

# ROMANCE ALONG THE NILE: ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LOVE POETRY



NIV ALLON AND DIANA CRAIG PATCH

GALLERY 132

EGYPTIAN ART FACSIMILE ROTATION 2015–2016

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# Preface

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The small installation presented in the following catalogue explores the visual imagery of ancient Egyptian poetry through New Kingdom wall paintings. The accompanying texts present excerpts of love poems, reflecting the gallery panel and labels at the time of the exhibition. In order to view each facsimile's record on The Met's website, click on the image in the catalogue.

All objects in this catalogue are part of the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Unless otherwise indicated, additional illustrations are from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Department of Egyptian Art Archives.

The gallery rotation was made possible by the generosity of the Friends of Egyptian Art.



# Views of the Installation in Gallery 132

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# CATALOGUE

# Romance along the Nile: Ancient Egyptian Love Poetry

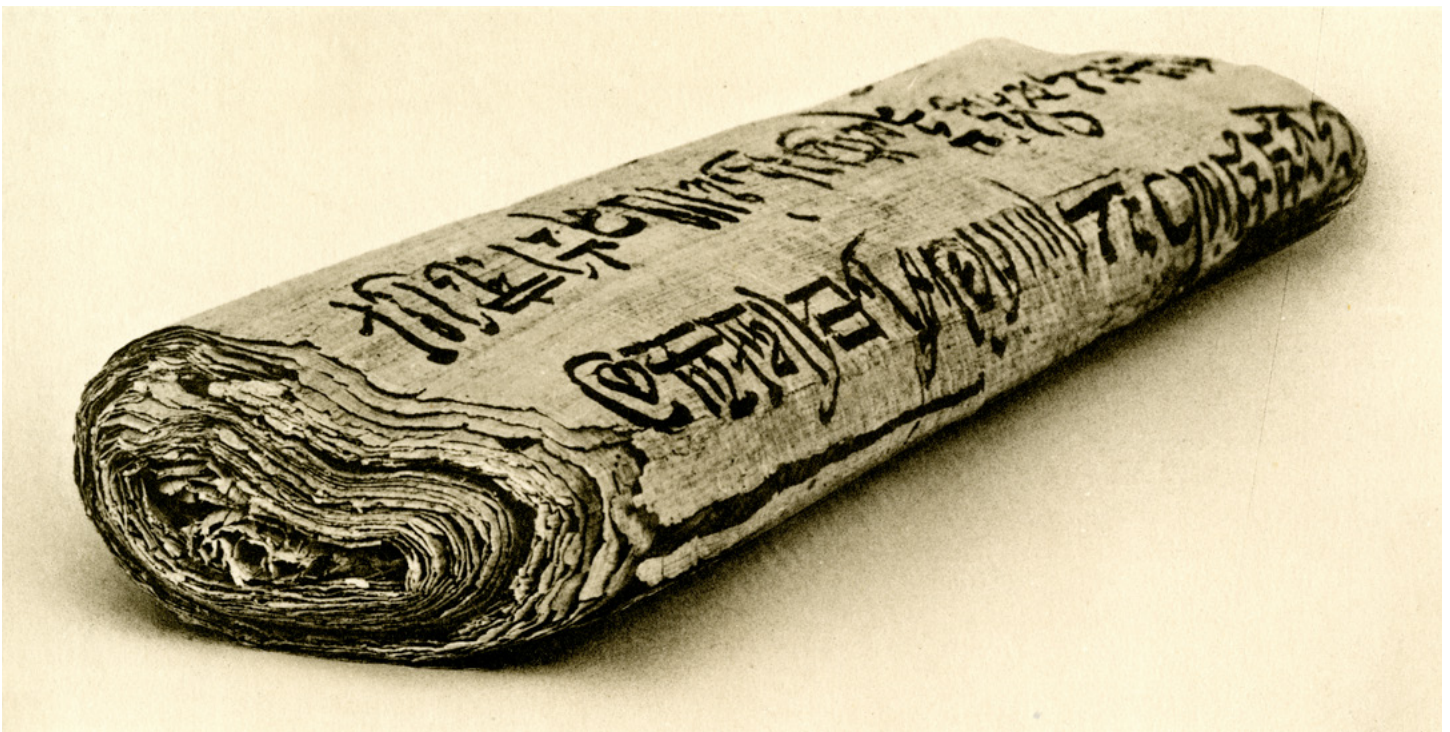
Many ancient Egyptians, like people everywhere, wanted to find someone with whom they could happily share their lives. During the New Kingdom, and especially during the Ramesside period (ca. 1295–1070 B.C.), scribes recorded a new form of literature that explored through poetry the nature of love from a personal and often explicit perspective.

