

Eroticism and Sensuality in *Papyrus Westcar*

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Beyond a certain cult to whom we sometimes want to connect the Egyptians and their monumental constructions, religious beliefs or ways of understanding life and death, they were real human beings similar to ourselves. Even recognizing that pharaonic Egypt kept a certain decorum and reserve on themes concerning sexuality (with a monumental artistic spoil, early as pre-historical ages as far as 3000 years of history, most of the pornographic iconography which reaches the present time is from late eras, some of the New Kingdom but the majority from Greco-roman period), the Egyptians lived it as we live our own: either discreetly or sometimes in an exuberant way, and also giving reason to a certain pornographic nature or sickly minds, some even covered by their complex religion. Adultery, polygamy, incest, prostitution, homosexuality, masturbation and even necrophilia and bestiality¹,

¹ About these last issues, there aren't as much documental, textual or iconographic evidences, as the first ones. Besides those, we all know, from the world conception of Atum through masturbation, and the divine conception *post mortem* of Horus, that Isis's magic, assuming the form of bird, permitted to conceive with the dead Osiris, there are also ithyphallic gods, gods with aggressive sexual behaviour and a structure of thought that admitted a powerful sexual life after death. Moreover, of course, we have Herodotus testimony in II, 89: «When they die, the notable wives aren't immediately sent to embalm, the same with very beautiful or highly considered women; they'll be delivered to embalm when they are dead for two or three days already. They act this way to prevent that embalmers united themselves to these women; it is said that one of them was surprised while he was uniting himself to the corpse of a very recent deceased woman, and was exposed by a colleague». Moreover, in II 46, Herodotus relates one event that was probably a ritual act: «The inhabitants of Mendes venerated all animals of the caprine species, males, more than females, due to the fact they possess horns of a larger dimension; there is one they venerate more then the others. When he dies, there is an enormous grief in the entire district. The goat and god Pan in Egyptian language were called Mendes. At my time, something extraordinary happened in that district: a goat had sexual intercourse with a woman at everybody's sight, this act became to be an object of sexual exhibition». Lise Manniche talks also about an act of exhibitionism concerning

are human and divine practices, real or dreamt, documented in texts and images from ancient Egypt.²

Egyptian tales are a valuable source of information that according to Gustave Lefebvre, «offer us society, its hierarchy, different classes, and also moral ideas and religious beliefs, a faithful portrait, full of life, rich colours, details carefully written, which allow us to see into the most deep of the Egyptian soul. Out of this, it matters not only to the history of literature, but probably even more to civilizations»³. To get the closest approach possible to «moral ideas» from the «Egyptian soul» that Lefebvre mentions, we propose to analyze two of the five tales generally designated as *Khufu and the Magicians*, which come to us in a single manuscript: *Papyrus Berlin 3033*, known as the *Papyrus Westcar*.⁴

The justification of this designation is commonly accepted, usually with no discussion, because of information of Richard Lepsius information, whose manuscript was given to him by Miss Mary Westcar, during his stay in England (1838/1839). Nevertheless, we can register a small imprecision: Miss Westcar got married about twenty years earlier, on the 3rd July 1819 and was living in Italy when Lepsius was in England and she had never been in Egypt. What would have happened then? The parents, John and Mary Westcar, were friends and neighbours of Dr. John Lee, lawyer, antiquary and patron of science, whose name was also associated to another papyrus, a judicial papyrus from Lord's Amherst

bull Apis, which virility was reinforced when a woman showed her intimacy. She also relates that in the books of dreams, of which are known two examples, one written to the man (*Papyrus Chester Beatty III recto* or *BM 10683*, from circa 1175 B.C.) and another written to the woman (*Papyrus Carlsberg XIII*, which is in Copenhagen, from II century B.C.), can be found examples of relations between humans and animals, showing that if in reality they didn't exist, they lived in a wide erotic imagination: «Man could copulate with jerbos [small rodent from the dipodideos] swallows and pigs, while women could choose between the rat, horse, donkey, sheep, wolf, lion, crocodile, snake, baboon, ibis or hawk. Frequently dreams were auguries of fate» (Hérodote, *L'Égypte. Histoires, livre II*, Paris, 1997, pp. 63-65 and 109-111; see Manniche, L., *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt*, London – New York – Bahrain, 2002, pp. 28 and 100-102.

² See Manniche, L., *op. cit.*, 2002, pp. 12-30.

³ Lefebvre, G., *Romans et Contes égyptiens de l'époque pharaonique*, Paris, 1988, p. XXV.

