
Woman in Ancient Egypt: Evolution of Personal and Social Positions

Anastasia A. Banschikova

Center for Civilizational and Regional Studies, Moscow

ABSTRACT

The shortage of direct documentary evidence on the evolution of ancient Egyptian marital and extra-marital relations stimulates an analysis of such a secondary source on gender history as its reflection in didactic literature, as it was aimed at treating and discussing standard and common situations, problems, goals and values of everyday life. If we integrate all the data of Egyptian Teachings as far as the image of a woman drawn there is concerned, we will receive a complex picture of a gradual evolution of Egyptian stereotypes of the woman from the Old Kingdom concept of wife as 'the second power' in the married couple the relations with whom are to be mutually balanced and aimed at obtaining psychological harmony between husband and wife as two autonomous friendly persons, – through the New Kingdom concept of wife as the 'family co-manager' of her husband, while their relations are aimed mainly at providing 'usefulness for domestic wealth' (at the same moment the motif of adultery emerges in the Teachings for the first time) Turaev to the Late Period concept of essentially, at heart bad and corrupted woman who is not regarded as a real personality anymore. This evolution reflects a gradual increase in individualization of one's personality and his/her behavior (and, partial disintegration of social life and corruption of its values) which have been taking place throughout Egyptian social history on the as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

The lack of direct documentary evidence on the evolution of ancient Egyptian marriage (cf. general overview of the problem: Robins 1993) makes such secondary sources as literary texts substantially important for any research into this field as well as into Egyptian gender history and family relations in general. It may be possible that the evidence of special interest can be provided through the analysis of Egyptian didactic texts as they, being inherently quite pragmatic, were aimed strictly at treating and discussing what was regarded as the most standard and actual situations, problems, goals, and values within the framework of everyday life of the texts authors' audience.

The main specimens of ancient Egyptian didactics – the so-called ‘Teachings’ – contain special information on the real ‘gender history’ of Egyptians as well as on the evolution of the women's image in ancient Egyptian literature. On the whole the Teachings form a specific genre of Egyptian didactics (from which we know about two dozens of specimens; see the general characteristics in Brunner 1998). Every Teaching is usually formally composed as a **series** of advice given by a wise older man to a young addressee (often to his son); this advice includes maxims, considerations and recommendations for the main cases and situations of this addressee's daily life, whoever would he be. The aim of the Teachings (sometimes declared explicitly) is to give their addressees some detailed instructions how to achieve prosperity and success (especially in career and family life) and to avoid disasters in social behavior. The most well-known and copied Teachings try to reflect as many relevant situations and spheres of life as possible. This pragmatic and wide-scoped character of the Teachings makes them a very important source for reconstructing Egyptians' social values and social life. It must be emphasized that the Teachings (at least those available for us, *i.e.* which were rather broadly copied in Egyptian schools and among Egyptian literate people for many centuries) were never aimed at expressing any original, individual point of view or at reflecting any extraordinary or exotic phenomena; they are concentrated on standard situations which any person from the audience would have to face in his life, and treat these situations staying firmly on the ground of pragmatic ‘common sense’. Thus, they reflect ‘average’ social life and ‘stan-

standardized' social values, attitudes, and opinions of their audience. That is why they are used as quite representative sources for gender history and for reconstruction of the woman's position in society too (Robins 1993). There is only one important restriction in this usage of the Teachings: they typically deal only with the matters of life of their audience, *i.e.* of the literate people; and to the latter belonged the representatives of all the upper social strata of the Egyptian society (including all the officials) and indefinitely a large part of wealthy commoners. Thus, using the Teachings we can learn immediately almost only about the life of the upper and middle classes of Egypt. To what degree the lower and higher strata shared values in their family life is a problem which cannot be solved satisfactorily: the great majority of all other sources reflect mainly the life of the higher strata too. (Though one of the sources employed below, Teaching of Ani, was, quite exceptionally, addressed to the middle strata and common people as well; see Lichtcheim 1973b: 135).

