



California State University Northridge
Department of Religious Studies

SACRED TEXTS OF AFRICAN RELIGIONS

Part 1. Ancient Egypt

Part 2. Other regions of Africa

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Part 1

SACRED TEXTS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

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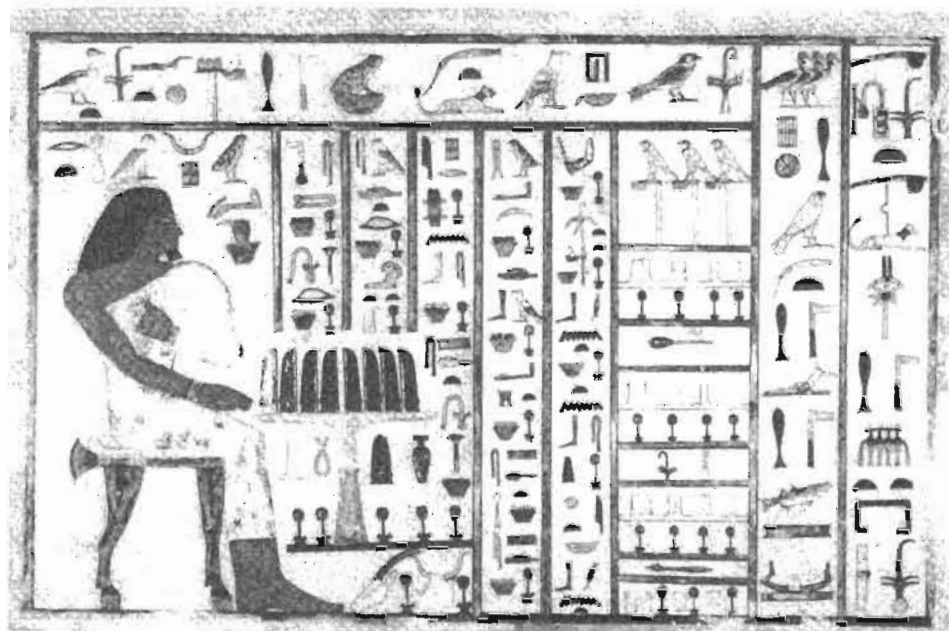
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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms



MIRIAM LICHTHEIM

The Decalogue of the Egyptian Bible < The Book of the Dead >

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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

Chapter 125

The Judgment of the Dead

The declaration of innocence

(1) To be said on reaching the Hall of the Two Truths¹ so as to urge N of any sins committed and to see the face of every god:

Hail to you, great God, Lord of the Two Truths!
I have come to you, my Lord,
I was brought to see your beauty.
I know you, I know the names of the forty-two gods,²
Who are with you in the Hall of the Two Truths.

Who live by warding off evildoers.
Who drink of their blood.
On that day (5) of judging characters before Wennofer.³
Lo, your name is "He-of-Two-Daughters."
(And) "He-of-Maat's-Two-Eyes."
Lo, I come before you,
Bringing Maat to you,
Having repelled evil for you.

I have not done crimes against people.
I have not mistreated cattle.
I have not sinned in the Place of Truth.⁴
I have not known what should not be known.⁵
I have not done any harm.
I did not begin a day by exacting more than my due.
My name did not reach the bark of the mighty ruler.
I have not blasphemed (10) a god.
I have not robbed the poor.
I have not done what the god abhors.
I have not maligned a servant to his master.
I have not caused pain.
I have not caused tears.
I have not killed.
I have not ordered to kill.
I have not made anyone suffer.
I have not damaged the offerings in the temples.
I have not depleted the loaves of the gods.
I have not stolen (15) the cakes of the dead.
I have not copulated nor defiled myself.
I have not increased nor reduced the measure.
I have not diminished the arura.
I have not cheated in the fields.
I have not added to the weight of the balance.
I have not falsified the plummet of the scales.
I have not taken milk from the mouth of children.
I have not deprived cattle of their pasture.
I have not snared birds in the reeds of the gods.
I have not caught fish in their ponds.
I have not held back water in its season.
I have not dammed a flowing stream.
I have not quenched a needed (20) fire.
I have not neglected the days of meat offerings.
I have not detained cattle belonging to the god.
I have not stopped a god in his procession.

I am pure, I am pure, I am pure, I am pure!
I am pure as is pure that great heron in Hnes.
I am truly the nose of the Lord of Breath,
Who sustains all the people,
On the day of completing the Eye⁶ in On,
In the second month of winter, last day,
In the presence of the lord of this land.
I have seen the completion of the Eye in On!
No evil shall befall me in this land.
In this Hall of the Two Truths;
For I know the names of the gods in it,
The followers of the great God!

The Address to the Gods

Hail to you, gods!
I know you, I know your names.
I shall not fall in fear of you,
You shall not accuse me of crime to this god whom you follow!
(5) No misfortune shall befall me on your account!
You shall speak rightly about me before the All-Lord.
For I have acted rightly in Egypt.
I have not cursed a god.
I have not been faulted.
Hail to you, gods in the Hall of the Two Truths.
Who have no lies in their bodies.
Who live on *maat* in On.
Who feed on their rightness before Horus in his disk.
Rescue me from-Babi, who feeds on the entrails of nobles.
On that day of the great reckoning.
Behold me, I have come to you.
Without *sin*, without guilt, without evil,
Without a witness against me,
Without one whom I have wronged.
I live (10) on *maat*, I feed on *maat*,
I have done what people speak of,
What the gods are pleased with,
I have contented a god with what he wishes.
I have given bread to the hungry,
Water to the thirsty,
Clothes to the naked,
A ferryboat to the boatless.
I have given divine offerings to the gods,
Invocation-offerings to the dead.
Rescue me, protect me,
Do not accuse me before the great god!

I am one pure of mouth, pure of hands,
One to whom "welcome" is said by those who see him;
For I have heard the words spoken by the Donkey and the
Cat,
In the house of the Open-mouthed;
I was a witness before him when he cried out,
I saw the splitting of the *ished*-tree in (15) Rostau.
I am one who is acquainted with the gods,
One who knows what concerns them.
I have come here to bear witness to *maat*.

II. A Spell from the Coffin Texts

CT 1130 and 1031

Beginning in the First Intermediate Period, it became customary to inscribe the coffins of non-royal well-to-do persons with spells designed to protect the dead against the dangers of the netherworld and to bring about an afterlife modeled on that of the divine king. Like the king, the common man (and woman) now desired to rise up to the sky and to join the gods. Along with these grandiose wishes, the texts spell out more ordinary concerns and fears, such as the fear to suffer hunger and thirst, and the wish to be united with one's family.

In inspiration, the Coffin Texts descend directly from the Pyramid Texts, and some of their spells are direct borrowings. But the bulk of the material is new and reflects its non-royal origin. As a corpus, the Coffin Texts are far less coherent than the Pyramid Texts, for they lack a unifying point of view. Inspired by a reliance on magic, they lack the humility of prayer and the restraints of reason. Oscillating between grandiose claims and petty fears, they show the human imagination at its most abstruse. Fear of death and longing for eternal life have been brewed in a sorcerer's cauldron from which they emerge as magic incantations of the most phrenetic sort. The attempt to overcome the fear of death by usurping the royal claims to immortality resulted in delusions of grandeur which accorded so little with the observed facts of life as to appear paranoid.

Now and then a more reasonable attitude prevails, as in the first part of the spell here translated. It consists of a speech of the sun-god Re, in which the god takes credit for four good deeds which he did at the time of creation. In listing the four deeds, the god makes two assertions of prime importance: that he created all men as equals; and that it was not he who taught mankind to do wrong; rather, people do wrong of their own volition. This portion of the text is much above the usual level. The remainder is a typical Coffin Text spell, a grandiose claim that the dead will win entry into heaven and will be the equal of the sun-god.

The spell was used on a number of coffins, and the translation draws on the several versions as found side by side in de Buck's masterly edition.

Publication: de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, VII, 461-471 and 262.

Translation of the first part: J. A. Wilson in *ANET*, pp. 7-8.

Words spoken by Him-whose-names-are-hidden, the All-Lord, as he speaks before those who silence the storm, in the sailing of the court:¹

Hail in peace! I repeat to you the good deeds which my own heart did for me from within the serpent-coil,² in order to silence strife. I did four good deeds within the portal of lightland:

I made the four winds, that every man might breathe in his time. This is one of the deeds.

I made the great inundation, that the humble might benefit by it like the great. This is one of the deeds.

I made every man like his fellow; and I did not command that they do wrong. It is their hearts that disobey what I have said. This is one of the deeds.

I made that their hearts are not disposed to forget the West, in order that sacred offerings be made to the gods of the nomes. This is one of the deeds.

I have created the gods from my sweat, and the people from the tears of my eye.³

Instruction to King Merikare

Well tended is mankind - God's cattle
He made sky and earth for their sake,
He subdued the water monster,
He made breath for their nose to live.
They are his images, who came from his body,
He shines in the sky for their sake;
He made for them plants and cattle,
Fowl and fish to feed them...
He makes daylight for their sake,
He sails by to see them.
He has built his shrine around them,
When they weep he hears.
He made for them rulers in the egg,
Leaders to raise the back of the weak.
He made for them magic as weapons
To ward off the blow of events,
Guarding them by day and by night.
He has slain the traitors among them,
As a man beats his son for his brother's sake,
For God knows every name...

Life on earth passes, it is not long,
Happy is he who is remembered,
Is there a man who lives forever?
He who comes with Osiris passes
Just as he leaves who indulged himself...
The Court that judges the wretch,
You know they are not lenient,
On the day of judging the miserable,
In the hour of doing their task...
Do not trust in the length of years,
They view the lifetime in an hour!
When a man remains over after death,
His deeds are set beside him as treasure,
And being yonder lasts forever!

3. *Nht*, "lament," not *nht*, "endure."
4. O. Neugebauer and R. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, Vol. I (London, 1960), p. 35, have shown that *bkst* is the early night, after *hswy* and before *wfsw*. Here the plural *bkswt* is used.
5. Restore: *wḏ wī n bks th*, at the end of line 4.
6. The *iswt wḏbw* 'bw are obscure.
7. As Grdseloff recognized (*loc. cit.*), the sign after *rh* is not *kd* but the book-roll determinative of *rh*; hence read *dt-t rh-s*.
8. The king is meant.

III. The Testament of a Heracleopolitan King

THE INSTRUCTION ADDRESSED TO KING MERIKARE

The text is preserved in three fragmentary papyri which only partly complement one another. They are Papyrus Leningrad 1116A, dating from the second half of the Eighteenth Dynasty; P. Moscow 4658, from the very end of the Eighteenth Dynasty; and P. Carlsberg 6, from the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty or later. Unfortunately, the most complete manuscript, P. Leningrad, is also the most corrupt. The numerous lacunae and the many scribal errors make this text one of the most difficult.

The work is cast in the form of an Instruction spoken by an old king to his son and successor. The fragmentary beginning has preserved the name of the son: Merikare. But that of the father is lost except for the still visible outline of the cartouche and traces of two vertical hieroglyphs forming the end of the king's name. This name is assumed to be that of one of the several kings of the Ninth/Tenth Dynasty who bore the nomen *Khety* (Akhtoi). However, since the order of the kings of this dynasty has not yet been fully clarified, it has not been determined which of the several Khety preceded Merikare. In a new study of the dynasty (in *ZAS*, 93 (1966), 13-20), J. von Beckerath has proposed as the most suitable candidate the Khety whose prenomen was Nebkaure.