⁴ See Canhão, T. F., *A literatura egípcia do Império Médio: espelho de uma civilização*, Ph. D thesis in *History – Ancient History*, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, 2010, Volume Two, pp. 21-75.

collection. A nephew of the couple, Henry Westcar, the sole member of the family who visited Egypt, would have brought it to England in 1824 and gave it to Dr. Lee. Lepsius visited Lee in 1838, who granted him the papyrus to study, which was kept in his possession till his death. After he deceased, in 1886, his son found it between his papers and donated it to the Berlin Museum⁵. Apparently Lepsius and Mary never crossed their ways, remaining her name connected to the papyrus, probably a confusion of Lepsius or John Lee, due to the proximity to the Westcar family, at the exchange moment of the papyrus from the hands of the first to the second. Anyway the origin of the name of the papyrus is the Westcar family; not Mary but her cousin Henry.

The five tales are artificially connected with each other and only the three middle texts are complete, missing the initial part of the first and the end of the last one. Obviously the inexistence of the beginning and the end, gives the possibility that originally they could have been five or any other number of texts. Lefebvre, for instance, based on the possibility that the builder of the Great Pyramid could have had nine sons and the fact that each tale is introduced by a different son, opens the possibility that they could have been originally nine⁶, the same number of kings of the V dynasty, so we say. We do know for a fact how the nine was important to Egyptians in its magic symbolic of numbers; plurality of pluralities. Anyway, the perusal of the *Papyrus Westcar* allows us to understand that it is a work of political propaganda, written with the purpose of relating the origins of the kings of the V dynasty. «The birth of the V dynasty», the name ascribed today, is unquestionable, although at the time of that relate it didn't make any sense. It's mostly the treatment given to the «attachment to the fourth tale»⁷, which in

⁵ Dawson, R. W.; Uphill, E. P.; Bierbrier, M. L. (1995), *Who Was Who in Egyptology*, London, 1995, pp. 241-242 and 438.

⁶ Lefebvre, G., *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁷ Simpson says, «it's presented as a sort of an attachment»; Lefebvre calls it firstly «a supplemental chapter» and ahead, «supplement to the fourth tale: the birth of the kings of the V dynasty»; (Simpson, W. K., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven/London, 1973, p. 15; Lefebvre, G., *op. cit.*, p. 70; Parkinson, R. B., *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems (1940-1640 B.C.)*, Oxford, 1997, p. 105.

our opinion, is not correct. On the contrary, it's the climax of this text. All the other tales are the «attachments». There it is legitimate the lawfully right to the throne of the kings of the V dynasty, through the relate of the birth of its three first kings – Userkaf, Sahure Neferirkare Kakai – delivered by Isis, Nephtis, Meshkhenet, Heket and Khnum, having the former narratives created the favourable environment to their divine birth.

The manuscript is a copy from circa 1600 B.C., II Intermediate period, more precisely, from the Hyksos period, from XV or XVI dynasty⁸, approximately a thousand years later the events there related. Although the colophon hasn't survived, we believe that it wasn't the original, which would probably be from the XII dynasty or even earlier, with a possible decrease of the temporal spacing between the literary dating and the historical dating to half. The original length of papyrus is unknown, it actually measures 1.69 meters, but its width, today around 33.5 centimetres, being admissible that it could have had initially 38/39 centimetres, due to the fact that the text has no margins and that usually a few centimetres blank around it were left, to protection of the text in case of deterioration of the papyrus.⁹

Its state of preservation is not the best, alternating lighter passages with others darker and exhibiting in between a few zones very badly treated; there are holes in the papyrus. It's totally written in lines, 295 in overall, some of them with many flaws, in a very cursive hieratic writing, set in twelve “pages” of 25, 26 or 27 lines, with exception of the first one that only has twelve lines separated by a blank column with circa 1.5 centimetres, space not always totally respected¹⁰. Its much deteriorated starting allows us to imagine that one or two pages might be missing, being the first related tale practically inexistent. It merely survived the funerary offer that ends and with which the king Khufu thanks king Djoser and his first lecturer priest, whose name's

⁸ Erman, A., *Die Märchen des Papyrus Westcar*, I, (einleitung und commentar), Berlin, 1890a, p. 1; Lefebvre, G., *op. cit.*, p. 70; Parkinson, W. K., *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 105.

⁹ See Parkinson, R. B. and Quirke, S., *Papyrus*, London, 1995, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ Erman, A., *op. cit.*, 1890a, plates 1 to 12.

also missing, the relate of the prodigy just attended. Nine “pages” in *recto* supplemented with three more in the *verso*, at the end of which the text abruptly terminates, being also lost, as we mentioned, the end of the fifth tale.