As for our theme, two additional considerations are necessary: first, based on daily experiences and common mode of life, they present to the audience common women known to the latter, taken in standard situations, and depict typical everyday occurrences involving women; second, the Teachings do not construct any individualized image of a person, they tell about 'a woman in general' (women in a special situation or of special status, but without specialized psychological characteristics). In other words, they deal with a generalized stereotype of women's behavior and character as it existed in Egyptians' minds of this or that period.

It must be emphasized that there are common features in Teachings of all periods on the point of our study: the act of a man in respect to a woman which is discussed in Teachings more than any other is 'to take for a wife', while the most discussed act of a woman in respect to a man is 'to give (him) a son'. These two main actions enjoy no changes in their presentation or attention provoked by them; thus, they are the main phenomena of gender relations from the Egyptian point of view in any period. The second of these actions is evidently the main aim of the first one. It was not this general view that was subject to changes throughout Egyptian history but the socio-psychological context of this view and, partly, its specific realization.

Not all the Teachings give us enough material on gender history. The relevant texts analyzed here are the Teaching of Ptahhotep, composed, as it is usually adopted, in late Old Kingdom period, the New Kingdom Teaching of Ani and the so-called 'Satiric Letter', and the Teaching of Ankh-Sheshonk belonging to Late period (for dating see in general Brunner 1998). As we shall see below, each of them gives some new trends in comparison to the preceding ones, and these trends correspond to some new phenomena in social life of the epoch in discussion (contrary to the broadly accepted opinion, according to which the Teachings of various periods express one and the same consolidated concept, see Müller 1977: 349). We have no evidence on our topic in the Middle Kingdom Teachings (those available are dedicated to the matters of politics and career not related to the family ones), but as Ptahhotep's Teaching was, as we know, carefully copied throughout the Middle Kingdom and early New Kingdom times, we can assume that it, being thus fit to the tastes and requirements of the Middle Kingdom audience, somehow matched the situation of the period, too.

PTAHHOTEP'S TEACHING

Let us begin with the famous Old Kingdom text, 'Ptahhotep's Teaching' (Dyn. V–VI, the 25th–28th centuries B. C., Turaev 2000: 84, cf. in Lichtheim 1973a), according to which a husband must treat his wife as follows: 'fill her belly', 'clothe her body', 'make her heart joyful', 'answer to her arms (in embracing)' (lines 290–299, Brunner 1998: 122). Ptahhotep warns a husband against such actions as 'to bring a lawsuit against her', 'to be cruel (with her)', 'to reject/repel her' (lines 295, 425, Brunner 1998: 122, 127). It is stated that a wife has free will to stay in her husband's house if she is content with her husband, but can easily leave it otherwise; a husband is to keep his wife from impulsive actions to which she is usually inclined, as a woman often follows any impulse caused by 'what she sees in this or that moment' (lines 338, Žaba 1956: 43).

We can see a peculiar fact: the Teaching has two sets of statements in respect to any member of a couple: the sets of examples of his and her positive behavior as well as of negative one. A husband can treat his wife well or not, and it determines if he would be able to keep her in his house or not, would she be a devoted

spouse, or, as Ptahhotep eloquently gives it, would turn into a flowing (away) water, river, or storm (lines 326–349, Žaba 1956: 42–43). It must be stressed that the Teaching emphasizes the inevitability of reciprocal reactions of a woman in return to her husband's conduct, and represents it as a natural and important factor of family life; a husband is obliged to reckon with these reactions and to modify his own mode of behavior in order to provide his wife's positive reactions. As a result, the relations between a husband and his wife are regarded as a joint result of the both sides' efforts, with a man presented as the dominating and initiative figure and a woman – as the reacting one (while their behaviors are reciprocally dependent upon each other).

Speaking of relations with a woman who is not the Teaching addressee's wife, Ptahhotep insistently advises to avoid any sexual contact with her; even death is named among the negative consequences of such an intercourse. By the way, Ptahhotep does not speak of any responsibility of the woman in this case; all responsibility is that of the man, the text deals only with the consequences he would face and warnings addressed to him. So, here the woman is also represented as a 'reacting' partner only, and that's why the text lacks any special qualification of her behavior.