As an Instruction, it continues the genre Instruction which originated in the Old Kingdom. But a new element has been added: it is a royal instruction, and specifically, a royal testament. It is the legacy of a departing king which embodies a treatise on kingship.

→ The treatise on kingship in the form of a royal testament is a literary genre that was to flourish many centuries later in the Hellenistic world and subsequently in the Islamic East as well as in medieval Europe: the *speculum regum*. It is, of course, not possible to draw a connecting line from the ancient Egyptian type to its Hellenistic and medieval counterparts—far too little is preserved from all ancient literatures to make it possible to reconstruct their interconnections—but it is interesting to see the emergence of the genre. Not that the *Instruction to Merikare* was the first work of this type (an Instruction of an earlier king Khety is referred to in the text), but it is the earliest preserved, and probably also an early work of the genre, for it shows compositional weaknesses that suggest experimentation.

As stated in the Introduction, I believe the work to be pseudepigraphic in the sense of not having been composed by King Khety himself, but genuine in the sense of being a work composed in the reign of King Merikare, designed to announce the direction of his policy and containing valid, rather than fictitious, historical information.

Set beside such literary antecedents as the *Maxims of Ptahhotep*, the work shows intellectual and literary progress. Its morality has grown in

depth and subtlety; and there is a parallel growth in the ability to formulate concepts, and to develop themes and topics at greater length. A fully sustained compositional coherence as found in comparable works of the Twelfth Dynasty has not been achieved. There are several instances in which the same topic reappears in different places, and in which a buildup to a climax is deflected. Yet an overall plan and progression can be recognized.

The first major portion, of which almost nothing is preserved, deals with rebellion and how to overcome it. The second major section gives advice on dealing wisely and justly with nobles and commoners and is climaxed by a view of the judgment in the hereafter. Next comes advice on raising troops and on performing the religious duties. Then follows the "historical section" in which the old king describes his accomplishments and advises on how to continue them. At this point there is the beginning of a paean on the glory of kingship which is interrupted by a reference to the tragic destruction of monuments in the holy region of Abydos, a matter that had previously been alluded to. This leads to a reflection on divine retribution and rises to the recognition that the deity prefers right doing to rich offerings. Then comes the true climax: a hymn to the creator-god, the benefactor of mankind. The concluding section exhorts acceptance of the royal teachings.

The scribes of the New Kingdom divided the work into sections by means of rubrication. At an average such sections consist of twelve sentences and clauses. Where these rubrics were logical I have maintained them; but not all of the rubrics of the principal manuscript, P. Leningrad, are judicious, for the scribes often introduced rubrics mechanically without regard to content. The major topics encompass more than one rubricated section. The building blocks within each section are the small units of two, three, and four sentences, which are joined together by parallelism in its several forms, such as similarities, elaborations, and contrasts. And since all sentences and clauses are of approximately the same length, there results a clearly marked, regular, sentence rhythm.

All Instructions are composed in this rhythmic style marked by symmetrical sentences which I call the orational style. On occasion, when specific events are told, it turns into prose. At other moments it rises into poetry, as in the hymn to the creator-god which crowns the Instruction addressed to Merikare.

Publication: Golenischeff, *Papyrus hiératiques*, pls. ix-xiv. Volten, *Politische Schriften*, pp. 3-82 and pls. 1-4.

Translation: A. H. Gardiner, *JEA* 1 (1914), 20-36. Erman, *Literatur*, pp. 75-84. J. A. Wilson in *ANET*, pp. 414-418. Scharff, *Der historische Abschnitt der Lehre für König Merikare*, SPAW (1936), Heft 8 (lines 69-110 and most of lines 111-144).

Comments and translations of individual passages: G. Posener, *Annuaire du Collège de France*, 62 (1962), 290-295; 63 (1963), 303-305; 64 (1964), 305-307; 65 (1965), 343-346; 66 (1966), 342-345. *Idem*, *RdE*, 7 (1950), 176-180. E. Drioton, *RdE*, 12 (1960), 90-91 (line 92). R. Williams, in *Essays in Honour of T. J. Meek* (Toronto, 1964), pp. 16-19. Seibert, *Charakteristik*, pp. 90-98 (lines 91-94 and 97-98). D. Müller, *ZAS*, 94 (1967), 117-123 (lines 53-54). H. Kees, *MDIK*, 18 (1962), 6 (lines 88-89).

(25) The hothead¹ is an inciter of citizens,
He creates factions among the young;
If you find that citizens adhere to him,

Denounce him before the councillors,
Suppress [him], he is a rebel,
The talker is a troublemaker for the city.
Curb the multitude, suppress its heat,

(30) -----
May you be justified before the god,
That a man may say [even in] your [absence]
That you punish in accordance [with the crime].
Good nature is a man's heaven,
The cursing of the [furious] is painful.

If you are skilled in speech, you will win,
The tongue is [a king's] sword;
Speaking is stronger than all fighting,
The skillful is not overcome.

----- on the mat,
The wise is a [school]² to the nobles.
Those who know that he knows will not attack him,
No [crime] occurs when he is near;
Justice comes to him distilled,
Shaped in the sayings of the ancestors.
(35) Copy your fathers, your ancestors,

See, their words endure in books,
Open, read them, copy their knowledge,
He who is taught becomes skilled.
Don't be evil, kindness is good,
Make your memorial last through love of you.
Increase the [people], befriend the town,
God will be praised for (your) donations,
One will -----
Praise your goodness,
Pray for your health ----.

Respect the nobles, sustain your people,

Strengthen your borders, your frontier patrols;

It is good to work for the future,

One respects the life of the foresighted,

While he who trusts fails.

Make people come [to you] (40) through your good nature,

A wretch is who desires the land [of his neighbor],

A fool is who covets what others possess.

Life on earth passes, it is not long,

Happy is he who is remembered,

A million men do not avail the Lord of the Two Lands.

Is there [a man] who lives forever?

He who comes with Osiris passes,

Just as he leaves who indulged himself.

Advance your officials, so that they act by your laws,

He who has wealth at home will not be partial,

He is a rich man who lacks nothing.

The poor man does not speak justly,

Not righteous is one who says, "I wish I had,"

He inclines to him who will pay him.

Great is the great man whose great men are great,

Strong is (45) the king who has councillors,

Wealthy is he who is rich in his nobles.

Speak truth in your house,

That the officials of the land may respect you;

Uprightness befits the lord,

The front of the house puts fear in the back.³

Do justice, then you endure on earth;

Calm the weeper, don't oppress the widow,

Don't expel a man from his father's property,

Don't reduce the nobles in their possessions.

Beware of punishing wrongfully,

Do not kill, it does not serve you.

Punish with beatings, with detention,

Thus will the land be well-ordered;

Except for the rebel whose plans are found out,

For god knows the treason plotters,

(50) God smites the rebels in blood.

He who is merciful --- lifetime;

Do not kill a man whose virtues you know,

With whom you once chanted the writings,

Who was brought up . . . --- before god,

Who strode freely in the secret place.

The *ba* comes to the place it knows,

It does not miss its former path,

No kind of magic holds it back,

It comes to those who give it water.

The Court that judges the wretch,⁴

You know they are not lenient,

On the day of judging the miserable,

In the hour of doing their task.

It is painful when the accuser has knowledge,

Do not trust in length of years,

(55) They view a lifetime in an hour!

When a man remains over after death,

His deeds are set beside him as treasure,

And being yonder lasts forever.

A fool is who does what they reprove!

He who reaches them without having done wrong

Will exist there like a god,

Free-striding like the lords forever!

Raise your youths and the residence will love you,

Increase your subjects with 'recruits',⁵

See, your city is full of new growth.

Twenty years the youths indulge their wishes,

Then 'recruits' go forth . . .

Veterans⁶ return to their children . . .

.....⁷

(60) I raised troops from them on my accession.

Advance your officials, promote your [soldiers],

Enrich the young men who follow you,

Provide with goods, endow with fields,

Reward them with herds.

Do not prefer the wellborn to the commoner,

Choose a man on account of his skills,

Then all crafts are done --- . . .

Guard your borders, secure your forts,

Troops are useful to their lord.

Make your monuments [worthy] of the god,
 This keeps alive their maker's name,
 A man should do what profits his *ba*.
 In the monthly service, wear the white sandals,
 Visit the temple, 'observe'⁸ the mysteries,
 Enter (65) the shrine, eat bread in god's house;
 Proffer libations, multiply the loaves,
 Make ample the daily offerings,
 It profits him who does it.
 Endow your monuments according to your wealth,
 Even one day gives to eternity,
 An hour contributes to the future,
 God recognizes him who works for him.
⁹

Troops will fight troops
 As the ancestors foretold;
 Egypt (70) fought in the graveyard,
 Destroying tombs in vengeful destruction.
 As I did it, so it happened,
 As is done to one who strays from god's path.
 Do not deal evilly with the Southland,
 You know what the residence foretold about it;
 As this happened so that may happen.
 'Before they had trespassed' . . . ---
 I attacked This 'straight to' its southern border 'at Taut',
 I engulfed it like a flood;
 King Meriyebre, justified, had not done it;
 Be merciful on account of it,
 ----- renew the treaties.

(75) No river lets itself be hidden,
 It is good to work for the future.

You stand well with the Southland,
 They come to you with tribute, with gifts;
 I have acted like the forefathers:
 If one has no grain to give,
 Be kind, since they are humble before you.
 Be sated with your bread, your beer,
 Granite comes to you unhindered.
 Do not despoil the monument of another,

But quarry stone in Tura.
 Do not build your tomb out of ruins,
 (Using) what had been made for what is to be made.
 Behold, the king is lord of joy,
 (80) You may rest, sleep in your strength,
 Follow your heart, through what I have done,
 There is no foe within your borders.

I arose as lord of the city,
 Whose heart was sad because of the Northland;
 From Hetshenu to 'Sembaga', and south to Two-Fish Channel¹⁰
 I pacified the entire West as far as the coast of the sea.
 It pays taxes, it gives cedar wood,¹¹
 One sees juniper wood which they give us.
 The East abounds in bowmen,
 'Their labor' -----
 The inner islands are turned back,
 And every man within,
 The temples say, "you are greater (85) than I."¹²

The land they had ravaged has been made into nomes,
 All kinds of large towns ['are in it'];
 What was ruled by one is in the hands of ten,
 Officials are appointed, tax-[lists drawn up].
 When free men are given land,
 They work for you like a single team;
 No rebel will arise among them,
 And Hapy will not fail to come.
 The dues of the Northland are in your hand,
 For the mooring-post is staked in the district I made in the East
 From Hebenu to Horusway;¹³
 It is settled with towns, filled with people,
 Of the best in the whole land,
 To repel (90) attacks against them.
 May I see a brave man who will copy it,
 Who will add to what I have done,
 A wretched heir would 'disgrace' me.

But this should be said to the Bowman:¹⁴
 Lo, the miserable Asiatic,
 He is wretched because of the place he's in:

Short of water, bare of wood,
 Its paths are many and painful because of mountains.
 He does not dwell in one place,
 Food propels his legs,
 He fights since the time of Horus,
 Not conquering nor being conquered,
 He does not announce the day of combat,
 Like a thief who darts about a group.¹⁵

But as I live (95) and shall be what I am,
 When the Bowmen were a sealed wall,
 I breached ["their strongholds"],
 I made Lower Egypt attack them,
 I captured their inhabitants,
 I seized their cattle,
 Until the Asiatics abhorred Egypt.
 Do not concern yourself with him,
 The Asiatic is a crocodile on its shore,
 It snatches from a lonely road,
 It cannot seize from a populous town.