One day, about 4.600 years ago, king Khufu fought tedious hearing fantastic tales, each one presented by one different son, where magic was the main character. In the middle of Ancient Kingdom, two historical scenarios were imagined: on one hand the action occurs in Khufu’s time, in the IV dynasty, on the other hand we can hear relates of events occurred years earlier, in the III or even in the IV dynasty, focusing several kings. From the three complete tales of the *Papyrus Westcar*, we will only come up with two, for being the only ones that emanate a strong erotic and sensual charge. One of them, the second on the papyrus alignment, is usually pointed out as «Un prodige sous le roi Nebka. Le conte du mari trompé» (Gustave Lefebvre) or simply «The deceived husband» (Luís Araújo). It’s also known by the titles: «Le crocodile de cire» (Pierre Grandet), «Châtiments d’amours adultères» (Pascal Vernus) or «The Marvel which happened in the time of king Nebka» (William K. Simpson)¹¹. The king’s son, the future sovereign Khafre, tells that when the first lecturer priest Ubainer attended the founder of the III dynasty, Nebka («the *ka* is the lord») – known as Sanakht («strong protection») and brother of his successor, the famous Djoser –, to Ptah’s temple, in Memphis, his wife committed adultery continuously, having Ubainer been informed of the situation through a faithful woman-servant. This case compels him to execute a wax sculpture of a crocodile, to read a magic formula and deliver it to the servant with precise instructions. In the fulfilment of these instructions, the wax crocodile transformed itself into a real crocodile capturing the man when he was taking his usual bath in the lake of Ubainer’s house, after consuming the act. They remain seven days at

¹¹ Lefebvre, G., *op. cit.*, p. 74; Araújo, L. M., *Mitos e Lendas do Antigo Egipto*, Lisboa, 2005, p. 163; Grandet, P., *Contes de l’Égypte ancienne*, Paris, 1998, p. 65; Vernus, P., *Chants d’amour de l’Égypte antique*, Paris, 1992, p. 44; Simpson, W. K., *op. cit.*, p. 16.

the bottom of the lake till Ubainer's return. When he returned with the king, who he informed about the situation, the man, who was still alive, was condemned to death by the sovereign that offered him to the crocodile. The wife of the first lecturer priest was also condemned to death by the pharaoh, but by fire. The tale ends with a funerary offer exactly the same of the first tale, changing only the names of the honoured.

The «Tale of the deceived husband» is clearly a text where good moral behaviours are defended, because adultery was a behaviour condemned by the ancient Egyptians. In the epoch of these tales, the Old Empire, punishment was death, only ordered by the pharaoh; later, in the Greco-Roman epoch, these matters could have been solved through divorce. The tale reveals that the Egyptians had an erotic imagination quite sophisticated, but much closer to an esthetical dimension than to pornography and apparently, denouncing feelings at anyone's hand.

Our attention could rely upon several aspects of the text, from magic to death penalty, going through the king's role, through the offerings or by the tedious of Khufu, but, what really matters is the analyse of the adulterer behaviour and, especially, the way it is transmitted. After Ubainer left with the king Sanakht, the text says through several lacunae:

«So, Ubainer's wife fell in love with a man... Then she sent him a box full of clothes... He came with the servant. A few days later, as there was a pavilion in Ubainer's garden, he told Ubainer's wife: "There is certainly a pavilion in Ubainer's garden! Well, let's have a moment there!" Then, [the wife] of Ubainer sent a message to the chief servants who was in charged of the garden saying: "Ordain to prepare the pavilion [of the garden]". She spent there all day drinking with the man happy... And when night fell, he invited her to go down to the lake and then the woman-servant»¹²

¹² PW 1, 23 to 2, 23.

Due to the papyrus state, this phrase is kept in suspension, leaving the doubt upon the woman-servant's task.

The first impression is that besides the name of the pharaoh Sanakht it just appears Ubainer's name. Never named are: the wife, the lover, the chief of woman-servants, and the woman-servant who always accompanies the wife. We do know the importance of names in the pharaonic Egypt! What really mattered was the act itself, to allow a conclusion that reached all the Egyptian society, and not the persons themselves. Only those on the moral and good behaviour' side were nominee. This situation is reinforced, as on other tales, by the name given to the deceived husband that shapes his character. The name Ubainer is composed by the union of the *uba* verb, which means «to pierce (stone)», «open», «explore», «reveal», with the substantive *iner* that means exactly «stone», «rock»¹³. We may, then, translate this name for “he who pierces stone”, that in this context has clearly a sexual connotation which means a powerful phallus. It's an indication of virility of its title-holder that only could end well in this story. Ubainer solves the question favourably assisted by magic, but the final word and the punishment of the prevaricators that could only be applied by the pharaoh, whose power hangs over the tale, the same as other pharaohs upon other tales, bearing the stamp of political propaganda.