A substantially positive characteristic of women as social beings can be seen in a marginal sentence of Ptahhotep: 'The beautiful speech is more rare than emerald but it can be found among the maids at grain-mortars' (lines 52, Brunner 1998: 111). Taking into account the substantial meaning of eloquence for the Egyptian culture, this praise should be qualified as a very high one in spite of its concessive character; we do not know other examples of such appraisals in the Teachings.

On the whole, Ptahhotep regards a woman as the 'second power' in the family which has her own will and legitimate and sanctioned interests; the normal and harmonized family relations are impossible without taking her desires and needs into consideration by her husband; and the main aim of a family life (as far as the relations between a husband and a wife are concerned) is, according to Ptahhotep, just the psychological harmony between them (cf. Müller 1977: 349), not only redistribution of the family power or firm formal regulation of functions in the family.

**THE NEW KINGDOM TEACHINGS
(SECOND HALF OF THE 2nd MILLENIUM B.C.)**

The New Kingdom text, the Teaching of Ani (known by copies of the times of Dyn. XXI–XXII [the 11th–19th centuries B.C.] but dated back to New Kingdom times [Turaev 2000: 199]), also gives us a picture of harmonized marital relations, but here it is not psychological harmony, but, contrary to Ptahhotep, rather a functional harmony of two ‘co-managers’, ‘co-administrators’ of a family; it involves not so much feelings, emotions or personal ties, but a construction of optimal ‘administration’ of the family as a social and economic unit. ‘The Teaching of Ani’ says nothing about sensual or emotional aspects of family life. Two sets of statements in respect to husband and wife – of positive examples and of negative ones (which we have already seen in the Ptahhotep's text) occur in the Ani's Teaching, but now they deal with other aspects of behavior. Such actions of a husband in respect to his wife as to ‘supervise the house’, ‘ask: where is this or that?’, ‘oversee silently’, ‘put an end to quarrels’, ‘avoid blaming’, ‘learn that she is efficient’, ‘know her skill’ are mentioned (lines 315–324, Brunner 1998: 210ff.). The mentioned wife's actions in respect to her husband are to ‘take counsel with her husband’, ‘set things on their (proper) place’, ‘accept her husband's hand’ (reckon thoroughly but voluntary with her husband's will) (lines 186, 318, 321, Brunner 1998: 205–210). If we compare this list to the Ptahhotep's text, we will see that the sphere of mutual reactions and mutual perceptions of a husband and a wife is reduced here from a whole complex of personal and emotional perceptions (which is represented in the Ptahhotep's Teaching) to a mere reproduction of formal ‘family order’ without quarrels; all the actions of a husband (both appreciated or condemned) mentioned by Ani are aimed only at the welfare of the family economy and family as the whole, as a system but not at the welfare of his wife as a unique personality (as it was in the Ptahhotep's text).

This perception of a woman in the context of her family duties only diminishes substantially her role in comparison with the Old Kingdom period. Another peculiarity is that Ani, contrary to Ptahhotep, does not mention any negative reaction of the wife to her husband's unworthy behavior. The most probable reason for

this silence would be that Ani, contrary to Ptahhotep, did not think that a husband should take such reactions **into consideration**. The whole Ptahhotep's paradigm of reciprocity of husband and wife's ways of conduct and of the necessary auto-correction of the husband's behavior in order to obtain the wife's proper behavior is completely absent in the Ani's Teaching. Ani does not give any appraisal addressing women beyond the sphere of their domestic duties ([lines 316, Brunner 1998: 210]; cf. Ptahhotep's appraisal for the feminine eloquence, 'the beautiful speech' that can be heard from the maids).

