

G8 (week 2, Friday)

The Language of Gender Ancient Egyptian Love Songs

HPAH5013/6013 – Gendered Lives in Ancient
Egypt

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Readings

- ❑ Landgrafova, R., Navratilova, H. 2009. *Sex and the Golden Goddess I: Ancient Egyptian Love Songs in Context*. Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology.
- ❑ Navratilova, H., Landgrafova, R. 2015. *Sex and the Golden Goddess II: World of the Love Songs*. Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology.
- ❑ McDowell, A.G. 1999. *Village Life in Ancient Egypt: Laundry Lists and Love Songs*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr.
- ❑ Sweeney, D. 2008. Gender and requests in New Kingdom literature. In: Graves Brown, C. *Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt: Don you wig for a joyful day*. Swansea: Classical Pr. of Wales. 191-214.
- ❑ Lichtheim, M. 1976. *Ancient Egyptian Literature II: New Kingdom*. Berkeley: Univ. of Berkeley Pr. 179-193.
- ❑ Manniche, L. 1997. *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt*. London: Kegan Paul. Esp. 52-116.





(Erotic) language

- What is said is depending on genre and sources – functionality of sources – “Sitz im Leben” (seat in life – where is this text at home?)
 - Mythologies
 - Tales
 - Wisdom texts (teachings)
 - Curses
 - Poems

Decent language?

- Tomb of Ti (OK)
 - Two men fight in boat – *Come on, you fornicator.*
- Swear words
 - For women who played dirty tricks on others – *k3.t t3hw.t* – “vulva prostitute”????
- Yes, usually – Pap. Lansing 14,8: *your moth does not fornicate; you have abstained from adulterous talk*

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 - Mythologies
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 - Poems
- Myths – things said straight forward
- (love) poems – word plays, *double entendres*
 - How can this be replicated by modern interpreters and understood by modern readers?

Sexist statements?

- ❑ written material → difficult to pin down outright sexist statement
- ❑ Nowhere said that boys are better than girls or male babies would be preferred
- ❑ Only example = maybe Instructions of Ani: “take a wife when you are young, so that she produces a son for you,” but statement based on the fact that only a son could inherit his father’s job

Teachings of Ptahhotep (6th dyn.), Ani (NK), Ankhsheshonqi (LP)

- "Keep your wife from power, restrain her... In this way you will make her stay in your house."
- "Beware the women who is stranger, who is not known in her town. Do not stare at her as she passes by and do not have intercourse with her."
- "He who makes love to a woman who has a husband will be killed on her doorstep."

Instructions of Ani

- ❑ text = giving advice to up-and-coming young middle class men
- ❑ working male official vs. stay-at-home wife
- ❑ man is asked about his position
- ❑ woman is asked about her husband

Literacy and gender

- Administration = highly bureaucratic
- working in government meant being (at least partly) literate in order to deal with documents and record keeping
- Schools (often based at royal palace) trained young boys to be scribes + follow a career in the government, military, temple
- We can only prove MALE students
- Maybe special case Deir el-Medina???