Ubainer's wife simply fell in love with a man with whom she had no daily contact. To show him her intentions she sent him a box full of clothes. A woman-servant took the clothes and returned with a man. Such a gift might infer that the man was of a lower social condition, and only through this passage, it's not clear whether he came with the woman-servant to express his gratitude for the gift or for any other reason. He only took the liberty for a direct sexual approach a few days later, making the proposition to go to the pavilion of the garden and there “have a good moment”. At this point, there is a clear intention of privacy, a certain erotic tension, a sexual charge, because it seems that until that moment he was received at Ubainer's house like a

¹³ Faulkner, R. O., *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford, 1996, pp. 23-24 and 58.

normal visitor. From this point on the situation will change to another, which was apparently unusual, especially to unwanted and indiscreet, regards.

The woman didn't sustain unnecessary conversations, neither false prejudicial excuse, confirming the initial interest, giving the orders to prepare the pavilion where she spent the day drinking with the man. Unfortunately here, it's neither the elegance nor decency with which this theme is treated that deprives us of knowing what happened in the pavilion, but due to the fact that this part of the papyrus is quite damaged. However, one word, or at least what lasts of it, seems to have survived: the word «happy». Such happiness culminates in the final act: the refreshing bath at the lake. The bath is the element that shows us that these visits to the pavilion of Ubainer's garden were regular and continuous, as later on Ubainer will affirm explicitly when speaking to his chief of servants: «When the man walks down the lake, as his daily habit, you'll throw immediately the crocodile... after him»¹⁴.

When finally we make ready to work out magic, we have another description:

«Then, Ubainer's wife sent a message to the chief of servants who was in charge of the garden, to say: "Make the pavilion of the garden ready. Look, I shall go there to rest!" Then the pavilion was prepared with all sorts of good things. They [sic] go there, and there they spent a nice day with the man. At nightfall, the man did what he usually does. Then, the chief of servants immediately threw the wax crocodile to the water. He transforms into a seven cubits crocodile and grabs the man (with his mouth)»¹⁵.

There are clearly dissonances with the first description. On the first time, the message to the chief of servants was dry: «Make the pavilion of the garden ready». This time it seems that there was the necessity

¹⁴ *PW* 2, 27-2, 28.

¹⁵ *PW* 3, 5-3, 12.

for a justification: «Make the pavilion of the garden ready. Look, I shall go there to rest!» Before due to the bad shape of the papyrus or not, we «only» know that they drank, the «pavilion was prepared with all sorts of good things». More than the creation of a favourable environment, it seems a way of presenting those who served well. The first time they found happiness, this time «they had a nice day». Now the idea given is more of joyful routine and less of happiness than the initiation provides. Actually, it was a daily routine, as we have seen before and now reinforced with one more phrase inscribed with this meaning: «And when the night fell, the man did what he daily did».

Another point to speak about is the behaviour of the servants. We have the chief servant who was in charge of the garden and a woman-servant. Their roles are antagonistic. Or they have the same role but respond to characters that are in opposite sides. The chief of the servants is faithful to the master of the house, being his eyes, his ears, and even the one who, in his absence will run the punishment prepared by him for both lovers. A person from whom the housewife keeps apart, communicating only through «messages» always sent at distance. Always in the shadow, he will finally watch out the necessary and sufficient to relate the case to his master, without, due to the bad state of the papyrus, letting us know exactly how. Therefore the woman-servant is a «friend and confidant» of the mistress of the house being through her that she approaches initially the man. She was the one who gave the man the clothes as a gift, and possibly the complementary message, introducing him at her mistress's house. It was her, who in the first description, in truly connivance with the illicit, could have been vigilant in the garden, revealing the insecurity in which the act occurred.

One of the passages is yet doubtful. In the second description, it is clearly said: «They went there and had a nice day with the man». There is no doubt: Ubainer's wife and her woman-servant were the only two feminine characters of this tale. The first doubt arises from the reading of this excerpt of the papyrus. None of the consulted photographs, those published by A. Erman in 1890 and those of W. D. Davies

published in 1988, both of good quality, allow the total reading of this word at the end of the ninth line of third “page”, having to rely upon the transcriptions made by Erman in 1890 to hieroglyphic Egyptian, and by Blackman, in 1936, this one published by Davies together with the most recent photographs of the papyrus. Erman read this passage keeping the missing character,              