A wholly new motif we face in the Ani's text and in another New Kingdom composition, the so-called 'Satiric Letter of the scribe Hori' (c. 13th century B.C., Turaev 2000: 212), is the appearance of a lonely stranger-woman, either a newcomer to the town (who comes there alone thus getting far from her husband) or just a foreign girl (the situation takes place in the Asian city of Jaffa). In both cases the woman in discussion becomes an initiator of free sexual relations/adultery with a man, and both authors, Ani and Hori, persistently recommend not to answer to such an initiative. Ani says: 'Beware to get close to a woman unknown in your town; do not watch her when she passes by, do not take her. She is deep water which flowing is unknown. A woman, who is far from her husband, "I am (so) soft/smooth", she tells you every day when there are no witnesses against her. It is a crime worth death penalty when it happens this way, because her mouth would not hold it within' (*i.e.* she will divulge it herself; the possibility of death penalty for adultery is mentioned by Ptahhotep as well) [A 50–59, Brunner: 200 f.]. Cf. in 'Satiric Letter': 'You find a beautiful girl who works in a garden. She makes you her lover and gives her body to you. But you were convicted and exposed' [Pap. Anastasi I. 25,3–5]; as a result the man bears some punishment (not fully clear to us) which compels him to sell his properties.

Both texts mention dangers of witnesses and resulting punishments for a man. Ptahhotep warned from adultery too, but he spoke just of any woman except one's wife, while Ani and Hori speak about strangers and foreigners; in other words, the New Kingdom didactics reflects a broader circle of possible sexual contacts of a person than the Old Kingdom one. This fact is most probably caused by much higher mobility of a person and a certain individu-

alization of social life in the New Kingdom age of imperial expansion than in the preceding centuries. A thousand years earlier when Ptahhotep wrote, the chance to meet a foreign woman or a woman living alone in a stranger town was much lower than in the New Kingdom. It should be stressed that neither Ani nor Hori express any invective addressing women who initiate adultery, though the latter inflict dangers upon the man; no punishment for these women is mentioned (obviously not because the woman was left unpunished while the man bore punishment but because the woman's fate in this case was of no interest from the authors' point of view). Thus, contrary to Ptahhotep's Teaching, in the New Kingdom text the initiative for adultery belongs to a woman, but social responsibility for it (as far as it is depicted in the text at all) lies upon a man. If we can judge by all these features, the New Kingdom was characterized by certain diminishing of the woman's personal position and role in the family on the one hand, and by the restriction of family harmony to material welfare and effective collaboration of brides as depersonalized 'family co-functionaries', on the other hand. Besides, we can see increasing possibilities for extra-marital sexual contacts (while the woman *de facto* can abuse much more individual freedom than before, up to conducting a lonely free life in a stranger town) and actualization of the corresponding topic in Teachings.

All these new trends in didactic treatment of the gender problematic during the New Kingdom can well correspond to more general and profound social changes which mark the New Kingdom period in comparison with previous centuries. It is well-known that the times of militarized monarchy of the Dyn. XVIII–XIX saw substantial increase in individualization, social mobility (vertical as well as horizontal), more dynamism in, and freedom of personal behavior, activity in self-realization, and private initiative in Egyptian life. Autobiographies of noblemen often depict them as self-made men obliged for their career achievements to their individual initiative, personal will, unique qualities and extraordinary feats (especially feats of arms) – all of this standing quite away from traditional routine of standard functionaries' skills expressed in their regular daily activities (the skills glorified first and foremost in earlier centuries). The vertical mobility is even stressed by the role of the new social term *nemkhu* which defines officials and

dignitaries of completely ignoble origin who lacked any hereditary corporate traditions of state service and whose careers were based only on their personal virtues and personal favor of the king (Perepelkin 2000: 341 f.). The phenomena of individualization, mass semi-privatization and lease of state properties by persons of various rank became characteristic of the socio-economic sphere in this period (see Stuchevskij 1982: 125 ff., 246; Bogoslovskij 1983; Perepelkin 2000: 254f., 263–273). Fine arts and literature also show strong desire to escape from the frames of canons, to increase significantly the degree of individual creativity and free self-realization of the artist in comparison with the preceding centuries; *e.g.*, probably the lyrics as such emerged as a literary genre just in this period.