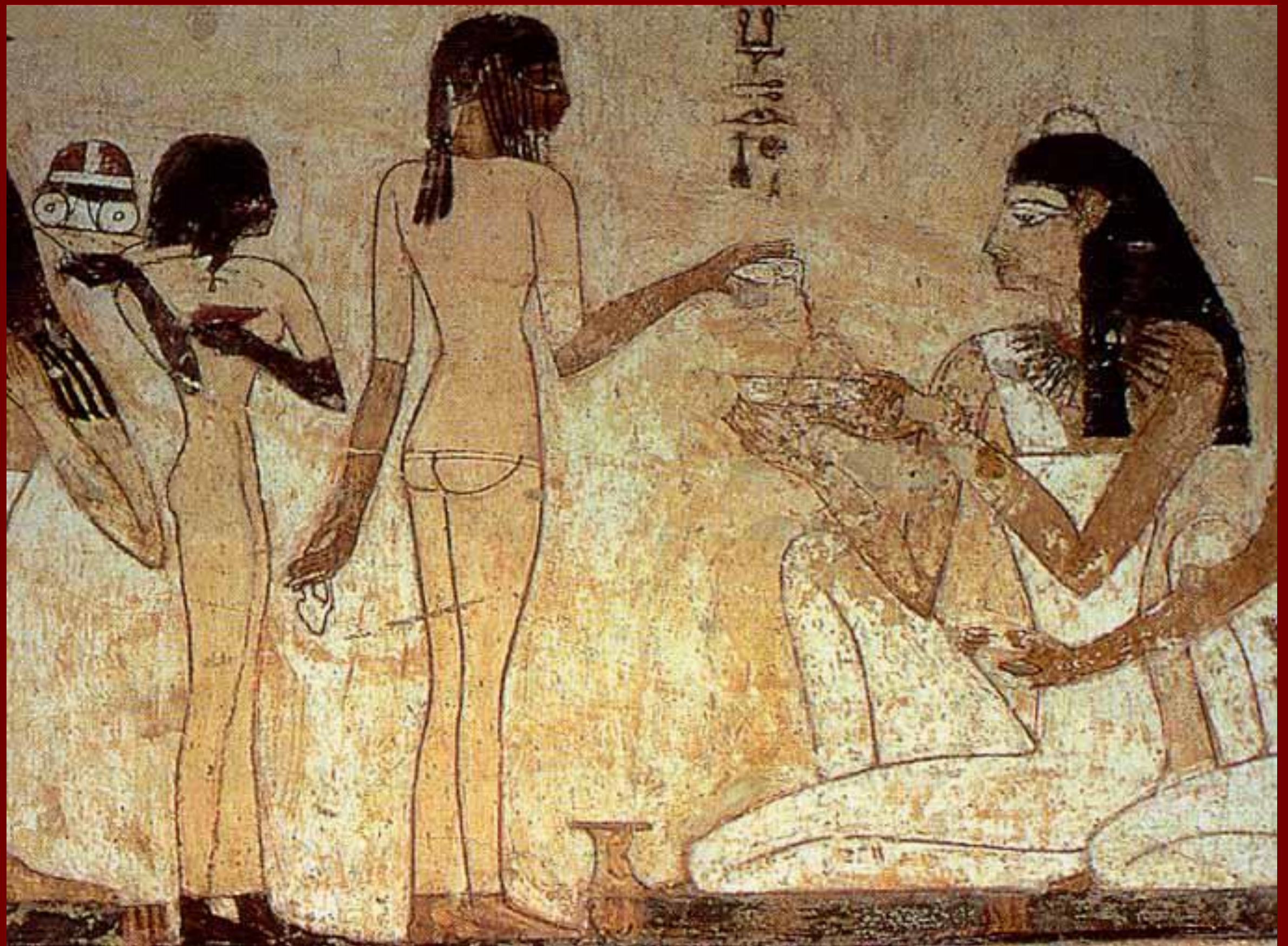


Literacy and gender

- ❑ BUT: evidence for “pockets” of female literacy
 - royal women
 - wives of high officials
- ❑ → could afford to become literate
- ❑ Females seems not to have attended school like males
- ❑ May not have worked in positions of authority that required
- ❑ → For them the accomplishment would be useful in legal affairs and as an aid to a cultured life (Baines/Eyre)

Legal texts

- written evidence → women = same legal rights as men
- Both could buy, sell, own, will, inherit, be debtors/creditors
- same status in courts of law: bring suits against others, testify
- Legal matters = against idea of a patriarchal and male-dominated Egyptian society???



John Baines (1987)

- Egyptian love poetry stands out within Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern literature because of its subjective quality and concern with individual emotions, as against centripetal, social values. It belongs to a “folk” world comparable with that of some literary narratives of the same period, and looks to an oral content that is ostensibly not the high culture of earlier texts ... (the) implied sexual freedom – perhaps a phantasy in a different reality – is more visible in the Egyptian text than in the Song of Songs...

Defying genres?

- Found in all cultures
- Often escapes definition
- Shows elements of formal poetry (authored) AND folk songs
- Genre of Egyptian written culture, BUT shows all characteristics of **oral literature** (Ong) → meant to be recited, sung, performed
 - Formulaic, frequent coordination (additive style – and, and, and), situational, aggregative (parallel, antithetic closeness to human world (empathy, participation))
 - Love songs concerned about certain situations (I found my beloved)
- Several Egyptian terms:
 - In titles: *sekhmekh-jb* (that which makes the heart forget), *nedjem* (that which is sweet/pleasant)
 - Labelled as: *hsw* (songs), *r3w* (utterances), *tjesw* (verses), *mdwt* (words)

Verschriftlichung (bring into writing)

- For love songs only made possible by changes in Amarna Period (focus on spoken language, introduction of Late Egyptian as written language)
- But might be captured assumed as oral genre in other songs already during OK – Harper songs

Ancient Egyptian love songs – to be said by a woman

- *Come, my brother, swim to me!
The water is deep in my love
Which carries me to you.
We are in the midst of the stream,
I clasp the flowers to my breast
Which is naked and drips with water.
But the moon makes them bloom like the lotus.
I give you my flowers
because they are beautiful,
And you are holding my hand
In the middle of the water.*