is solved. We may as well accept to be told that it could be an error of the original or of the copyist, and that it's necessary to do a change in context (hard to do if we want to present side by side the hieroglyphic Egyptian transcription, the transliteration and the translation!). As we have already seen in other tales, the mistakes were very frequent; in the lines that we now scrawl, we will still prove a clear pronoun change that, in a certain way, proves a weak knowledge of its application or, at least, certain carelessness. Nevertheless, we understand that if the text is not explicit, doubt is legitimate. It can be said that that in the previous actions developed in the pavilion, the narrative points out the involvement of only two lovers. But the uncompleted phrase «and when the night came, he immediately made the invitation to go down to the lake and then the woman-servant», if it's not said what the woman-servant was supposed to do, it doesn't say what she was doing there either, in such an intimate ambiance in the company of two other characters! Another argument that could be used to contradict this opinion is the fact that in the end there are only two and not three convicted! However, even there we are prevented from being objective, once that in no circumstance the woman-servant was submitted to any punishment. Even if it was only to be faithful to her mistress in a litigation of this nature against her master, the truth is that she didn't commit any adultery, after all the illicit in focus in this tale.

Deductive error or truth? We ignore other examples of this practice in ancient Egypt, but from what we can deduce through the mutilations of the text, it seems that we can have here the registration of one of the most ancient manifestations of a sexual relationship between three people, behaviour generically named today by the French expression *ménage à trois*. As far as we know, Egyptian tales register at least another case in which the conditions of the text determinate the doubt of the investigators, associated to sexual behaviours of the ancient Egyptians. The conjugation between the fact that nothing is clearly expressed and the fact of being a text despoiled of parts that could be enlightening, it reminds us of *The Tale of the King Neferkaré and General Sasenet*. There, one king, possibly Pepi II, is watched by «the

first amateur detective» related by History that followed the king in a series of surreptitious displacements to general's home. Apparently they were love visits¹⁷. Also there, nothing is explicit, not even the text is completed, which feeds the doubt: homosexual behaviour or not? As in the «Tale of the deceived husband», it only exists the idea of a certain furtive and conspiracy ambience, with indicia that allow us to jump to certain conclusions, without being, however, bearer of any certainty.

However, for a plot in which the theme is clearly condemned by coeval society, adulterer's behaviour was less than furtive. It seems that Ubainer's wife wanted to be uncovered! At least that was the author's wish. Due to this fact, we have our doubts about the fact that the woman-servant could or could have not been surveying! That is expressed nowhere! Perhaps due to this, the tale is marked by the insistence in the number seven: seven fingers length for the wax crocodile, seven cubits of length for the real crocodile, seven days stood the priest lecturer with the king and that the man survived in the bottom of the lake at the crocodile's mouth. Seven, the sum of the plurality with the totality: the tale should be an example for anyone, culminating in an exemplar punishment for everybody. Perfect!

¹⁷ None of the three fragments of this tale (one in wood from the XVIIIth dynasty, one ostracum from the XXth dynasty and a theban papyrus from the XXVth dynasty, written in a similar style to those of the *Papyrus Westcar* tales and seemed to reflect also persons and behaviours of the Old Kingdom) presents the end of the narrative, but its plot has risen an inflamed discussion about who might be the person that enjoys the love favours of the king. Apparently it could have been the general Sasetet himself, to whose place the king ran furtively at dead of night, until just because it's known for sure that in ancient Egypt, «other sources show that homosexuality was seen as an aberration of the ideal pattern of familiar life, similar to adultery» (Parkinson, R. B., *Voices from Ancient Egypt, an Anthology of Middle Kingdom Writings*, London, 1991, pp. 54-56). The denouncing of this behaviour shouldn't let us vacillate for being the figure of the king. When, perhaps, the words «god» or «divine» are applied to the Egyptian sovereign, it's not a reference to the physical being but to the sacred character of his function. He would be more a «king-priest» than a «king-god», once his practice derives from the religious commitment assumed before the gods, in whose will his individual action is dissolved. In fact, the pharaoh was a man that sometimes was laid across the divine word, which, even so, marked a great difference towards the common of the mortals (Canhão, T. F., «*O meu caminho é bom*». *O Conto do Camponês Eloquente. Texto hieróglifo, transliteração, tradução comentada e análise de uma fonte documental*, MA dissertation in History of Pre-Classical Civilizations – Area of Egyptology, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa, 2003, p. 205).

If in this tale the hastiness of Ubainer's wife allowed a certain exaltation of sex, the next one tends more to stimulation and pleasure of the senses. The third tale in alignment with the *Papyrus Westcar* is not that prosaic; on the contrary, it is an authentic exercise of aesthetics. Known as «The Boating party» (M. Lichtheim), «The nautical trip» (Luís Araújo), «Un prodige sous le roi Snéfrou. Le conte des rameuses» (Gustave Lefebvre), «L'eau pliée en deux» (Pierre Grandet), «Les distractions du pharaon Snéfrou» (Pascal Vernus), «The Marvel which happened in the reign of King Snefru» (William K. Simpson) or «How Djaja-em-ankh saved the day» (Lise Manniche)¹⁸, has now as a reporter prince Bauefré. Searching a way of occupying king's Snefru time, founder of the IVth dynasty, father and predecessor of Khufu, his priest lecturer chief Djadjaemankh, suggested him a promenade in the royal lake, in a vessel conducted by the most beautiful girls of the palace. During the promenade, one of them let fall into the water a fish-pendant of new turquoise¹⁹ that garnished her hairs. She stopped