As we have already discussed in detail above, the New Kingdom didactics while construing the woman's image shows the increase in the same very trends in the sphere of gender relations: individualization, personal social, intellectual, and emotional mobility. Even the new image of the married couple members as 'co-managers' of family 'economic enterprise' corresponds quite fittingly to the aforementioned burst of private economic activities in the New Kingdom and reflects, in my opinion, the social role of a person as the 'manager of his/her own life' who must realize his individual life strategy in his family and in the wider society, what was stimulated by the innovations of the New Kingdom time, both in economic and social life.

THE TEACHING OF AHKH-SHESHONK

Let us turn to the only teaching of the Late period containing vast information on our topic – 'Teaching of Ankh-Sheshonk' (*c.* the 4th century B.C., Brunner 1998: 257). First of all, in this text we find a much more complicated relationship between the notions of 'woman' *per se* and 'wife', because here we find the notion of 'beloved woman', which can be applied to one's both wife and mistress, and it is just this expression, 'beloved woman', that serves now the main positive characteristic of a woman while the term 'wife' practically loses the immanently positive essence inseparable from it in the earlier times. The paradigm of possible ways of conduct in the family and love affairs involved in discussion by the author is also much broader than before and its perception is different.

Ankh-Sheshonk's attention is concentrated on the relations held by the presumable addressee of his Teaching with anyone's wife – either the addressee's wife (family relations) or another man's wife (adultery). Ankh-Sheshonk mentions the following actions of a man in respect to his own wife: 'to catch her with her lover', 'to expel her from the house' (because of her childlessness), 'to loose her', 'to be ashamed to sleep with her', 'to marry a wicked/godless woman' (lines 169, 196, 336, 434; Brunner 1998: 276–289). It is a set of sentences with the most general meaning, and it demonstrates from the very beginning a great contrast to all the earlier Teachings. The motif of wife's adultery is developed so vividly for the first time as well as the motif of divorce (on husband's unilateral initiative and forceful decision) because of the childlessness. All the things against which a husband is warned by Ankh-Sheshonk are, surprisingly, the attempts to find a real personal contact with, and psychological closeness to his wife and personal attraction to her: 'do not take a maid for her', 'do not open your mind to her', 'do not teach her' (*i.e.*, because it would be in vain in any case), 'do not rejoice at her beauty' (lines 170, 174, 177, 283f., Brunner 1998: 276–282). Thus, a husband is strongly recommended not to try to establish any confidence and personal mutual acceptance with his wife, not to be affected for her and not to meet her wishes (what a contrast to the Ptahhotep's maxims). Then, the preoccupation in this late Teaching belongs to strictly prohibitive statements with respect to one's wife: while earlier authors usually recommended what positive things one should do in order to reach good family relations, the later authors tell mostly what one must forbid or avoid in order to keep himself safe from family evils. Thus, the whole paradigm of family relations seems inverted in perception presented by the Teaching under consideration, and negative recommendations acquire a basic role while positive advice – a peripheral one.

On the whole, the main new features traceable in this late source are as follows: the only aim of marriage is to acquire posterity; the woman's personality is fully ignored and/or dishonored as well as any possibility to get psychological contact with her. The only example of family relations which provokes the Teaching author's special attention is adultery of a wife which is presented as a constant threat to every husband caused by the common nature of

women 'as they are', not by any specific negative situation within this or that family. This 'woman as she is' is described as a creature which does not deserve any confidence and is unable to understand her husband ('to teach a woman is the same as to try to fill a torn bag with sand' [lines 177, Brunner 1998: 276]) but, lacking a real personality of her own (cf. comparison with an [empty] quarry [lines 417, Brunner 1998: 288]), tries instinctively to imitate some of his features. The Teaching's author does not ascribe to her any positive quality, and the negative one stressed by him is her full involvement in sensual pleasures and constant readiness to an adultery as a result. The thirst for sexual amusements is described as the main factor of woman's behavior; the main feminine actions mentioned in these Teachings are 'to be with her lover (in an adultery)', 'to have sex not with her husband' [lit. with another man], 'to lie in bed not with her husband' [lit. with another man] (lines 169, 354, Brunner 1998: 276, 285). The author proclaims that the wife's attitude to her husband depends upon his sexual strength (lines 210–211, Brunner 1998: 278) and that the woman's heart belongs to the one who is always ready to make sex with her. It is argued that women cannot keep in secret any confidential information and are even inclined to stealing. Moreover, even such basic qualities as an ability to bring up a child or physical beauty are mentioned in negative contexts: 'Do not take for a wife a godless/shameless woman otherwise she would make your child godless/shameless' (lines 434, Brunner 1998: 289); 'Do not rejoice at your wife's beauty – her heart belongs to (any) one who makes sex with her' (lines 283, Brunner 1998: 282). The only feminine quality really appreciated here is practical common sense and cleverness as far as the ability to run the house is concerned (lines 68, Brunner 1998: 270).

