed faience head of Hapi, the monkey-god of the Nile (Twenty-second Dynasty, 900 B.C.) set as a hat-pin. (6) A miniature temple in glazed faience (900 B.C.) set as a brooch. (7) This is the only object on the page which is not an actual Egyptian antique. It is a miniature replica of the most beautiful alabaster vase found in Tutankhamen's Tomb. (8) Ear-rings of lotus seeds and glazed faience tubes (Eighteenth Dynasty, 1500 B.C.) set with diamonds and onyx. (9) A sacred ram in glazed faience (600 B.C.) set as a brooch. (10) A figure of Ta-urt, protecting goddess of women, in sardonyx (Thirteenth Dynasty) set as a hat-pin. (11) A scarab (Twenty-first Dynasty, 1000 B.C.) set in coloured stones as a clasp for a twisted silk belt.

Figure 11.6 Egyptian trinkets from 1,500 to 3,000 years old adapted as modern jewellery, © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans.

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The newly found interest in ancient women as a justification for women's rights was a direct result of new information gleaned from the very same archaeological discoveries that influenced not only design but also women's modern concepts of femininity. The discoveries of greatest interest to suffragists were those relating to Hatshepsut, whose mortuary temple was first excavated during the 1890s and was a continuing theme in early twentieth-century Egyptology, and the Code of Hammurabi, discovered in 1901, an ancient Babylonian law code of great significance that indicates a certain amount of equality and power for women. References to these artefacts and ancient women of standing pervade print media during the early twentieth century, both in specialist feminist or suffrage publications and in mainstream newspapers. The examples are too numerous to list, but the argument is always the same: if these ancient women had rights, then so too should the modern woman.[61]

As Melman argues, there was a growing interest in women's history from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, which coincided with the rise of first-wave feminism.[62] However, rather than merely writing women into history, these articles reinterpret the past from an explicitly feminist viewpoint, much like feminist history of the later twentieth century.[63] The fact that much of the knowledge gained was only recently discovered meant that it could be much more easily accommodated within a feminist agenda. Hatshepsut, a highly successful ruler and one of only a handful of true female pharaohs, was only rediscovered during the late nineteenth century because her name had been erased from the records by her successors. During a time when women had first systematically begun to construct feminist history, discoveries of such importance to women's history were perfectly suited to a feminist agenda. The first wave of feminism coincided with the development of archaeology as a discipline, and there were numerous links between the two.

One salient feature of these feminist ancient histories was the correlation between feminism and femininity. Barbara Caine contends that '[Victorian feminists] had sought particularly an end to the idea that womanliness or femininity necessarily involved physical and moral weakness, cowardice, and incompetence'; these ideals became more deep-rooted during the twentieth century, at the same time that knowledge of figures such as Hatshepsut was emerging from the past.[64] When the Egypt Exploration Fund (the Egypt Exploration Society, since 1919) excavated Hatshepsut's mortuary temple during the 1890s and following the renewal of the excavations in 1911 (and subsequent reconstruction), many women were drawn to Hatshepsut as a representation of their political goals given her power during her reign from c. 1478 to 1458 BC. Her beauty was equally praised.[65] Lectures about Hatshepsut were extremely popular among women, and some even treated her temple as a site of suffragette pilgrimage.

One early twentieth-century article contends that the 'New Woman' was not new at all, positing Hatshepsut herself as the original 'New Woman' who 'knew how to combine beauty and politics'.[66] In fact, a whole onslaught of early twentieth-century articles about ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern women in the popular press took the view that such women were on equal or almost equal terms with men. These articles regularly refer to beauty and femininity as going hand in hand with women's power, even down to

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describing their political successes in one paragraph and their beauty regimens in the next.[67] One could be both beautiful and politically active; perhaps they even infer that femininity and power were inextricably linked. In either case, the connection these articles make between feminine power and beauty in the past is perpetuated into the twentieth-century present by these very same articles. Michelle Tusan suggests that women were trying to actively promote the 'womanliness' of the 'New Woman', one component of which was motherhood.[68] Again, some articles reinforce ideas regarding femininity, motherhood and feminism in the past by indicating the high status enjoyed by mothers.[69] However, most interesting of all is that such articles repeatedly refer specifically to contemporary archaeological finds. Thus, not only were archaeology, feminism and femininity very much related during the early twentieth century, but in addition, due to the ubiquity of those themes, most well-read women would have been familiar with the connection.