Medenytt has been restored to its nome,
 Its one side is irrigated as far as Kem-Wer,¹⁶
 It is the "defense" against the Bowmen.¹⁷
 (100) Its walls are warlike, its soldiers many,
 Its serfs know how to bear arms,
 Apart from the free men within.
 The region of Memphis totals ten thousand men,
 Free citizens¹⁸ who are not taxed;
 Officials are in it since the time it was residence,
 The borders are firm, the garrisons valiant.
 Many northerners irrigate it as far as the Northland,
 Taxed with grain in the manner of free men;¹⁹
 Lo, it is the gateway of the Northland,
 They form a dyke as far as (105) Hnes.²⁰
 Abundant citizens are the heart's support,
 Beware of being surrounded by the serfs of the foe,
 Caution prolongs life.

If your southern border is attacked,
 The Bowmen will put on the girdle,
 Build buildings in the Northland!

As a man's name is not made small by his actions,
 So a settled town is not harmed.

Build ———

The foe loves destruction and misery.

King Khety, the justified, laid down in teaching:
 (110) He who is silent toward violence diminishes the offerings.
 God will attack the rebel for the sake of the temple,
 He will be overcome for what he has done,
 He will be sated with what he planned to gain,
 He will find no favor on the day of woe.²¹
 Supply the offerings, revere the god,
 Don't say, "it is trouble," don't slacken your hands.
 He who opposes you attacks the sky,
 A monument is sound for a hundred years;²²
 If the foe understood, he would not attack them,²³
 There is no one who has no (115) enemy.

The Lord of the Two Shores is one who knows,
 A king who has courtiers is not ignorant;
 As one wise did he come from the womb,
 From a million men god singled him out.
 A goodly office is kingship,
 It has no son, no brother to maintain its memorial,
 But one man provides for the other;
 A man acts for him who was before him,
 So that what he has done is preserved by his successor.
 Lo, a shameful deed occurred in my time:
 (120) The nome of This was ravaged;
 Though it happened through my doing,
 I learned it after it was done.²⁴
 There was retribution for what I had done,
 For it is evil to destroy,
 Useless to restore what one has damaged,
 To rebuild what one has demolished.
 Beware of it! A blow is repaid by its like,
 To every action there is a response.

While generation succeeds generation,
 God who knows characters is hidden;
 One can not oppose the lord of the hand,²⁵
 He reaches all (125) that the eyes can see.

One should revere the god on his path,
 Made of costly stone, fashioned of bronze.²⁶
 As watercourse is replaced by watercourse,
 So no river allows itself to be concealed,
 It breaks the channel in which it was hidden.
 So also the *ba* goes to the place it knows,
 And strays not from its former path.
 Make worthy your house of the west,
 Make firm your station in the graveyard,²⁷
 By being upright, by doing justice,
 Upon which men's hearts rely.
 The loaf²⁸ of the upright is preferred
 To the ox of the evildoer.
 Work for god, he will work for you also,
 With offerings (130) that make the altar flourish,
 With carvings that proclaim your name,
 God thinks of him who works for him.

Well tended is mankind—god's cattle,
 He made sky and earth for their sake,
 He subdued the water monster,²⁹
 He made breath for their noses to live.
 They are his images, who came from his body,
 He shines in the sky for their sake;
 He made for them plants and cattle,
 Fowl and fish to feed them.
 He slew his foes, reduced his children,
 When they thought of making rebellion.³⁰
 He makes daylight for their sake,
 He sails by to see them.
 He has built (135) his shrine around them,
 When they weep he hears.
 He made for them rulers in the egg,
 Leaders to raise the back of the weak.
 He made for them magic as weapons
 To ward off the blow of events,
 Guarding³¹ them by day and by night.
 He has slain the traitors among them,
 As a man beats his son for his brother's sake,
 For god knows every name.

Do not neglect my speech,
 Which lays down all the laws of kingship,
 Which instructs you, that you may rule the land,
 And may you reach me with none to accuse you!
 Do not kill (140) one who is close to you,
 Whom you have favored, god knows him;
 He is one of the fortunate ones on earth,
 Divine are they who follow the king!
 Make yourself loved by everyone,
 A good character is remembered
 [When his time] has passed.
 May you be called "he who ended the time of trouble,"
 By those who come after in the House of Khety,
 In thinking³² of what has come today.
 Lo, I have told you the best of my thoughts,
 Act by what is set before you!

NOTES

1. The *hnm-ib*, the person whose heart is inflamed.
2. In place of Gardiner's restoration, "schoolhouse," Williams in *Essays*, p. 16, has proposed "storehouse."
3. The "back of the house" is the rear where women, children, and servants had their quarters.
4. K. Baer would render *ssry* as the "oppressed" and *wd'* as "providing justice" to the aggrieved, whence the judgment would be the vindication of those who were wronged on earth, rather than a general judgment of the dead. My feeling is that an overall judgment is envisaged in the passage as a whole; but the first part may well be the vindication of the innocent.
5. *Swi* in *Ptahhotep*, line 489 means "neighbors, friends, helpers," or the like. Here it has been thought to mean "feathers" in the sense of "Nachwuchs" (Volten), "recruits" (Wilson), or "milice active" (Posener, *Annuaire*, 64 [1964], 305).
6. *S'kyw*, "veterans" (Volten, Posener), but it is uncertain.
7. One obscure sentence.
8. *Kfs hr sst3* has been translated "reveal the mysteries," except by Gardiner who rendered "be discreet concerning the mysteries." On *kfs* in the compound *kfs ib* see *Ptahhotep*, n. 27.
9. Four sentences which, though free of lacunae, are very obscure. The word written *tww-k* has been rendered as "your statues," but I cannot believe that the king is speaking of dispatching royal statues to foreign countries.
10. Literally, "its southern border at Two-Fish Channel." The "Two-Fish Channel," known from P. Westcar IX, 16 and elsewhere, appears to be the name for the Nile branch in the nome of Letopolis, i.e., the southernmost part of the Canopic branch. In this passage it designates the southern boundary of the western Delta.

11. *Mrw*-wood is rendered "Zedernholz" by Helck, *Materialien*, *passim*, see especially Pt. V, p. 906. The Merikare passage conveys the fact that imports of foreign timber again reach the Heracleopolitan realm.

12. I.e., the temples (or: "administrative districts"?) of the central Delta, called "the inner islands," acknowledge the king and pay homage to him.

13. In *MDIK*, 18 (1962), 6, Kees insisted that Hebenu is not an unknown locality in the eastern Delta, as Scharff and Volten had thought, but is the well-known metropolis of the sixteenth nome of Upper Egypt, hence that the king is speaking of an extensive system of border strongholds which stretched from the eastern side of the sixteenth nome all the way to the northeastern Delta, to the border fortress of Sile, where the "Horusway," the road to Palestine, began. "Horusway" and "Horusways" are synonymous with Sile.

14. This celebrated passage has been reexamined by Seibert, *Charakteristik*, I, 90-98. The principal difficulty lies in *štšw m ht* 'ššw, which had been rendered "difficult from many trees," despite the fact that an arid landscape cannot have many trees. In *RdE*, 12 (1960), 90-91 Drioton proposed the meaning "debarred from having many trees." Seibert takes *m ht* to be the compound preposition "after," to which he assigns the meaning "despite," and proposes to read: *štšw m ht* 'šš <ny> *wšwt try/ ksn m- gww*, which he renders, "verborgen trotz der Menge der Wege dahin/ (Und) schlimm durch Berge." However, the meaning "despite" assigned to the alleged *m-ht* is impossible in this context. Only when *m-ht* serves as conjunction in a temporal clause can it acquire the overtone of "despite," as in the two references from *Urk. I*, pp. 49 and 283, cited in *Wb.*, III, 345.21, and in Edel, *Altäg. Gr.*, § 797: *m-ht m qd-n(i)*, and *m-ht m wd-n hm(i)*, where the literal meaning "after" has the overtone "despite," as is possible in any language. Said in a tone of rebuke, the sentence "after I told you to stay at home, you went out," means "despite my telling you to stay at home." But the spatial preposition "after" is not capable of such manipulation: "after many paths" does not yield "despite many paths."

I divide the sentences into: *šhw m mw/ štšw m ht/ 'ššw wšwt try/ ksn m- gww*; and following Drioton I take *štšw m ht* to mean "debarred from trees." For *šhw*, the meaning "short of," "lacking," is inescapable (Volten: "kümmerlich; Seibert, "dürftig"), and it agrees with the *ššhw* of *Ptahhotep* line 485, which I have rendered "deprived." As to the initial *ksn pw n bw ntf im*, Seibert rightly pointed out that the *n* cannot be ignored, hence "he (the Asiatic) is wretched." It may be recalled that the personal use of *ksn pw* occurs twice in *Ptahhotep*, lines 81 and 446.

15. *Šn'*, "dart about," as in *Peasant*, B 1, 61. The Moscow variant has *šn'*, an unknown compound for which Seibert proposed the meaning "to ban."

16. I.e., the east bank of the twenty-second nome was recovered by the Heracleopolitans and brought under cultivation up to the point where it joined the Fayum which they had held all along. This rendering was suggested to me by K. Baer. On *km-wr* of the Fayum see J. Yoyotte, *BIFAO*, 61 (1962), 116 f.

17. While P. Leningrad has *hps*, "navel-cord," P. Carlsberg has *hpu* with fighting-man determinative. Scharff and Volten chose *hpu* and assigned it the meaning "Abwehr." Wilson and others preferred "navel-

cord." In any case "it" refers to Medenyt; hence the town and its nome are either "the defense against" the Asiatics or the "point of entry" that attracts the Asiatics.

18. Here, above in line 86 and below in line 103 I have, following Volten, rendered *w'bw* as "free men" rather than "priests." But it is uncertain; see Volten's discussion, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

19. If *bškw* is the passive, as I think it is, then the next sentence, *šwst pw hr-i n tr st*, "it means surpassing me for him who does it," is out of place t e.

20. "Dyke" here is surely metaphorical for "protection." A real dyke all the way from the Delta to Heracleopolis is hardly possible.

21. *N in tw hr mw-f*, "one will not bring him on one's water." "To be on someone's water" is usually taken to mean "to be loyal to someone." This passage suggests a broader meaning, a mutual relationship of friendship and favor.

22. Posener, *Annuaire*, 65 (1965), 345, read the numeral "hundred" after *rnpt*.

23. The sentence *m mrwt smnh tr-t-n-f* etc. which follows here is out of place; it recurs in its proper context in line 118.

24. The destruction of tombs in the Thinite nome during warfare against the Thebans had already been mentioned in line 70. Here the king takes the blame for the action of his troops.

25. The sun-god in his aspect as creator.

26. Apparently a reference to the cult statues of the gods carried in procession during festivals.

27. Cf. the *Instruction of Hardjedef*, n. 3. Here in *Merikare* the advice on tomb-building is spiritualized: the funerary monument is to be built on rightdoing.

28. *Bit*, "loaf," rather than "character," as suggested by R. Williams in *Essays*, p. 19.

29. A reference to the concept of a primordial water monster, defeated at the time of creation.

30. An allusion to the myth of the "destruction of mankind," a text that forms part of the composition known as "the book of the cow of heaven," which is inscribed on the walls of three royal tombs of the Nineteenth Dynasty.

31. *Rst*, "to watch," not *rswt*, "dream," as suggested by W. Federn, *JNES*, 19 (1960), 256-257.