Thus, the Teaching of Ankh-Sheshonk does not give a picture of marital relations aimed at the establishment of family harmony or at providing the wife's fidelity; such issues are not even matters of hope and do not serve as an ideal, their absence is not lamented for but is taken as quite natural and inevitable. The balance in the husband-wife relations is completely forgotten, only unilateral and forceful steps are recommended to a husband (up to the expelling his wife out of the house if she is childless, what demonstrates to the best childbearing as the only real aim of a marriage, according to Ankh-Sheshonk).

On the other hand, the lack of interest to one's own wife is compensated now by increasing interest to a woman of another family, to another man's wife. Ankh-Sheshonk gives numerous examples of the kind: 'Do not take for yourself a woman whose husband is still alive, otherwise he would become your enemy', 'Do not sleep with a married woman', 'Do not love a married woman', 'Do not be frivolous with a woman whose husband has a higher position than yours' (lines 58, 353, 384, 247, Brunner 1998: 270–287). Note that earlier Teachings also contain warnings only as far as the contacts with another man's wife are concerned. Sometimes such warnings are motivated by possible reaction of this woman's husband, sometimes the case is different and more complicated: 'Do not sleep with a married woman, if one sleeps with a married woman in bed, then another man will sleep with his own wife on the ground' (lines 358f., Brunner 1998: 285); 'Do not love a married woman, if one loves a married woman, then his own threshold will be broken' (lines 384f., Brunner 1998: 287). The warning here is again motivated by the harm threatening to the addressee himself, but this harm is not a direct vengeance or punishment for his crime. The same idea is typical of warnings against the third category of women mentioned in the late Teachings, *i.e.* prostitutes: 'Who loves a prostitute (lit. 'a street-girl'), (has) his purse is cut' (lines 363, Brunner 1998: 286).

It must be noted that the negative consequences of one's adultery are represented as much less dangerous and harmful in later texts than in earlier ones; in the latter the man who was guilty in adultery was threatened with death (lines 281, Žaba 1956: 38), while the late authors think it necessary to threaten his addressee, eloquently and in all details, with no harder consequence of his adultery than the possibility of the addressee's own wife's adultery in the future. Such a situation corresponds completely to the fact that adultery is regarded by Ankh-Sheshonk as something ordinary and widespread.

Ankh-Sheshonk is the first Egyptian author known to us who uses concrete terms for denoting women (other than one's own wife) by their social position and status ('another man's wife', 'a street-girl'). In earlier texts such women received only personal or situative but never social characteristics ('a beautiful girl', 'a woman who is a stranger to the town'). It shows most probably that

extra-marital relations were now more common than before and became a daily matter, as they do not need to be characterized by any especially favorable situation (such as contact with a foreign girl in a foreign land or with a stranger girl in one's own town – which were the situations of adulteries described by New Kingdom Teachings) any longer. Besides marital and extra-marital relations, Ankh-Sheshonk depicts the sphere of personal relations lying in a wholly new plane: he uses the term 'a beloved woman' without any further concretization (she can be one's wife as well as mistress, married or unmarried), and she is the only feminine being in respect to which Ankh-Sheshonk recommends a man to take any care ('do not say any bad thing to your beloved woman' [lines 368, Brunner 1998: 286]). We can conclude that this recommendation reflects a great increase in individualization of private life, as the recommendations are motivated not by a woman's this or that normative status but only by a man's personal, informal, emotional attraction to her. It is just this personal attitude that determines good treatment of her, while all other women (including one's wife) are recommended by Ankh-Sheshonk to be treated as inferior beings unworthy any meeting their personal wishes and needs. The separated, independent existence and actualization of the terms 'wife' (with rather negative emotional loading) and 'beloved woman' (with fully positive emotional loading) clearly demonstrates that the marital love is not regarded now as something necessary or really desirable.