¹⁸ Lichtheim, M., *Ancient Egyptian Literature. A Book of readings*, vol. I: *The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1975, p. 216; Araújo, L. M., *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 167; Lefebvre, G., *op. cit.*, p. 77; Grandet, P., *op. cit.*, p. 68; Vernus, P., *op. cit.*, p. 138; Simpson, W. K., *op. cit.*, p. 19; Manniche, L., *How Djadja-Em-Ankh saved the Day: A Tale from Ancient Egypt*, New York, 1977.

¹⁹ In the Middle Kingdom, the ornaments in fish form were quite popular, many of them made in metals and precious stones. Particularly those that reproduced the *Synodontis batensoda*, a fish that had a quite peculiar habit of swimming in the vertical with the mouth upwards and the tale downwards, as it is possible to find in some tombs relieves. Maybe because that's the position in which he appeared suspended in a wire and other jewels. (Brewer, D. J.; Friedman, R. F., *Fish and Fishing in Ancient Egypt*, Cairo, 1990, p. 4). There are beautiful exemplars in gold, that are believed that could be protective amulets against drowning or enchantments favourable to fertility. From the fish-cat family, some are still related to motherhood and children. Maybe for that reason, the insistence towards the king wasn't a simple whim but the fear of losing protection (Houlihan, P. F., *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, Cairo, 1996, pp. 131 and 133; Castel, E., *Egipto. Signos y símbolos de lo sagrado*, Madrid, 1999, pp. 305-306). The particular form of the jewel, the fish, has a strong erotic connotation, as it stands out in several Egyptian love poems, where it appears specially the *tilapia* fish of which red colour potentates the erotic charge. There is also the reference to a beloved woman that plays with «fat fishes». Would it be an indicium's of fertility or lust? There's also the expression of happiness of the lover that has his heart «mad of happiness like the red fish in the lake» due to the arrival of his beloved one (Manniche, L. *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 80; Vernus, P., *op. cit.*, pp. 88 and 95; Araújo, L. M., *Estudos sobre erotismo no antigo Egipto*, Lisboa, 1995, p. 116). The grammar construction of the phrase, forces to read «a fish form wire of new turquoise» and not «a new fish form wire of turquoise»; it was not the wire that was new but the turquoise: it was believed that at the time the turquoise would lose its colour, the reason for a new one to be more valuable (Parkinson, R. B., *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 122).

roaring and guiding the other roars, forcing them also to stop, calling the attention of the king. She refused to keep on roaring and answering the pharaoh that she didn't want him to substitute the lost pendant, she only wanted hers. Without any other solution, the king called Djadjaemankh to solve the situation. By magic arts, he puts half the water of the lake over the other half and caught the pendant, and gave it back to the owner. He returned the lake to its original position and all end in a great party. This tale also ends with the same funerary offer equal to the first one, only changing the name of the homages.

It's not the magic of overwhelming half the water of the lake over the other half, likewise Moses before the waters which went apart in the Red Sea, not even the fact that king Snefru appeared to be a calm, comprehensive and affable man, that interest us. Not even the fact that the king walked around the palace looking for an occupation, like Khufu he fought tedious by hearing fantastic tales. Somewhere else, about the behaviour of the heracleopolitan Pharaoh Nebkauré Kheti, who ordered to retain a certain Khuenanupu to keep himself distracted with his rhetorical, we already affirm and justify that the appeal of the pharaoh's boredom is a literary stratagem to frame the expression that follows that type of affirmations²⁰. What we want to point out is the proposition presented to the king and the way in which the scene took place, overflowing sensuality and eroticism.

The proposition of the chief lecturer priest Djadjaemankh to Snefru was simple: «...provide a boat with all the beauties of your palace! The heart of your majesty will calm, seeing the uproar rowing upwards and downwards. And you'll see the beautiful swamps of your lake. You'll see your fields and their beautiful shores. Your heart will appease with that.» In Djadjaemankh's perspective it wasn't exactly the beauty of the women which would calm his heart, but the clamour with which the proposed task would be performed. The beauty was in the swamps of the lake, in the fields and its banks. As we'll see the king had a vision of things quite different from this image, apparently his brother, whose name gives

²⁰ See Canhão, T. F., *op. cit.*, 2003.

us an exemplar description of his constitution and appearance: *djadja* means «head», «crane»; *in* is the preposition «in», «with»; *ankh* means «life». So Djadjaemankh means «crane-with-life», in other words he should have been a tall figure, slender and thin, fleshless; that kind of person today would be called “skinny”, or “ambulant corpse”. If it wasn’t for the fact that the Egyptians considered that thought, intelligence, will or feelings were developed by the heart, playing no role whatsoever in the brain, and we could think that this name made justice to someone with an unusual activity and intellectual capacity!