32. Reading *tw qd-tw-k*; and taking *ntyw m phwy m pr Hty* in the temporal sense, in accordance with Posener, *Annuaire*, 66 (1966), 345. On *m ššw* see *Ptahhotep*, n. 50; the rendering of *m ššw* as "in contrast" negates the whole thrust of the king's speech—the description of his achievements which his son is asked to emulate and surpass.

Restraint is a brief moment,³
 Gluttony is base (5) and is reproved.
 A cup of water quenches thirst,
 A mouthful of herbs strengthens the heart;
 One good thing stands for goodness,
 A little something stands for much.
 Vile is he whose belly covets when (meal)-time has passed,
 He forgets those in whose house his belly roams.⁴

When you sit with a glutton,
 Eat when his greed has passed;
 When you drink with a drunkard,
 Take when his heart is content.⁵
 Don't fall upon meat by the side of a glutton,⁶
 (10) Take when he gives you, don't refuse it,
 Then it will soothe.
 He who is blameless in matters of food,
 No word can prevail against him;
 'He who is gentle, even timid,'⁷
 The harsh is kinder to him than to his mother,⁸
 All people are his servants.

Let your name go forth
 (II, 1) While your mouth is silent.
 When you are summoned, don't boast of strength
 Among those your age, lest you be opposed.
 One knows not what may happen,
 What god does when he punishes.

The vizier had his children summoned, after he had understood the ways of men, their character: having become clear to him.⁹ Then he said to them: "All that is written in (5) this book, heed it as I said it. Do not go beyond what has been set down." Then they placed themselves on their bellies. They recited it as it was written. It seemed good to them beyond anything in the whole land. They stood and sat accordingly.¹⁰

Then the majesty of King Huni died; the majesty of King Snefru was raised up as beneficent king in this whole land. Then Kagemni was made mayor of the city and vizier.

Colophon: It is finished.

NOTES

1. The four sentences express one idea: the quiet, modest person is well liked and hence successful. Thus, "the tent is open to the silent," not: "the tent of the silent is open." To have a "spacious seat" is "to be well received," and "to be made comfortable." Cf. "Spacious is Teti's seat with Geb," PT, Utterance 402. See also *Ptahhotep*, line 225.

2. *Nn hn n ts hr spf* is ambiguous and has been variously rendered. Gardiner: "There is no speedy advance except at its proper time." Scharff and Federn took *nn hn* to refer to the "knives" and *sp* in the sense of "fault."

3. I.e., to control one's desire requires only a moment's effort.

4. This is substantially Scharff's and Gardiner's rendering. But in *JEA*, 36 (1950), 112 Gunn proposed: "He is a wretch who is grasping for the sake of his belly, . . . (and) who is gluttonous at home," and Gardiner accepted this. By omitting the middle portion of the sentence, however, Gunn failed to supply a meaning for the whole.

5. This was Gardiner's rendering of *tw tb-f htpw* in the first edition of his *Grammar*, p. 248, top. In the third edition of the *Grammar*, and in *JEA*, 32 (1946), 73, he changed it to "and his heart will be content."

6. For *m sdtw r twf* I hold with Scharff against Gardiner and Federn. In the presence of a glutton one should not grab the meat but wait until one is given.

7. *Hrr* (or: *htr*) *n hr r df3-ib* is obscure and perhaps corrupt. Federn cited two examples of *hrr* and, deriving *df3-ib* from *wdf*, "to lag," proposed: "meek to the degree of slow-wittedness." Gardiner did not accept this and left it unresolved, as Scharff had done.

8. Or: "The harsh is kinder to him than his (own) mother."

9. Literally, "having come upon him."

10. In addition to its literal meaning, "stand and sit" is used in the metaphorical sense of "to conduct oneself." It recurs in that sense in *Ptahhotep*, line 221. Its counterpart in biblical Hebrew was noted by Williams in *Wilson Festschrift*, p. 94.

THE INSTRUCTION OF PTAHHOTEP

This long work has survived in four copies, three of which are written on papyrus rolls while the fourth, containing only the beginning, is on a wooden tablet. The only complete version is that of Papyrus Prisse of the Bibliothèque Nationale, which dates from the Middle Kingdom. The other two papyri, both in the British Museum, are from the Middle and New Kingdoms, respectively. The wooden tablet, Carnarvon Tablet I in the Cairo Museum, also dates from the New Kingdom. The version of P. Prisse differs considerably from that of the other three copies. The translation here given reproduces the text of P. Prisse only.

The work consists of thirty-seven maxims framed by a prologue and an epilogue. Each maxim is developed as a unit of at least four, and rarely more than twelve, sentences and clauses. In one case, maxims 2-4, a theme is developed over three consecutive maxims thus forming a larger whole. Some themes and topics recur several times, an indication of their importance in the scale of values.

Taken together, the thirty-seven maxims do not amount to a comprehensive moral code, nor are they strung together in any logical order. But they touch upon the most important aspects of human relations and they focus on the basic virtues. The cardinal virtues are self-control, moderation, kindness, generosity, justice, and truthfulness tempered by discretion. These virtues are to be practiced alike toward all people. No martial virtues are mentioned. The ideal man is a man of peace.

As stated in the Introduction, in my opinion the most plausible date for the composition of this work is the latter part of the Sixth Dynasty, a time in which Old Egyptian had evolved considerably in the direction of Middle Egyptian, a time in which the autobiographies in private tombs show an intellectual and literary capability comparable with the Maxims of Ptahhotep, and a time in which the monarchy was still serene and society ordered and secure.

Publication: G. Jéquier, *Le Papyrus Prisse et ses variantes* (Paris, 1911). Budge, *Facsimiles*, pls. xxxiv-xxxviii. E. Dévaud, *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep* (Fribourg, 1916). Z. Žába, *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague, 1956). Sethe, *Lesestücke*, pp. 36-42 (excerpts).

Additional fragments: R. A. Caminos, *Literary Fragments in the Hieratic Script* (Oxford, 1956), pls. 28-30.

Translation: Gunn, *Ptah-Hotep and Ke'gemni*, pp. 41-61. Erman, *Literature*, pp. 54-67. F. Lexa, *Enseignement de Ptahhotep et fragment de l'enseignement de Kagemni* (Prague, 1928). *Idem*, "Quelques corrections," *Griffith Studies*, pp. 111-118. J. A. Wilson in *ANET*, pp. 412-414 (excerpts). Spiegel, *Hochkultur*, pp. 455 ff. (excerpts). Bissing, *Lebensweisheit*, pp. 45-51 (excerpts).

Studies of individual passages: R. O. Faulkner in *Ägyptologische Studien*, pp. 81-84 (maxims 2-4). G. Fecht, *Der Habgierige und die Maat in der Lehre des Ptahhotep*, Abhdl. d. deutschen archäol. Instituts, Kairo, Ägyptologische Reihe, 1 (Glückstadt, 1958), maxims 5 and 19. H. Goedicke, *JARCE*, 5 (1966), 130-133 (maxims 5 and 19), and *idem*, *JARCE*, 6 (1967), 97-102 (maxim 32). F. Lexa, *Arch. Or.*, 7 (1935), 200-207 (maxim 6). A. Volten in *Miscellanea Gregoriana*, pp. 371-373 (maxim 6). Seibert, *Characteristik*, pp. 71-84 (maxim 19 and lines 575-587). Fecht, *Literarische Zeugnisse*, pp. 125-130 (lines 534-563).

The text is exceedingly difficult, and the translations differ widely. The best translation is that of Žába in his new and standard edition of 1956. I have frequently departed from all translations without mentioning these departures in notes, so as not to create an excessively heavy apparatus of annotations.

The numbers in parentheses are the line numbers that were assigned by Dévaud and Žába, which are equated with the page and line numbers of Papyrus Prisse, where the text begins on page 4. The numbers in the margin identify the individual maxims.

(1 = 4, 1) Instruction of the Mayor of the city, the Vizier Ptahhotep, under the Majesty of King Isesi, who lives for all eternity. The mayor of the city, the vizier Ptahhotep, said:

O king, my lord!
Age is here, old age arrived,

Feebleness came, weakness grows,
(10) 'Childlike'¹¹ one sleeps all day.
Eyes are dim, ears deaf,
Strength is waning through weariness,
The mouth, silenced, speaks not,
The heart, void, recalls not the past,
The bones ache throughout.
Good has become evil, all taste is gone,
(20 = 5, 2) What age does to people is evil in everything.
The nose, clogged, breathes not,
'Painful'¹² are standing and sitting.

May this servant be ordered to make a staff of old age,⁸
(30) So as to tell him the words of those who heard,⁴
The ways of the ancestors,
Who have listened to the gods.
May such be done for you,
So that strife may be banned from the people,
And the Two Shores may serve you!
Said the majesty of this god:
Instruct him then in the sayings of the past,
May he become a model for the children of the great,
(40) May obedience⁶ enter him,
And the devotion of him who speaks to him,
No one is born wise.

Beginning of the formulations of excellent discourse spoken by the Prince, Count, God's Father, God's beloved, Eldest Son of the King, of his body, Mayor of the city and Vizier, Ptahhotep, in instructing the ignorant in knowledge and in the standard of excellent discourse, as profit for him who will hear, (50) as woe to him who would neglect them. He spoke to his son:

1. Don't be proud⁶ of your knowledge,
Consult the ignorant and the wise;
The limits of art are not reached,
No artist's skills are perfect;
Good speech is more hidden than greenstone,
Yet may be found among maids at the grindstones.
2. If you meet a disputant in action,⁷
(61 = 5, 11) A powerful man, superior to you,

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0

Fold your arms, bend your back,
To flout him will not make him agree with you.
Make little of the evil speech
By not opposing him while he's in action;
He will be called an ignoramus,
Your self-control will match his pile (of words).

3. If you meet a disputant in action
Who is your equal, on your level,
(70) You will make your worth exceed his by silence,
While he is speaking evilly,
There will be much talk by the hearers,
Your name will be good in the mind⁸ of the magistrates.

- * 4. If you meet a disputant in action,
A poor man, not your equal,
Do not attack him because he is weak,
Let him alone, he will confute himself.
Do not answer him to relieve your heart,
Do not vent yourself⁹ against your opponent,
(81 = 6, 3) Wretched is he who injures a poor man,¹⁰
One will wish to do what you desire,
You will beat him through the magistrates' reproof.

- * 5. If you are a man who leads,
Who controls the affairs of the many,
Seek out every beneficent deed,
That your conduct may be blameless.
Great is justice, lasting in effect,
Unchallenged since the time of Osiris.
(90) One punishes the transgressor of laws,
Though the greedy overlooks this;
Baseness may seize riches,
Yet crime never lands its wares;
In the end it is justice that lasts,
Man says: "It is my father's ground."¹¹

6. (99 = 6, 8) Do not scheme against people,
God punishes accordingly:
If a man says: "I shall live by it,"
He will lack bread for his mouth.

If a man says: "I shall be rich,"
He will have to say: "My cleverness has snared me."
If he says: "I will snare for myself,"
He will be unable to say: "I snared for my profit."¹²
(111) If a man says: "I will rob someone,"
He will end being given to a stranger.
People's schemes do not prevail,
God's command is what prevails;
Live then in the midst of peace,
What they give comes by itself.¹³

7. (119 = 6, 11) If you are one among guests
At the table of one greater than you,
Take what he gives as it is set before you;
Look at what is before you,
Don't shoot many glances at him,
Molesting him offends the *ka*.
Don't speak to him until he summons,
One does not know what may displease;
Speak when he has addressed you,
(130) Then your words will please the heart.
The nobleman, when he is behind food,¹⁴
Behaves as his *ka* commands him;
He will give to him whom he favors,
It is the custom when night has come.
It is the *ka* that makes his hands reach out,
(140) The great man gives to the chosen man;¹⁵
Thus eating is under the counsel of god,
A fool is who complains of it.