The subjects of the poems range from ardent descriptions of a beloved and the intoxication of love to the difficulties and challenges of pursuing a love interest, as well as illness caused by unrequited love. The words chosen to voice these concepts draw on the ancient Egyptian world, including using flowers, fruit, and honey as comparisons to a woman's charms or the physical dangers of crossing the Nile to express a lover's devotion to his beloved. Along with their secular

themes, the poems often invoke Hathor, the goddess of love and sexuality, to secure a lover's desire.

These writings have a consistent structure using a formulaic style, simple construction, and parallel terms (repetition), as literary devices, while their content communicates human empathy and creates settings that illuminate the time and place. These poems most likely had an oral existence and may well have been sung. Often recorded on papyrus (see illustration), the poetry is also inscribed on fragments of stone or pottery, called ostraca.

The facsimiles in this exhibition, all copied from New Kingdom tomb decoration, have been selected because each gives expression to an image conveyed in the accompanying poem.



*A Papyrus containing a Collection of Love Poems, after A.H. Gardiner, The Library of A. Chester Beatty (London, 1931)*

For further reading on ancient Egyptian love poetry, see Renata Landgráfová and Hana Navrátilová, *Sex and the Golden Goddess: I. Ancient Egyptian Love Songs in Context* (Prague, 2009) and Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Wisconsin, 1985).



# A Wife Embracing Her Husband



*How knowing is my beloved in tossing the lasso,  
(But) she draws no cattle.  
Her hair is the lasso she tosses at me.  
With her eye(s), she beckons me,  
With her finery, she binds me,  
Her ring is her brand.*

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Chester Beatty Library

**Facsimile painted in 1922–23 by Charles K. Wilkinson**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.192)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390–1352 B.C.)  
Thebes, Dra Abu el-Naga, Tomb of Qenamun (TT 162)

# A Decorated Doorway



*I pass by his house,  
Finding its door open.  
My beloved stands beside his mother,  
His siblings all around him.  
He looks at me as I pass,  
(But) I alone rejoice.  
Had his mother known my heart,  
She would have gone inside for a moment.  
O Golden One, put that in her heart,  
so I may hurry to my beloved,  
and kiss him before his companions!*

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Chester Beatty Library

**Facsimile painted ca. 1907 by Norman de Garis Davies**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.15)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III (ca. 1479–1458 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Puyemre (TT 39)



# A Beautifully Adorned Woman



*The love of my beloved is there, on the (other) side,  
The river swallows my body.  
Nun (flood) is strong in (this) season,  
(And) a crocodile is waiting on the sandbank.  
(Still) I go down to the water,  
Wading through the waves . . .  
The crocodile, I find, is like a mouse,  
The floodwaters like land under my feet.  
It is her love that makes me strong,  
So she will cast a water-spell for me.  
And I will see the one whom my heart loves,  
Standing right before me.*

Ostrakon CGC 25218, Egyptian Museum, Cairo

**Facsimile painted in 1922 by Nina de Garis Davies**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.46)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose IV– Amenhotep III (ca. 1400–1352 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Menna (TT 69)

# Antelopes Fleeing a Hunter and his Dog



*Would that you come to your beloved,  
Swiftly as a gazelle,  
Leaping across the desert,  
Its legs racing,  
Its limbs weary,  
Its body riddled with fear.  
The hunter is behind it, a dog at his side,  
(But) they cannot (even) see its dust . . .*

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Chester Beatty Library

**Facsimile painted in 1929 by Nina de Garis Davies**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.52)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep I–Thutmose III (ca. 1525–1425 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb usurped by Ineni (TT 81)

# Prancing Horse

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*Would that you come (to your beloved),  
(Swiftly) as the king's horse,  
Thoroughbred among all steeds,  
The champion of the stable,  
Cosseted in its feed,  
Whose sovereign recognizes its pace.*

*Hearing the crack of a whip,  
It cannot be held back.  
No warrior can subdue it.  
How knowing is the heart of the beloved,  
That he is not far from (his) beloved.*

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Chester Beatty Library

**Facsimile painted in 1922 by Charles K. Wilkinson**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.39)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1427–1400 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Userhat (TT 56)



# Decorative Border Featuring Hathor, the Golden Goddess



*My beloved stirs my heart with his voice,  
He causes illness to seize me . . .  
My mother is right in commanding me:  
“Avoid seeing him.”  
But, my heart is smitten by his memory,  
My love for him has seized me.*

*Look, he is a fool  
But I am just like him.  
He does not know my desire to embrace him,  
He does (not) send word to my mother.  
Oh, my beloved! I am destined for you,  
By the Golden (Goddess) of Women.*