The king grabbed the idea and affirmed: «I will, most certainly do my boat promenade!» He gave immediately the following order: «Bring me twenty ebony oars covered with gold, with sandal grasp oars covered with electro»²¹. It’s not strange that the owner of everything that existed in Egypt wished to surround himself with all the best! We are still creating the environment and it all had to be perfect! Soon he added: «Bring me twenty women with beautiful bodies, with firm breasts and braided hair and that haven’t given birth yet.» Snefru knew what he was talking about! The fact they were twenty was related to boats equipage that exceptionally was composed by women rather than men. The details of «beautiful bodies» are full of eroticism and sensuality: «firm breasts», pride of those who possess them and greediness of those who desire them, «braided hair», the hair an element of seduction upon which Egyptians had an entire aesthetic related to refined and ostentatious wigs always full of beautiful and precious ornaments, «and that haven’t given birth yet», which means plain bellies, sensual and with no deformations particularly of those who had already faced a pregnancy²². It’s not all! The order ends with

²¹ Alloy of gold and silver.

²² Unlike L. M. de Araújo, who interprets the phrase «and that haven’t given birth yet» as if the king had demanded the presence of twenty virgins, in the context it seems much more appropriate our interpretation. It is an aesthetic appreciation that is at stake and not an anatomic or moral one. Besides, virginity should not have interfered in the body structure as pregnancy would, such as, not being a virgin and not having given birth could maintain the favourable plastic to the pharaohs’ delight. We have researched in dictionaries and other works and we could not find the word «virgin» or any other, or concept to which it could be related. The same way, we have never detected in any text, expressed

the following demand: «And let them bring (too) twenty nets and give those nets to the women when they undress their clothes». That's what the Egyptians systematically show us in relieves and paintings! Especially in the New Kingdom, the slender and slim figure of the Egyptian women more than what can be guessed, is seen through the generous transparencies of their linen clothes, here replaced by nets. The Egyptians knew perfectly well the principle that what is veiled is much more seductive than what is impudently exposed: covered only with a net, roars are not entirely naked, they were barely dressed. This is the most eroticist touch of the tale.

Next, it is proved that, in fact, this was not Djadjaemankh magic, because «they kept on roaring downwards and upwards and his majesty's heart was happy to see them roaring». As we had insinuated before, his majesty's heart was not happy to hear them, but to see them roaring. Paying attention to this tale and several events of his reign, Snefru, besides being a good pharaoh was an aesthete. He did not appreciate only what is good. He also appreciated the beauty. The way he treated works of art to which he became affected, besides demonstrating the truth art lover that he was, shows us too that he was a true gentleman. Instead of using his «status» of «Lord of the Two Lands» when the fish-pendant of new turquoise of the poop roar, the one who established the rhythm and led the roars, fell into the water, he let her contradict him, refusing his gift to replace the lost jewel and still found a way to recover the object.

or implied, any idea that displayed that, that issue was brought up by ancient Egyptians (Araújo, L. M., *op. cit.*, 1995, pp. 121-122; Manniche, L., *op. cit.*, 2002; Manniche, L., *Egyptian Luxuries. Fragrance, aromatherapy, and cosmetics in pharaonic times*, Cairo, 1999; Faulkner, R. O., *op. cit.*, 1996; Allen, J. P., *Middle Egyptian. An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, Cambridge, 2000; Gardiner, A., *Egyptian Grammar*, Oxford, 1994; Sánchez Rodríguez, A., *Diccionario de Jeroglíficos Egipcios*, Madrid, 2000; Machado, M. J., “Casamento” in Araújo, L. M., (dir.), *Dicionário do Antigo Egípto*, Lisboa, 2001, pp. 188-189; Araújo, L. M., “Adultério” and “Erotismo” in Araújo, L. M., (dir.), *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32 e 326-329; Nunes Carreira, J., “Mulher” in Araújo, L. M., (dir.), *op. cit.*, pp. 585-592; Yoyote, J., «Érotisme», «Famille», «Femme» and «Marriage» in Posener, G. *Dictionnaire de la civilisation égyptienne*, Paris, 1998, pp. 106-107, 110-111, 115-116 and 162-163; Shaw, I.; Nicholson, P., “Erotica”, “Marriage”, “Sexuality”, “Toys” and “Women” in *British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, London, 1995, pp. 93, 170-171, 265-266, 293-294, 306-307).