8. If you are a man of trust,
Sent by one great man to another,
Adhere to the nature of him who sent you,
Give his message as he said it.
Guard against reviling speech,
(150) Which embroils one great with another;
Keep to the truth, don't exceed it,
But an outburst¹⁶ should not be repeated.
Do not malign anyone,
(160 = 7, 5) Great or small, the *ka* abhors it.

9. If you plow and there's growth in the field,
And god lets it prosper in your hand,
Do not boast at your neighbors' side,
One has great respect for the silent man:
* Man of character is man of wealth.
If he robs he is like a crocodile in court.¹⁷
Don't impose on one who is childless,
(170) Neither decry nor boast of it;¹⁸
There is many a father who has grief,
And a mother of children less content than another;
It is the lonely whom god fosters,
While the family man prays for a follower.¹⁹
10. If you are poor, serve a man of worth,
That all your conduct may be well with the god.
Do not recall if he once was poor,
Don't be arrogant²⁰ toward him
For knowing his former state;
Respect him for what has accrued to him,
For wealth does not come by itself.
It is their law for him whom they love,²¹
His gain, he gathered it himself;
It is the god who makes him worthy
And protects him while he sleeps.
11. Follow your heart as long as you live,²²
Do no more than is required,
Do not shorten the time of "follow-the-heart,"
Trimming its moment offends the *ka*.
(190) Don't waste time on daily cares
Beyond providing for your household;
When wealth has come, follow your heart,
Wealth does no good if one is glum!
12. If you are a man of worth
And produce a son by the grace of god,
(199) If he is straight, takes after you,
Takes good care of your possessions,
Do for him all that is good,
He is your son, your *ka* begot him,
Don't withdraw your heart from him.

- But an offspring can make trouble:
If he strays, neglects your counsel,
(210) Disobeys all that is said,
His mouth spouting evil speech,
Punish him for all his talk!
They hate him who crosses you,
His guilt was fated in the womb;
He whom they guide can not go wrong,
Whom they make boatless can not cross.²³
13. (220 = 8, 2) If you are in the antechamber,
Stand and sit as fits your rank,²⁴
Which was assigned you the first day.
Do not trespass—you will be turned back,
Keen is the face to him who enters announced,
Spacious the seat of him who has been called.²⁵
The antechamber has a rule,
All behavior is by measure;
It is the god who gives advancement,
(231) He who uses elbows is not helped.²⁶
14. If you are among the people,
Gain supporters through being trusted;²⁷
The trusted man who does not vent his belly's speech,
He will himself become a leader.
A man of means—what is he like?
(240) Your name is good, you are not maligned,
Your body is sleek, your face benign,²⁸
One praises you without your knowing.
He whose heart obeys his belly
Puts contempt of himself in place of love,
His heart is bald, his body unanointed;
The great-hearted is god-given,
He who obeys his belly belongs to the enemy.²⁹
15. Report your commission without faltering,
(250 = 8, 12) Give your advice in your master's council.
If he is fluent in his speech,
It will not be hard for the envoy to report,³⁰
Nor will he be answered, "Who is he to know it?"
As to the master, his affairs will fail

If he plans to punish him for it,
He should be silent upon (hearing): "I have told."³¹

- * 16. If you are a man who leads,
Whose authority reaches wide,
You should do outstanding things,
(260 = 9, 2) Remember the day that comes after.
No strife will occur in the midst of honors,
But where the crocodile enters hatred arises.

- * 17. If you are a man who leads,
Listen calmly to the speech of one who pleads;
Don't stop him from purging his body
Of that which he planned to tell.
A man in distress wants to pour out his heart
More than that his case be won.
(273) About him who stops a plea
One says: "Why does he reject it?"
Not all one pleads for can be granted,
But a good hearing soothes the heart.

18. If you want friendship to endure
In the house you enter
As master, brother, or friend,
(280) In whatever place you enter,
Beware of approaching the women!
Unhappy is the place where it is done,
Unwelcome³² is he who intrudes on them.
A thousand men are turned away from their good:
A short moment like a dream,
Then death comes for having known them.
Poor advice is "shoot the opponent,"
When one goes to do it the heart rejects it.
He who fails through lust of them,
No affair of his can prosper.

- (19. (298 = 10, 1) If you want a perfect conduct,
To be free from every evil,
Guard against the vice of greed:
A grievous sickness without cure,
There is no treatment for it.

It embroils fathers, mothers,
And the brothers of the mother,
It parts wife from husband;
It is a compound³³ of all evils,
A bundle of all hateful things.
That man endures whose rule is rightness,
Who walks a straight line;³⁴
(314) He will make a will by it,
The greedy has no tomb.

20. Do not be greedy in the division,
Do not covet more than your share;
Do not be greedy toward your kin,
The mild has a greater claim than the harsh.
Poor is he who shuns³⁵ his kin,
He is deprived of 'interchange'.³⁶
Even a little of what is craved
Turns a quarreler into an amiable man.³⁷
21. (325) When you prosper and found your house,
And love your wife with ardor,
Fill her belly, clothe her back,
Ointment soothes her body.
Gladden her heart as long as you live,
She is a fertile field for her lord.
Do not contend with her in court,
Keep her from power, restrain her—
Her eye is her storm when she gazes—
Thus will you make her stay in your house.
-----³⁸
22. (339 = 11, 1) Sustain your friends with what you have,
You have it by the grace of god;
Of him who fails to sustain his friends
One says, "a selfish *ka*."
One plans the morrow but knows not what will be,
The (right) *ka* is the *ka* by which one is sustained.
If praiseworthy deeds are done,³⁹
Friends will say, "welcome!"
One does not bring supplies to town,
One brings friends when there is need.

23. (350 = 11, 5) Do not repeat calumny,
Nor should you listen to it,
It is the spouting of the hot-bellied.
Report a thing observed, not heard,
If it is negligible, don't say anything,
He who is before you recognizes worth.
If a seizure is ordered and carried out,
Hatred will arise against him who seizes;¹⁴⁰
Calumny is like a dream against which one covers the face.⁴¹
24. (362) If you are a man of worth
Who sits in his master's council,
Concentrate on excellence,
Your silence is better than chatter.⁴²
Speak when you know you have a solution,
It is the skilled who should speak in council;
Speaking is harder than all other work,
He who understands it makes it serve.
25. If you are mighty, gain respect through knowledge
(371) And through gentleness of speech.
Don't command except as is fitting,
He who provokes⁴³ gets into trouble.
Don't be haughty, lest you be humbled,
Don't be mute, lest you be chided.
When you answer one who is fuming,
Avert your face, control yourself.
The flame of the hot-heart⁴⁴ sweeps across,
He who steps gently, his path is paved.
He who frets all day has no happy moment,
He who's gay all day can't keep house.
-----⁴⁵
26. (388) Don't oppose a great man's action,
Don't vex the heart of one who is burdened;
If he gets angry at him who foils him,
The *ka*¹⁶ will part from him who loves him.
Yet he is the provider along with the god,
What he wishes should be done for him.
When he turns his face back to you after raging,
There will be peace from his *ka*;

- As ill will comes from opposition,
So goodwill increases love.
27. Teach the great what is useful to him,
(400 = 12, 10) Be his aid before the people;
If you let his knowledge impress his lord,
Your sustenance will come from his *ka*.
As the favorite's belly is filled,
So your back will be clothed by it,
And his help will be there to sustain you.
For your superior whom you love
And who lives by it,
He in turn will give you good support.
Thus will love of you endure
In the belly⁴⁷ of those who love you,
He is a *ka* who loves to listen.
28. (415 = 13, 1) If you are a magistrate of standing,
Commissioned to satisfy the many,
Hew a straight line.¹⁴⁸
When you speak don't lean to one side,
Beware lest one complain:
"Judges, he distorts the matter!"
And your deed turns into a judgment (of you).
29. If you are angered by a misdeed,
Lean toward a man on account of his rightness;
Pass it over, don't recall it,
Since he was silent to you the first day.⁴⁹
30. (428) If you are great after having been humble,
Have gained wealth after having been poor
In the past, in a town which you know,
Knowing¹⁵⁰ your former condition,
Do not put trust in your wealth,
Which came to you as gift of god;
So that you will not fall behind one like you,
To whom the same has happened.
31. (441) Bend your back to your superior,
Your overseer from the palace;
Then your house will endure in its wealth,

Your rewards in their right place.
 Wretched is he who opposes a superior,
 One lives as long as he is mild,
 Baring the arm does not hurt it.⁵¹
 Do not plunder a neighbor's house,
 Do not steal the goods of one near you,
 Lest he denounce you before you are heard.
 A quarreler is a mindless person,⁵²
 If he is known as an aggressor
 The hostile man will have trouble in the neighborhood.

32. *This maxim is an injunction against illicit sexual intercourse. It is very obscure and has been omitted here.*⁵³

33. If you probe the character of a friend,
 Don't inquire, but approach him,
 Deal with him alone,
 So as not to suffer from his manner.
 Dispute with him after a time,
 (470) Test his heart in conversation;
 If what he has seen escapes him,⁵⁴
 If he does a thing that annoys you,
 Be yet friendly with him, don't attack;⁵⁵
 Be restrained, don't let fly,
 Don't answer with hostility,
 Neither part from him nor attack him;
 His time does not fail to come,
 One does not escape what is fated.

34. (481) Be generous⁵⁶ as long as you live,
 What leaves the storehouse does not return;
 It is the food to be shared which is coveted,
 One whose belly is empty is an accuser;
 One deprived⁵⁷ becomes an opponent,
 Don't have him for a neighbor.
 Kindness is a man's memorial
 For the years after the function.⁵⁸

35. (489 = 15, 3) Know your helpers, then you prosper,
 Don't be mean toward your friends,
 They are one's watered field,
 And greater than one's riches,

For what belongs to one belongs to another.
 The character of a son-of-man is profit to him;⁵⁹
 Good nature is a memorial.

36. Punish firmly, chastise soundly,
 Then repression of crime becomes an example;
 Punishment except for crime
 Turns the complainer into an enemy.⁶⁰

37. (499) If you take to wife a *špnt*⁶¹
 Who is joyful⁶² and known by her town,
 If she is 'fickle'⁶³ and likes the moment,
 Do not reject her, let her eat,
 The joyful brings 'happiness.'⁶⁴

Epilogue

If you listen to my sayings,
 All your affairs will go forward;
 In their truth resides their value,
 Their memory goes on in the speech of men,
 Because of the worth of their precepts;
 If every word is carried on,
 They will not perish in this land.
 If advice is given for the good,⁶⁵
 The great will speak accordingly;
 It is teaching a man to speak to posterity,
 He who hears it becomes a master-hearer;
 It is good to speak to posterity,
 It will listen to it.

(520 = 15, 12) If a good example is set by him who leads,
 He will be beneficent for ever,
 His wisdom being for all time.
 The wise feeds his *ba* with what endures,⁶⁶
 So that it is happy with him on earth.
The wise is known by his wisdom,
The great by his good actions;
His heart 'matches'⁶⁷ his tongue,
His lips are straight when he speaks;
 (530) He has eyes that see,
 His ears are made to hear what will profit his son,
 Acting with truth he is free of falsehood.

Useful is hearing to a son who hears;
 If hearing enters the hearer,
 The hearer becomes a listener,
 Hearing well is speaking well.
 (540 = 16, 5) Useful is hearing to one who hears,
 Hearing is better than all else,
 It creates good will.
 How good for a son to grasp his father's words,
 He will reach old age through them.