Ancient Egyptian love songs – to be said by a man

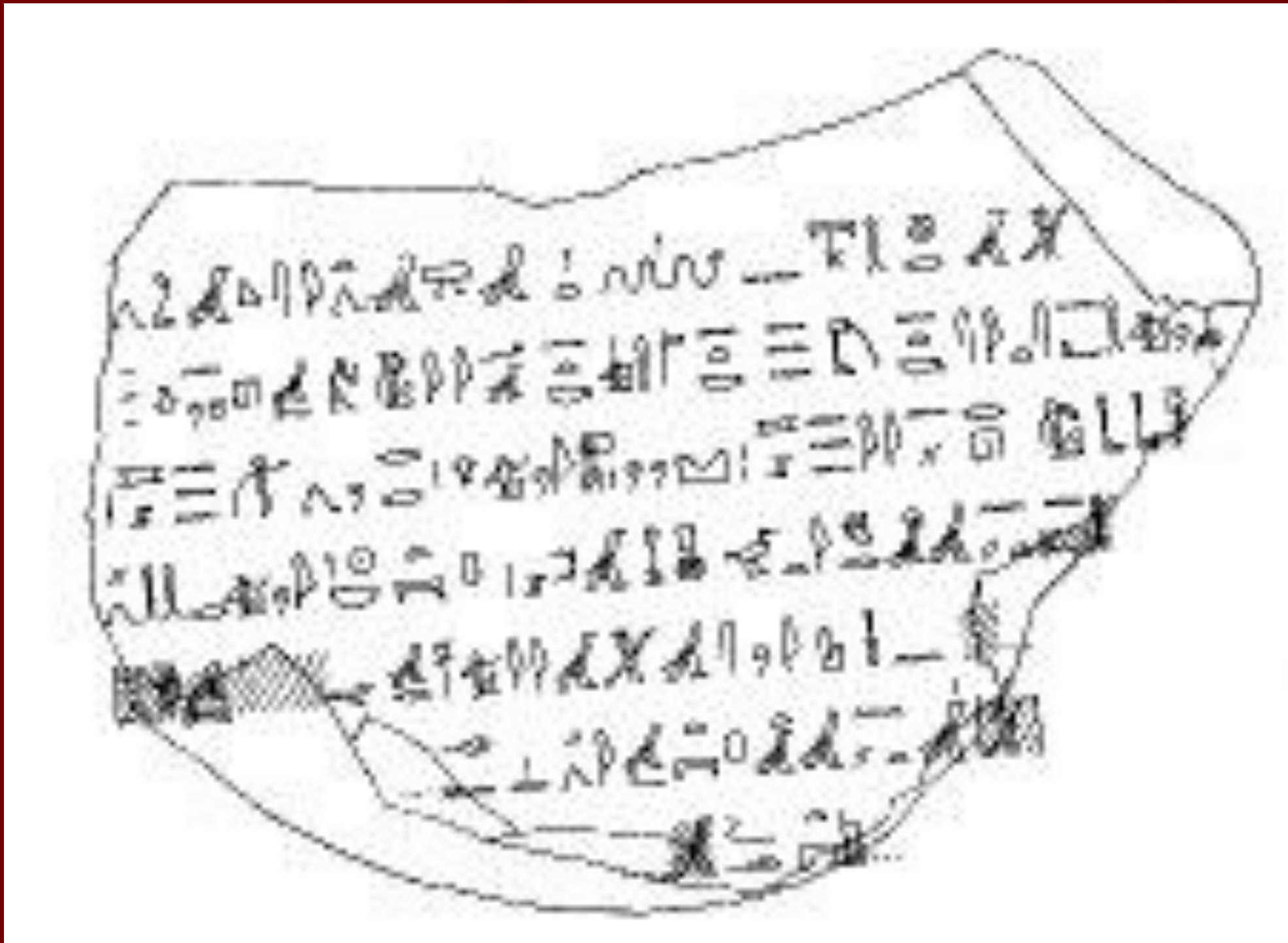
- *The little sycamore
That she planted with her own hand
Opens its mouth to speak.
Its rustling is as sweet
As a draught of honey.
How beautiful its graceful branches
In their greenness.
On it hangs young fruit and fruit that is ripe,
Redder than the blood-red jasper.*

Ancient Egyptian love songs – to be said by a man

- *The love of my loved one is on the other shore.
An arm of the river lies between us,
And crocodiles lurk on the sand-banks.
But I enter the water, I plunge into the flood;
My eager heart carries me swiftly over the
waves;
I swim as surely as though I were walking on
solid ground.
Love, it is love that gives me strength,
Averting the perils of the river.*

BM EA65942

Limestone ostracon: on one side only, six lines of a love-song and one line of a prayer.



Ancient Egyptian love songs

- *My boat sails downstream
In time to the stroke of the oarsmen.
A bunch of reeds is on my shoulder,
And I am travelling to Memphis, "Life of the Two Lands".
And I shall say to the god Ptah, Lord of Truth:
"Give me my fair one tonight."
The god Ptah is her tuft of reeds,
The goddess Sekhmet is her posy of blossoms,
The goddess Earit is her budding lotus,
The god Nefertum is her blooming flower,
My love will be happy!
The dawn irradiates her beauty.
Memphis is a crop of pomegranates,
Placed before the god with the handsome countenance.*