Another interesting phrase which has no precedents in earlier Egyptian texts is as follows: 'He, who is ashamed to sleep with his own wife, will never have a child' (lines 349, Brunner 1998: 285). This absolutely clear remark demonstrates the phenomenon of actualization of the most peculiar and individual patterns of family relations; no attention at all was paid to such deviant or uncommon psychological attitudes in the Teachings of preceding centuries.

On the whole, in the late Teachings the woman is described as a sub-social being unable to accomplish any valuable socialization, to react adequately and worthy to her partner's good will who can only follow the simplest basic instincts. In other words, she is described as a being unable to function as a *personality*. (She even imitates the character of her male partner).

Again, all these new features can be closely tied to great social changes that took place in the Late period: disintegration of the Egyptian society both in the socio-economic and political aspects. The processes of parceling and privatization in economics rose on a new level (up to the vast spread of personal slavery, including debt slavery), the state split into many petty kingdoms and principalities struggling against each other, and the society became a conglomerate of various state, private and corporate structures (Perepelkin 2000: 391 ff., 431 ff.). Social psychology reflected these processes by developing (for the first time in Egyptian history) a real 'ideal of the hero' glorifying a mighty person, a strong man, who realizes his own will without self-submission to any higher authority of legitimate power or strict social obligations (Bolshakov and Sushchevskij 1991: 22–24). The border between legal and illegal practice in social life lost its former definitiveness and importance. Many traditional social ties were neglected or torn. All this could not be regarded by didactic tradition otherwise than as the greatest ill and prolonged crisis, when what was abnormal theoretically became almost a norm in practice.

The Late period Teachings, as we can see, share just this general attitude as far as gender relations are concerned. Ankh-Sheshonk's 'misanthropic' view on the very possibility of true sincere unity even in a marriage pair fits well the picture of overall disintegration of traditional social structures and values, and the way in which adultery is presented here – as something illegal, but generally spread and in fact rather tolerated and habitual in everyday life – reflects a really distraught and chaotic condition of social life as a whole, thus plausibly corresponding to the general spirit of the period.

CONCLUSION

Integrating all the data discussed above, we receive a complex picture of gradual transformation of Egyptian stereotypes of the woman (as they are reflected in didactic texts) from the Old Kingdom concept of a wife as 'a second power' within the family, beloved partner, the relations with whom are to be mutually balanced and aimed at providing for psychological harmony between husband and wife as two autonomous friendly persons, – through the New Kingdom concept of wife as the 'family co-manager' of her

husband while their relations are aimed just at providing 'usefulness for domestic wealth' (lines 68, Brunner 1998: 270) (at the same moment, the motif of adultery emerges in the Teachings for the first time) – to the Late Period concept of essentially, at heart bad and corrupted woman who, as a rule, is not regarded as an independent personality anymore (and, quite predictably, this attitude correlates with the perception of adultery as the most usual business). This evolution could reflect gradual individualization and increase in social and personal dynamism which have been taking place throughout Egyptian history. Thus, gradual disintegration of political and socio-economic ties in the Egyptian society correlates with gradual deterioration and disintegration of the family relations, as it is reflected in the Teachings, also providing a picture of increasing corruption of relations not only in the family but in all the spheres of social life; the picture that had the universal dimension in the country inhabitants' Egyptocentric Weltanschauung. Unfortunately, the substantial scarcity of evidence on the core problems of family evolution *per se*, such as kinship system and marital residence pattern combined with methodological problems of even those scarce data's interpretation (see, *e.g.*, Allen 1998), does not allow us to reconstruct directly the way in which social processes influenced family relations, so we hardly could install the literary trends discussed above into a detailed picture of the family structures evolution.

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