He who hears is beloved of god,
 He whom god hates does not hear.
 (550) The heart makes of its owner a hearer or non-hearer,⁶⁸
 Man's heart is his life-prosperity-health!
 The hearer is one who hears what is said,
 He who loves to hear is one who does what is said.
 How good for a son to listen to his father,
 How happy is he to whom it is said:
 "The son, he pleases as a master of hearing."
 The hearer of whom this is said,
 He is well-endowed
 And honored by his father;
 His remembrance is in the mouth of the living,
 Those on earth and those who will be.

(564) If a man's son accepts his father's words,
 No plan of his will go wrong.
 Teach your son to be a hearer,
 One who will be valued by the nobles;
 One who guides his speech by what he was told,
 One regarded as a hearer.
 This son excels, his deeds stand out,
 While failure follows him who hears not.
 The wise wakes early to his lasting gain,
 While the fool is hard pressed.

(575) The fool who does not hear,
 He can do nothing at all;
 He sees knowledge in ignorance,
 Usefulness in harmfulness.
 He does all that one detests

And is blamed for it each day;
 He lives on that by which one dies,
 His food is distortion of speech.
 His sort is known to the officials,
 Who say: "A living death each day."
 One passes over his doings,
 Because of his many daily troubles.

(588 = 17, 10) A son who hears is a follower of Horus,
 It goes well with him when he has heard.
 When he is old, has reached veneration,
 He will speak likewise to his children,
 Renewing the teaching of his father.

Every man teaches as he acts,
 He will speak to the children,
 So that they will speak to their children:
 Set an example, don't give offense,
 If justice stands firm your children will live.

As to the first who gets into trouble,
 (600) When they see (it) people will say:
 "That is just like him."
 And will say to what they hear:
 "That's just like him too."⁶⁹

To see everyone is to satisfy the many,
 Riches are useless without them.⁷⁰
 Don't take a word and then bring it back,
 Don't put one thing in place of another.
 Beware of loosening the cords in you,⁷¹
 Lest a wise man say:
 "Listen, if you want to endure in the mouth of the hearers,
 Speak after you have mastered the craft!"
 If you speak to good purpose,
 All your affairs will be in place.

(618) Conceal your heart, control your mouth,
 Then you will be known among the officials;
 Be quite exact before your lord,
 Act so that one will say to him: "He's the son of that one."
 And those who hear it will say:
 "Blessed is he to whom he was born!"

Be deliberate when you speak,
 So as to say things that count;
 Then the officials who listen will say:
 "How good is what comes from his mouth!"
 Act so that your lord will say of you:
 "How good is he whom his father taught;
 When he came forth from his body,
 He told him all that was in (his) mind,
 And he does even more than he was told."

(633 = 19, 5) Lo, the good son, the gift of god,
 Exceeds what is told him by his lord,
 He will do right when his heart is straight.
 As you succeed me, sound in your body,
 The king content with all that was done,
 May you obtain (many) years of life!
 Not small is what I did on earth,
 I had one hundred and ten years of life
 As gift of the king,
 Honors exceeding those of the ancestors,
 By doing justice for the king,
 Until the state of veneration!

(645 = 19, 9) *Colophon*: It is done from its beginning to its end as it was found in writing.

NOTES

1. Assuming with Žába that *hḏr* is for *hḏd*, but it is quite uncertain; a word *hḏr*, with a different determinative occurs in *Peasant*, B 138 in an obscure context.
2. Instead of the *ḫsn* of the other versions Prisse has an obscure *n tmo*.
3. "Staff of old age" is a metaphor for son or successor.
4. *Sḏmyw*, "those who heard," or "the listeners," often has the specific meaning "judges."
5. Literally, "hearing."
6. Literally, "Do not let your heart be big." Ptahhotep distinguishes between '3-*tb*, "big-hearted," in the sense of "proud, arrogant," and *wr-tb*, "great-hearted," in the sense of "high-minded, magnanimous." Elsewhere this distinction is not made; for example the courtier Tjetji calls himself '3 *n tb-f* (BM 614, 7) which is of course "great of heart" in the positive sense. Yet the pejorative sense of '3 recurs; see G. Posener, *RdE*, 16 (1964), 37-43.
7. Faulkner's study of maxims 2-4 provided the correct overall understanding. Some details concerning shades of meaning remain uncertain, e.g., the precise meaning of *ḫrp-tb*.

8. The word is *rḫ*, "knowledge."
9. Literally, "Do not wash your heart." "To wash the heart" (*t' tb*) is to relieve the heart of feelings, be they of anger or of joy. In *Peasant*, B 205 the hunter "washes his heart" by indulging in the joy of killing animals. When the heart is "washed" it is "appeased," as in *Simuhe*, B 149. The expression was studied by A. Moret, *RT*, 14 (1893), 120-123; Gardiner, *Simuhe*, p. 57; and Faulkner, *loc. cit.*, p. 84.
10. As Faulkner, *loc. cit.*, pointed out, *ḫsn pw* here and also in 13, 11 = 446 is applied to a person. Contrary to Faulkner and Žába, I separate *tb* from *ḫwrw* and read *tb-tw* at the beginning of line 82.
11. On this much studied maxim consult the literature cited. I have omitted lines 95-96 which are generally thought to be out of place here, and have inserted them after line 107.
12. Lines 95-96; the meaning is doubtful.
13. "They" are the gods. The maxim is interesting as a working of the theme of divine retribution through the reversal of fortune. This aspect was studied by Volten, *loc. cit.* ("Nemesis-Gedanken").
14. Egyptian says "behind food" rather than "before food."
15. I take *ph n s* to be an idiom for "chosen man" or "lucky man." If one renders "the great man gives to the man whom he can reach" (Wilson, Žába), the giving becomes a merely passive matter and does not result from the will of the *ka*.
16. A "washing of the heart"; see n. 9.
17. This sentence appears to be out of place here.
18. I.e., neither decry childlessness nor boast of having children.
19. Deleting the *s* before *šms-f*.
20. '3-*tb* as above, n. 6.
21. Taking "they" to be "the gods"; see Žába's remarks, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
22. The recent attempt by D. Lorton in *JARCE*, 7 (1968), 41-54, to see in *šms-tb*, "follow the heart," something other than an exhortation to enjoy life seems to me erroneous.
23. The idea that the gods determine a man's character and fate was not developed to the point where it would have overwhelmed the sense of free will and personal responsibility. On the notion of fate consult S. Morenz, *Untersuchungen zur Rolle des Schicksals in der ägyptischen Religion*, Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Phil.-hist. Kl. 52/1 (Berlin, 1960).
24. "Stand and sit" may be taken literally or metaphorically; cf. *Kagemni*, n. 10.
25. The meaning is that he who comes before the king in accordance with protocol will find a good welcome. Hence the "keen face" is that of the king, not of the audience-seeker; the latter receives a "spacious seat," i.e., he is made welcome; cf. *Kagemni*, n. 1.
26. The participle of *rdtw ḫ'h* could be either active or passive; and since *ḫ'h* is both "elbow" and "shoulder," the image could be "he who touches elbows," or "rubs shoulders," or "is steered by the elbow." See also the expression *tr ḫ'h*, "give support" in line 411.
27. The meaning of *ḫfs-tb* is unclear. Faulkner, *Dict.*, p. 285: "trustworthy," and for *ḫfs* without *tb*, "be discreet," based on *Merikare*, line 64. E. Hornung, *ZAS*, 87 (1962), 115-116, proposed the meanings "open-hearted, generous," and their extension to "profligate, extravagant." In

Akhenaton's Hymn to the Aton

Translated by James Henry Breasted

Source: "The Life and Times of Akhnaton, Pharoah of Egypt"
(Arthur Weigall, published by Thornton Butterworth Ltd, London 1922 edition)

Splendid you rise in heaven's lightland,
O living Aten, creator of life!
When you have dawned in eastern lightland,
You fill every land with your beauty.
You are beauteous, great, radiant,
High over every land;
Your rays embrace the lands,
To the limit of all that you made.
Being Re, you reach their limits,
You bend them for the son whom you love;
Though you are far, your rays are on earth,
Though one sees you, your strides are unseen.

When you set in western lightland,
Earth is in darkness as if in death;
One sleeps in chambers, heads covered,
One eye does not see another.
Were they robbed of their goods,
That are under their heads,
People would not remark it.
Every lion comes from its den,
All the serpents bite;
Darkness hovers, earth is silent,
As their maker rests in lightland.

Earth brightens when you dawn in lightland,
When you shine as Aten of daytime;
As you dispel the dark,
As you cast your rays,
The Two Lands are in festivity.
Awake they stand on their feet,
You have roused them;
Bodies cleansed, clothed,
Their arms adore your appearance.
The entire land sets out to work,
All beasts browse on their herbs;
Trees, herbs are sprouting,
Birds fly from their nests,
Their wings greeting your ka.
All flocks frisk on their feet,
All that fly up and alight,

They live when you dawn for them.
 Ships fare north, fare south as well,
 Roads lie open when you rise;
 The fish in the river dart before you,
 Your rays are in the midst of the sea.

Who makes seed grow in women,
 Who creates people from sperm;
 Who feeds the son in his mother's womb,
 Who soothes him to still his tears.
 Nurse in the womb,
 Giver of breath,
 To nourish all that he made.
 When he comes from the womb to breathe,
 On the day of his birth,
 You open wide his mouth,
 You supply his needs.
 When the chick in the egg speaks in the shell,
 You give him breath within to sustain him;
 When you have made him complete,
 To break out from the egg,
 He comes out from the egg,
 To announce his completion,
 Walking on his legs he comes from it.

How many are your deeds,
 Though hidden from sight,
O Sole God beside whom there is none!
 You made the earth as you wished, you alone,
 All peoples, herds, and flocks;
 All upon earth that walk on legs,
 All on high that fly on wings,
 The lands of Khor and Kush,
 The land of Egypt.
 You set every man in his place,
 You supply their needs;
 Everyone has his food,
 His lifetime is counted.
 Their tongues differ in speech,
 Their characters likewise;
 Their skins are distinct,
 For you distinguished the peoples.

You made Hapy in dat (the Netherworld),
You bring him when you will,
To nourish the people,
For you made them for yourself.
Lord of all who toils for them,
Lord of all lands who shines for them,
Aten of daytime, great in glory!
All distant lands, you make them live,
You made a heavenly Hapy descend for them;
He makes waves on the mountains like the sea,
To drench their fields and their towns.
How excellent are your ways, O Lord of eternity!
A Hapy from heaven for foreign peoples,
And all lands' creatures that walk on legs,
For Egypt the Hapy who comes from dat.

Your rays nurse all fields,
When you shine they live, they grow for you;
You made the seasons to foster all that you made,
Winter to cool them, heat that they taste you.
You made the far sky to shine therein,
To behold all that you made;
You alone, shining in your form of living Aten,
Risen, radiant, distant, near.
You made millions of forms from yourself alone,
Towns, villages, fields, the river's course;
All eyes observe you upon them,
For you are the Aten of daytime on high.

To whom shall I speak today?
One lacks an intimate,
One resorts to an unknown (125) to complain.

To whom shall I speak today?
No one is cheerful,
He with whom one walked is no more.

To whom shall I speak today?
I am burdened with grief
For lack of an intimate.

To whom shall I speak today?
Wrong roams the earth,
(130) And ends not.

III

Death is before me today
<Like> a sick man's recovery,
Like going outdoors after confinement.