When Djadjaemankh arrived to solve the problem, «his majesty told him: Djadjaemankh, my brother, I did as you told me to, and the heart of his [*sic*]²³ majesty calmed down when he saw them roaring. However, the fish-pendant of new turquoise of one of them, the poop roar fell into the water and she immediately stopped, stopped roaring and breaking the team. Then I asked her: “Why don’t you roar?” and she answered: “The fish-pendant of new turquoise fell into the water”. Then I told her: “Roar!” I myself will replace it.” However, she answered him: “I like my object best then a similar one!» Here it is proved beyond doubt that what quieted his majesty’s heart was seeing them roaring. It is also proved that when one’s misfortune made them all stop, that disappointed the king, who did everything to have his boat moving again, or better, their bodies in movement. In this case, he did not move mountains, but lakes. The text follows:

«Then, first lecturer priest Djadjaemankh pronounced the magic words and immediately put half the water of the lake over the other half, founding the fish-pendant which was over a shell [turtle]. Then he went after it and he returned it to its owner. As to the water, that was twelve cubits (depth) in the middle (of the lake), ended with twenty-four cubits after being overlapped. Then he pronounced the magic words and conducted the waters to its normal position. His majesty spent (the rest) of the day in feast in company of all the royal house.»²⁴

As Lise Manniche well observed: Djadjaemankh saved Snefru’s day²⁵. Even the simple detail of the fish-pendant being over a turtle shell and not in the mud or over a stone or a potsherd, was accounted

²³ In the manuscript there is a change between the suffix pronoun: it should be the first person of the singular masculine (*.i*) and not the third person of the singular masculine (*.f*), as it is normal in similar cases of the direct speech. It should be read, then, «...and the heart of my majesty...»

²⁴ *PW* 6, 7-6,14.

²⁵ Manniche, L., *op. cit.*, 1977.

by the author, as being perfectly framed in the poetic and paradisiacal environment of the tale.

To conclude it is necessary to make it clear that we should not consider the Egypt of the pharaohs as a country of permissibility, lasciviousness or disorder. These two tales express exactly the opposite: the first promotes the correction of a deviation, of a non-acceptable social fanciness; the second is a hymn to aesthetic, to beauty. None of them falls into obscenity or simple wiggery, able to be listened to in any royal salon. The developed plots make that characters in the limelight are women, only possible due to the respect they deserved in ancient Egypt, based on the theoretical principle of *maat*, which embraced everybody in a singular form, rich or poor, man or woman, granting absolute equality in the fundamental rights. Egypt had clearly a more open society, tolerant and uninhibited than its contemporaries did, where women were quite respected possessing freedom and privileges unimaginable for women of coeval societies, and even for some in modern societies.

Beyond several examples given through art, in which it is accompanied by literature obviously in a smaller number, it is the juridical criterion that shows best the status of liberty and independence in which women lived in ancient Egypt. Surely in New Kingdom, or even before, single women, married ones or widows had legal authority to attend their own business, selling, buying or legating, without the need of any authorization. They could also serve as witnesses in deals or decisions. In the inheritances without will, they had the same rights as their brothers. Moreover, if the right of management of a property acquired by the couple during the marriage belonged to the husband, the wife got one third of all the properties of the couple in case of divorce or death of the husband. The other two parts were retained by the husband in the first case, or split up between the heirs in the second, according to the rules often written.²⁶

²⁶ Canhão, T. F., *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 159.

Not only the women of the dominant social groups had this status! In Cairo's *stele 27-6-24-3*, from the Ramesside period, there is an example that, even directly connected to the idea that the Egyptians had slavery – more a labour dependency than a real property detained by someone over somebody else – that shows us the concept they had of women in pharaohic Egypt. Two women-slaves, never treated as «citizens», had the liberty to sell their own lands, incidentally to their owner, but the document itself attests the possibility of being done to someone else²⁷. It's a clear sign that they did not need the agreement of their master to do business, neither could he take advantage of his situation. In the roman sense - men-object or human machines deprived of any rights – slavery was not practiced in Egypt otherwise than in the Ptolemaic period²⁸. Sticking to the point, without any details or justifications in the opinion of the Egyptians it was clear, that each one was equal to each other, either free or non-free, men or women. This way, in Egypt they could all enjoy eroticism and a natural but delicate sensuality.

²⁷ Kruchten, J.-M., "Law" in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 2, Oxford, 2001, pp. 279.

²⁸ Canhão, T. F., "Datação e temática do Conto do Camponês Eloquentes" in *Cadmo* 15 (2005), pp. 177-178.