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Chester Beatty Library

**Facsimile painted in 1936 by Nina de Garis Davies**

Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.4.1)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III (ca. 1479–1458 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Senenmut (TT 71)

# Lector Priest Holding a Papyrus Scroll



*For seven days I have not seen my beloved,  
Illness has overcome me . . .  
If the chief physicians came to me,  
My heart would not respond to their remedies.  
Even the lector priests could not find the way,  
My illness is not diagnosed.  
The one who tells me, "Look, it is she" is the  
one who will revive me,*

*Her name is what will cure me . . .  
My beloved is more beneficial for me than any  
remedy . . .  
I see her—and I become healthy.  
She opens her eyes—my limbs are young.  
She speaks—I am strong.  
I hug her—she drives away evil from me.  
(But) seven days ago, she left me.*

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Chester Beatty Library

**Facsimile painted in 1920–21 by Charles K. Wilkinson**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.99)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III (ca. 1479–1458 B.C.)  
Thebes, el-Khokha, Tomb of Nebamun (TT 179)



# Woman Holding a Captured Bird in the Marshes



*The voice of the goose cries out,  
Caught by its bait.  
Your love holds me,  
I cannot release it.  
I will collect my nets.  
What shall I tell my mother,  
To whom I go every day,  
Laden with birds?  
I set no trap today,  
(For) your love has seized me.*

Papyrus BM EA 10060 (Papyrus  
Harris 500), British Museum

**Facsimile painted in 1919–20 by Norman or Nina de Garis Davies**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.119)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Ramesside Period, Dynasty 19, reign of Ramesses II (ca. 1279–1213 B.C.)  
Thebes, Deir el-Medina, Tomb of Ipy (TT 217)



# Two Women Sitting in the Shade of a Sycamore Tree



*The little sycamore that she herself planted  
Opens its mouth to speak.  
The words coming forth from its mouth  
Overflow with honey.  
It is perfect, its branches beautiful,  
Blooming and strong,  
Laden with ripe and unripe figs  
That are redder than jasper.  
Its leaves like turquoise,  
With the gleam of glass.  
It attracts those who have yet come:  
“Come spend a day of beauty,  
Morning after morning, up to three days, While  
seated in (my) shade . . .  
I am discreet and do not say what I see.  
I will not breathe a word.”*

Papyrus Turin 1996, Museo Egizio, Turin

**Facsimile painted before 1930 probably by Nina de Garis Davies**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.162)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Ramesside Period, Dynasty 19, reign of Seti I (ca. 1294–1279 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Userhat (TT 51)

# Wine Making



*I sail north on the river,  
In the manner of a captain.  
My bundle of reeds on my shoulder,  
I am headed to Memphis.  
I will say to Ptah, Lord of Maat,  
“Give me my beloved tonight!”  
The river—it is wine,*

*Ptah is its reed.  
Sakhmet—its lotus leaf.  
Iadet—its lotus flower.  
Nefertem is its blooming blossom.  
The land lights up with her beauty.  
Memphis is a bowl of mandrakes,  
Set before the Beautiful-of-Face (Ptah).*

Papyrus BM EA 10060 (Papyrus Harris 500), British Museum

## Facsimile painted by Charles K. Wilkinson

Rogers Fund, 1915 (30.4.118)

### Original:

New Kingdom, Ramesside Period, Dynasty 19, reign of Ramesses II (ca. 1279–1213 B.C.)  
Thebes, Deir el-Medina, Tomb of Ipuy (TT 217)



# Troop of Female Musicians



*Seeing you, my beloved, is a festive day.  
Regarding you is a great favor.  
May you come to me with beer,  
Musicians equipped with instruments,  
Their mouths with songs of love,  
For joy and jubilation.*

*Your excellent beloved is in adoration before  
you,  
Kissing the ground at seeing you.  
Receive her with beer and incense,  
Like offerings to a god.*

Ostrakon Borchartd 1, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Cairo

**Facsimile painted in 1920–21 by Charles K. Wilkinson**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.9)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose IV (ca. 1400–1390 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Djoserkareseneb (TT 38)



# Façade of a House



*I pass by her house at night,  
I knock, (but) no one opens.  
A good night for our doorkeeper!  
Bolt, I will open (you),  
Latch, my fate is yours,  
(Latch), my very soul is yours . . .*

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Chester Beatty Library

**Facsimile painted in 1922 by Charles K. Wilkinson**

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.225)

**Original:**

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose III–Amenhotep II (ca. 1458–1410 B.C.)  
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Djehutynefer (TT 80)