Death is before me today
Like the fragrance of myrrh,
Like sitting under sail on breeze day.

Death is before me today
(135) Like the fragrance of lotus,
Like sitting on the shore of drunkenness.

Death is before me today
Like a well-trodden way,
Like a man's coming home from warfare.

Death is before me today
Like the clearing of the sky,
As when a man discovers (140) what he ignored.

Death is before me today
Like a man's longing to see his home
When he has spent many years in captivity.

IV

Truly, he who is yonder will be a living god,
Punishing the evildoer's crime.

25

Truly, he who is yonder will stand in the sun-bark,
Making its bounty flow (145) to the temples.

Truly, he who is yonder will be a wise man,
Not barred from appealing to Re when he speaks.

What my *ba* said to me: "Now throw complaint on the 'wood-pile',
you my comrade, my brother! Whether you offer on the brazier, (150)
whether you bear down on life, as you say, love me here when you
have set aside the West! But when it is wished that you attain the
West, that your body joins the earth, I shall alight after you have
become weary, and then we shall dwell together!"

Colophon: It is finished (155) from beginning to end, as it was found
in writing.

THE ELOQUENT PEASANT

This long work is preserved in four papyrus copies, all dating from the
Middle Kingdom. The individual copies are incomplete, but together they
yield the full text, which comprises 430 lines. The three principal copies
are P. Berlin 3023 (B1), P. Berlin 3025 (B2), and P. Berlin 10499 (R); the
fourth is P. Butler 527 = P. British Museum 10274.

The text consists of a narrative frame and nine poetic speeches. It is
both a serious disquisition on the need for justice, and a parable on the
utility of fine speech. The connection between the two themes is achieved
by means of an ironic device in the narrative frame: after the peasant has
been robbed and has laid his complaint before the magistrate in a stirring
plea, the latter is so delighted with this unlearned man's eloquence that he
reports it to the king; and on the king's orders the magistrate goads the
peasant to continue pleading until the poor man is completely exhausted.
Only then does he receive justice and ample rewards.

The tension between the studied silence of the magistrate and the
increasingly despairing speeches of the peasant is the operative principle
that moves the action forward. And the mixture of seriousness and irony,
the intertwining of a plea for justice with a demonstration of the value of
rhetoric, is the very essence of the work.

Publication: F. Vogelsang and A. H. Gardiner, *Die Klagen des Bauern*,
Literarische Texte des Mittleren Reiches, I (Berlin, 1908). F. Vogel-
sang, *Kommentar zu den Klagen des Bauern*, Untersuchungen, 6 (Leipzig,
1913; reprint, Hildesheim, 1964).

Excerpts: de Buck, *Readingbook*, pp. 88-99. Sethe, *Lesestücke*,
pp. 17-25. *Idem*, *Erl.*, pp. 21-32.

Translation: A. H. Gardiner, *JEA*, 9 (1923), 5-25. Erman, *Literature*,
pp. 116-131. F. Lexa, *Arch. Or.*, 7 (1935), 372-383. Lefebvre,
Romans, pp. 41-69. J. A. Wilson in *ANET*, pp. 407-410 (excerpts).
Bissing, *Lebensweisheit*, pp. 155-170.

Comments: F. Lexa, *RT*, 34 (1912), 218-231. A. H. Gardiner,
PSBA, 35 (1913), 264-276. E. Suys, *Étude sur le conte du fellah plaideur*

(Rome, 1933). A. M. Blackman, *JEA*, 20 (1934), 218-219. S. Herrmann, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 79-98. *Idem*, *ZAS*, 80 (1955), 34-39, and *ZAS*, 82 (1958), 55-57. G. Lanczkowski, *Altägyptischer Prophetismus* (Wiesbaden, 1960).

(R1) There was a man named Khun-Anup, a peasant of Salt-Field.¹ He had a wife whose name was [Ma]rye. This peasant said to his wife: "Look here, I am going down to Egypt to bring food from there for my children. Go, measure for me the barley which is in the barn, what is left of [last year's] barley." Then she measured for him [twenty-six] gallons of barley. (5) This peasant said to his wife: "Look, you have twenty gallons of barley as food for you and your children. Now make for me these six gallons of barley into bread and beer for every day in which [I shall travel]."

This peasant went down to Egypt. He had loaded his donkeys with rushes, *rdmt*-grass, (10) natron, salt, sticks of ---, staves from Cattle-Country,² leopard skins, (15) wolf skins, *ns3*-plants, *nw*-stones, *tnm*-plants, *hprwr*-plants, (20) *s3hwt*, *s3skwt*, *miswt*-plants, *snt*-stones, *b3w*-stones, (25) *ib33*-plants, *inbi*-plants, pigeons, *n'rw*-birds, *wgs*-birds, (30) *wbn*-plants, *tbsw*-plants, *gngnt*, earth-hair, and *inst*; (35) in sum, all the good products of Salt-Field. This peasant went south toward Hnes.³ He arrived in the district of Perfefi, north of Medenyt. There he met a man standing on the riverbank whose name was Nemtynakht.⁴ He was the son of a man (40) named Isri and a sub-ordinate of the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru.

This Nemtynakht said, when he saw this peasant's donkeys which tempted his heart: "If only I had a potent divine image through which I could seize this peasant's goods!" Now the house of this Nemtynakht was at the beginning (45) of a path⁵ which was narrow, not so wide as to exceed the width of a shawl. And one side of it was under water, the other under barley. This Nemtynakht said to his servant: "Go, bring me a sheet from my house." It was brought to him straightway. He spread it out on the beginning of the path, (50) so that its fringe touched the water, its hem the barley.

Now this peasant came along the public road. (B1, 1) Then this Nemtynakht said: "Be careful, peasant; don't step on my clothes! This peasant said: "I'll do as you wish, my course is a good one." So he went up higher. This Nemtynakht said: (5) "Will you have my barley for a path?" This peasant said: "My course is a good one. The riverbank is steep and our way is under barley, for you block the path with your clothes. Will you then not let us pass on the road?"

26

Just then one of the donkeys filled (10) its mouth with a wisp of barley. This Nemtynakht said: "Now I shall seize your donkey, peasant, for eating my barley. It shall tread out grain for its offense!" This peasant said: "My course is a good one. Only one (wisp) is destroyed. Could I buy my donkey for its value, if you seize it (15) for filling its mouth with a wisp of barley?⁶ But I know the lord of this domain; it belongs to the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru. He punishes every robber in this whole land. Shall I be robbed in his domain?" This Nemtynakht said: "Is this the saying people say: (20) 'A poor man's name is pronounced for his master's sake.' It is I who speak to you, and you invoke the high steward!"

Then he took a stick of green tamarisk to him and thrashed all his limbs with it, seized his donkeys, drove them to his domain. Then this peasant (25) wept very loudly for the pain of that which was done to him. This Nemtynakht said: "Don't raise your voice, peasant. Look, you are bound for the abode of the Lord of Silence!"⁷ This peasant said: "You beat me, you steal my goods, and now you take the complaint from my mouth! O Lord of Silence, give me back (30) my things, so that I can stop crying to your dreadedness!"⁸

This peasant spent the time of ten days appealing to this Nemtynakht who paid no attention to it. So this peasant proceeded southward to Hnes, in order to appeal to the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru. He found him coming out of the door (35) of his house, to go down to his courthouse barge. This peasant said: "May I be allowed to acquaint you with this complaint? Might a servant of your choice be sent to me, through whom I could inform you of it?" So the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, (40) sent a servant of his choice ahead of him, and this peasant informed him of the matter in all its aspects.

Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, denounced this Nemtynakht to the magistrates who were with him. Then they said to him: "Surely it is a peasant of his who has gone to someone else beside him. (45) That is what they do to peasants of theirs who go to others beside them.⁹ That is what they do. Is there cause for punishing this Nemtynakht for a trifle of natron and a trifle of salt? If he is ordered to replace it, he will replace it." Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, (50) fell silent. He did not reply to these magistrates, nor did he reply to this peasant.

First Petition

Now this peasant came to appeal to the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru. He said: "O high steward, my lord, greatest of the great, leader of all!

When you go down to the sea of (55) justice
And sail on it with a fair wind,¹⁰
No squall shall strip away your sail,
Nor will your boat be idle.
No accident will affect your mast,
Your yards will not break.
You will not founder when you touch land,
No flood will carry you away.
You will not taste the river's (60) evils,
You will not see a frightened face.
Fish will come darting to you,
Fatted fowl surround you.
For you are father to the orphan,
Husband to the widow,
Brother to the rejected woman,
Apron to the motherless.

Let me make your name in (65) this land according to all the good rules:¹¹

Leader free of greed,
Great man free of baseness,
Destroyer of falsehood,
Creator of rightness,
Who comes at the voice of the caller!
When I speak, may you hear!
Do justice, O praised one,
Who is praised by the praised;
Remove (70) my grief, I am burdened,
Examine me, I am in need!"

Now this peasant made this speech in the time of the majesty of King Nebkaure, the justified. Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, went before his majesty and said: "My lord, (75) I have found one among those peasants whose speech is truly beautiful. Robbed of his goods by a man who is in my service, he has come to petition me about it." Said his majesty: "As truly as you wish to see me

in health, you shall detain him here, without answering whatever he says. In order to keep him (80) talking, be silent. Then have it brought to us in writing, that we may hear it. But provide for his wife and his children. For one of those peasants comes here (only) just before his house is empty. Provide also for this peasant himself. You shall let food be given him without letting him know that it is you who gives it to him."

So they gave him ten loaves of bread and two jugs of beer (85) every day. It was the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, who gave it. He gave it to a friend of his, and he gave it to him. Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, wrote to the mayor of Salt-Field about providing food for this peasant's wife, a total of three bushels of grain every day.

Second Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a second time. He said: "O high steward, my lord, greatest of the great, richest of the rich, truly greater than his great ones, richer than his (90) rich ones!

Rudder of heaven, beam of earth,
Plumb-line that carries the weight!
Rudder, drift not,
Beam, tilt not,
Plumb-line, swing not awry!

A great lord taking a share of that which is (now) ownerless; stealing from a lonely man? Your portion is in your house: a jug of beer and three loaves. What is that you expend to satisfy your (95) clients? A mortal man dies along with his underlings; shall you be a man of eternity?

Is it not wrong, a balance that tilts,
A plummet that strays,
The straight becoming crooked?
Lo, justice flees from you,
Expelled from its seat!
The magistrates do wrong,
Right-dealing is bent sideways,
The judges snatch what has been stolen.
He who trims a matter's rightness (100) makes it swing awry:
The breath-giver chokes him who is down,

He who should refresh makes pant.
 The arbitrator is a robber,
 The remover of need orders its creation.
 The town is a floodwater,
 The punisher of evil commits crimes!"

Said the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru: "Are your belongings a greater concern to you than that my servant might seize you?"¹²
 This peasant said:

"The measurer of (105) grain-heaps trims for himself,
 He who fills for another shaves the other's share;
 He who should rule by law commands theft,
 Who then will punish crime?
 The straightener of another's crookedness
 Supports another's crime.
 Do you find here something for you?
 Redress is short, misfortune long,
 A good deed is remembered.
 This is the precept:
 Do to the doer (110) to make him do.¹³
 It is thanking a man for what he does,
 Parrying a blow before it strikes,
 Giving a commission to one who is skillful.

Oh for a moment of destruction, havoc in your vineyard, loss among
 your birds, damage to your water birds!

A man who saw has turned blind,
 A hearer deaf,
 A leader now leads astray!