Above all, the discovery of two breathtaking busts of Nefertiti in 1913 and 1933 sparked the largest cult following in terms of femininity and feminism. During the 1920s and 1930s, Nefertiti almost replaced Cleopatra as the symbol of Eastern beauty and power, but with one key difference: Nefertiti was a role model of intellectual value while Cleopatra remained a symbol of decadence and excessive sexuality. Lauded as both 'one of the most beautiful women in history' and as a 'feminist of 1375 BC', Nefertiti was completely novel to a modern audience and came to represent the ideal woman.[70]

A German team had discovered and retained the earlier polychrome bust, so no photographs of it were published in the British press until 1923, when they described the bust as having 'a haunting attraction surpassing the portraits of Cleopatra'.[71] In the years following, the British Museum and the Ashmolean Museum exhibited replicas of the bust, and Nefertiti's popularity grew, reaching a peak during the 1930s after a second quartzite bust of Nefertiti was found by British archaeologists on an Egypt Exploration Society excavation in 1933.[72]

Numerous periodicals featured fashion and beauty advice relating to Nefertiti, such as instructions on how to imitate her makeup, as well as portraying her as a feminist icon.[73] Interestingly, one of the justifications for her 'feminist' status was that archaeologists had deduced her high rank from the fact that she had the 'unusual honour' of being 'drawn to the same size and scale as the king [her husband Akhenaten]', again showing a direct connection between archaeology and women's culture.[74] By 1939, there was even a 'Nefertiti Club' formed for 'women suffering from one-eye defects' that encouraged them to embrace their beauty. The club emerged from theories positing that Nefertiti was blind in one eye, as the left eye on the polychrome bust lacks both pupil and iris.[75]

In the same year, an article in *Vogue* described the 'strange' new type of beauty that had become the ideal throughout the decade, 'very notably in Paris and London': an angular, unearthly and exotic enchantress with high cheek bones, often compared to Nefertiti.[76] Regarding the bust, the article states that 'no statue has, during the past twenty years, created so great a *furore*, so very many pictures and replicas, as that amazing polychrome head of Nefertiti', proving that women who were interested in performing femininity through the consumption of women's fashion and its associated publications

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were assumed to have been familiar with the queen.[77] Furthermore, the article describes Nefertiti's features as 'of the exotic order' and notes that depictions of Nefertiti are completely unlike the traditional forms of portraiture associated with ancient Egypt, indicating that the new style was partly responsible for the new ideals.[78] This style was, in fact, unique to the Amarna period, during which Nefertiti and Akhenaten reigned, and was characterized by elongated and particularly feminine features.[79] The style had only become widely known publicly during this period because of the bust, along with the Egyptian Exploration Society excavations from 1921 to 1936, making a strong case for the direct influence of archaeology on concepts of beauty and femininity.

Conclusion

During the early twentieth century, women actively engaged with ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern archaeology, using it to develop their sense of femininity and concepts of feminism. Closely related to women's relationships with colonialism and orientalism, the ancient world provided a myriad of influences for women's femininity, from innovations in fashion to traditions in domestic interiors. Archaeology and the ancient world featured heavily in theatre and cinema, both of which are of socio-historical importance for women. These media essentially acted as a means by which archaeological themes filtered into women's everyday lives and helped to reinforce ideals of ancient beauty and femininity. Furthermore, the rise in women's consumerism and the invention of new materials and techniques of mass production meant that archaeologically themed products and popular entertainments were increasingly accessible. With women being the prime target audience, their desire to emulate female figures of the ancient world was exploited. However, it was not just in superficial pursuits that women exhibited an interest in archaeology: powerful women who had been discovered through archaeological excavations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became symbols of the growing suffrage and women's rights movements. British women drew on ancient historical motifs to build on a sense of aesthetic, intellectual and social heritage, both in terms of how they performed gender and fought for greater rights and liberation.

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