(115) You are strong and mighty. Your arm is active,
 your heart greedy, mercy has passed you by. How miserable is the
 wretch whom you have destroyed! You are like a messenger of the
 Crocodile; you surpass (120) the Lady of Pestilence!¹⁴ If you have
 nothing, she has nothing. If there's nothing against her, there's
 nothing against you. If you don't act, she does not act. The wealthy
 should be merciful; violence is for the criminal; robbing suits him who
 has nothing. The stealing done by the robber is the misdeed of one
 who is poor.¹⁵ One can't reproach him; he merely seeks for himself.
 But you are sated (125) with your bread, drunken with your beer,
 rich in all kinds of [treasures].

Though the face of the steersman is forward, the boat drifts as it
 pleases. Though the king is in the palace, though the rudder is in your
 hand, wrong is done around you. Long is my plea, heavy my task.
 "What is the matter with him?" people ask.

Be a shelter, (130) make safe your shore,
 See how your quay is infested with crocodiles!
 Straighten your tongue, let it not stray,
 A serpent is this limb of man.
 Don't tell lies, warn the magistrates,
 Greasy baskets are the judges,
 Telling lies is their herbage,
 It weighs lightly on them.
 Knower of (135) all men's ways:
 Do you ignore my case?
 Savior from all water's harm:
 See I have a course without a ship!
 Guider to port of all who founder:
 Rescue the drowning!
"

Third Petition

Then this peasant came to petition him a third time; he said:

(14) "High steward, my lord,
 You are Re, lord of sky, with your courtiers,
 Men's sustenance is from you as from the flood,
 You are Hapy who makes green the fields,
 Revives the wastelands.
 Punish the robber, save the sufferer,
 Be not (145) a flood against the pleader!
 Heed eternity's coming,
 Desire to last, as is said:
 Doing justice is breath for the nose.
 Punish him who should be punished,
 And none will equal your rectitude.
 Does the hand-balance deflect?
 Does the stand-balance tilt?
 Does Thoth (150) show favor
 So that you may do wrong?
 Be the equal of these three:

If the three show favor,
Then may you show favor!
Answer not good with evil,
Put not one thing in place of another!

My speech grows more than *smyt*-weed, to assault¹⁶ the smell
with its answers. Misfortune pours water (155) till cloth will grow!
Three times now to make him act!¹⁷

By the sail-wind should you steer,
Control the waves to sail aright;
Guard from landing by the helm-rope,
Earth's rightness lies in justice!
Speak not falsely—you are great,
Act not lightly—(160) you are weighty;
Speak not falsely—you are the balance,
Do not swerve—you are the norm!
You are one with the balance,
If it tilts you may tilt.
Do not drift, steer, hold the helm-rope!
Rob not, act against the robber,
(165) Not great is one who is great in greed.
Your tongue is the plummet,
Your heart the weight,
Your two lips are its arms.
If you avert your face from violence,
Who then shall punish wrongdoing?
Lo, you are a wretch of a washerman,
A greedy one who harms (170) a friend,
One who forsakes his friend for his client,
His brother is he who comes with gifts.
Lo, you are a ferryman who ferries him who pays,
A straight one whose straightness is splintered,
A storekeeper who does not let a poor man pass,
Lo, you are (175) a hawk to the little people,
One who lives on the poorest of the birds.
Lo, you are a butcher whose joy is slaughter,
The carnage is nothing to him.
You are a herdsman

.

(180) Hearer, you hear not! Why do you not hear? Now I have
subdued the savage; the crocodile retreats! What is your gain? When
the secret of truth is found, falsehood is thrown on its back on the
ground. Trust not the morrow before it has come; none knows the
trouble in it."¹⁸

Now this peasant had made this speech (185) to the high steward
Rensi, the son of Meru, at the entrance to the courthouse. Then he
had two guards go to him with whips, and they thrashed all his limbs.

This peasant said: "The son of Meru goes on erring. His face is
blind to what he sees, deaf to what he hears; his heart strays from what
is recalled to him.

You are like a town¹⁹ (190) without a mayor,
Like a troop without a leader,
Like a ship without a captain,
A company without a chief.
You are a sheriff who steals,
A mayor who pockets,
A district prosecutor of crime
Who is the model for the (evil)-doer!"

Fourth Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a fourth time. Finding him
(195) coming out of the gate of the temple of Harsaphes, he said:
"O praised one, may Harsaphes praise you, from whose temple you
have come!"

Goodness is destroyed, none adhere to it,
To fling falsehood's back to the ground.

If the ferry is grounded, wherewith does one cross?

Is crossing (200) the river on sandals a good crossing? No! Who
now sleeps till daybreak? Gone is walking by night, travel by day,
and letting a man defend his own good cause. But it is no use to tell
you this; mercy has passed you by. How miserable is the wretch (205)
whom you have destroyed!

Lo, you are a hunter who takes his fill,²⁰
Bent on doing what he pleases;
Spearing hippopotami, shooting bulls,
Catching fish, snaring birds.
(But) none quick to speak is free from haste,

None light of heart is weighty in conduct.

Be patient (210) so as to learn justice,

Restrain your [anger] for the good of the humble seeker.²¹

No hasty man attains excellence,

No impatient man is leaned upon.

Let the eyes see, let the heart take notice. Be not harsh in your power, lest trouble befall you. (215) Pass over a matter, it becomes two. He who eats tastes; one addressed answers. It is the sleeper who sees the dream; and a judge who deserves punishment is a model for the (evil)doer. Fool, you are attacked! Ignorant man, you are (220) questioned! Spouter of water, you are attained!

Steersman, let not drift your boat,

Life-sustainer, let not die,

Provider, let not perish,²²

Shade, let one not dry out,²³

Shelter, let not the crocodile snatch!

The fourth time I petition you! (225) Shall I go on all day?"

Fifth Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a fifth time; he said:

"O high steward, my lord! The fisher of *hwdu*-fish -----, the --- slays the *ty*-fish; the spearer of fish pierces the *wbb*-fish; the *dsbhw*-fisher (230) attacks the *p'kr*-fish; and the catcher of *wh'*-fish ravages the river.²⁴ Now you are like them! Rob not a poor man of his goods, a humble man whom you know! Breathe to the poor are his belongings; he who takes them stops up his nose. It is to hear cases that you were installed, to judge between two, (235) to punish the robber. But what you do is to uphold the thief! One puts one's trust in you, but you have become a transgressor! You were placed as a dam for the poor lest he drown, but you have become a swift current to him!

Sixth Petition

Now this peasant came (240) to petition him a sixth time; he said: "O high steward, my lord!²⁵

He who lessens falsehood fosters truth, ←

He who fosters the good reduces <evil>,

As satiety's coming removes hunger,

Clothing removes nakedness;

As the sky is serene after a (245) storm,

Warming all who shiver;

As fire cooks what is raw,

As water quenches thirst.

Now see for yourself:

The arbitrator is a robber,

The peacemaker makes grief,

He who should soothe (250) makes sore.

But he who cheats diminishes justice!

Rightly filled justice neither falls short nor brims over.

If you acquire, give to your fellow; gobbling up is dishonest. But my grief will lead to (255) parting; my accusation brings departure. The heart's intent cannot be known. Don't delay! Act on the charge! If you sever, who shall join? The sounding pole is in your hand; sound! The water is shallow!²⁶ If the boat enters and is grounded, its cargo perishes (260) on the shore.

You are learned, skilled, accomplished,

But not in order to plunder!

You should be the model for all men,

But your affairs are crooked!

The standard for all men cheats the whole land!

The vintner of evil waters his plot with crimes,

Until his plot sprouts (265) falsehood,

His estate flows with crimes!"

Seventh Petition

Now this peasant came to petition him a seventh time; he said: "O high steward, my lord!

You are the whole land's rudder,

The land sails by your bidding;

You are the peer of Thoth,

The judge who is not partial.

My lord, be patient, so that a man may invoke you (270) about his rightful cause. Don't be angry; it is not for you. The long-faced becomes short-tempered. Don't brood on what has not yet come, nor rejoice at what has not yet happened. The patient man prolongs friendship; he who destroys a case will not be trusted.²⁷ If law is

laid waste and order destroyed, no poor man can (275) survive: when he is robbed, justice does not address him.

My body was full, my heart burdened. Now therefore it has come from my body. As a dam is breached and water escapes, so my mouth opened to speak. I plied my sounding pole, I bailed out my water; I have emptied what was in my body; I have washed my soiled linen. (280) My speech is done. My grief is all before you. What do you want? But your laziness leads you astray; your greed makes you dumb; your gluttony makes enemies for you. But will you find another peasant like me? Is there an idler at whose house door a petitioner will stand?

(285) There is no silent man whom you gave speech,

No sleeper whom you have awakened,

None downcast whom you have roused,

None whose shut mouth you have opened,

None ignorant whom you gave knowledge,

None foolish whom you have taught.

(Yet) magistrates are dispellers of evil,

Masters of the good,

Craftsmen who create what is,

Joiners of the severed head!"

Eighth Petition

Now this peasant (290) came to petition him an eighth time; he said: "O high steward, my lord! Men fall low through greed. The rapacious man lacks success; his success is loss. Though you are greedy it does nothing for you. Though you steal you do not profit. Let a man defend his rightful cause!

Your portion is in your house; your belly is full. The grain-bin brims over; shake it, (295) its overflow spoils on the ground. Thief, robber, plunderer! Magistrates are appointed to suppress crime. Magistrates are shelters against the aggressor. Magistrates are appointed to fight falsehood!

No fear of you makes me petition you; you do not know my heart. A humble man who comes back to reproach you is not afraid of him with whom he pleads. (300) The like of him will not be brought you from the street!

You have your plot of ground in the country, your estate in the district, your income in the storehouse. Yet the magistrates give to you and you take! Are you then a robber? Does one give to you and the troop with you at the division of plots?

Do justice for the Lord of Justice

The justice of whose justice is real!

(305) Pen, papyrus, palette of Thoth,

Keep away from wrongdoing!

When goodness is good it is truly good,

For justice is for eternity:

It enters the graveyard with its doer.

When he is buried and earth enfolds him,

His name (310) does not pass from the earth;

He is remembered because of goodness,

That is the rule of god's command.

The hand-balance—it tilts not; the stand-balance—it leans not to one side. Whether I come, whether another comes, speak! (315) Do not answer with the answer of silence! Do not attack one who does not attack you. You have no pity, you are not troubled, you are not disturbed! You do not repay my good speech which comes from the mouth of Re himself!

Speak justice, do justice,

For it is mighty;

It is great, it endures,

Its worth is tried,²⁸

It leads one to reveredness.

Does the hand-balance tilt? Then it is its scales which carry things. The standard has no fault. Crime does not attain its goal; he who is helpful²⁹ reaches land."

Ninth Petition

(B2, 91) Now this peasant came to petition him a ninth time; he said: "O high steward, my lord! The tongue is men's stand-balance. It is the balance that detects deficiency. Punish him who should be punished, and <none> shall equal your rectitude. (95) --- When falsehood walks it goes astray. It does not cross in the ferry; it does not 'progress'. (100) He who is enriched by it has no children, has no heirs on earth. He who sails with it does not reach land; his boat does not moor at its landing place.

Be not heavy, nor yet light,

Do not tarry, nor yet hurry,

Be not partial, nor listen to (105) desire.

Do not avert your face from one you know,
 Be not blind to one you have seen,
 Do not rebuff one who beseeches you.
 Abandon this slackness,
 Let your speech be heard.
 Act for him who would act for you,
 Do not listen to everyone,
 Summon a man to his rightful cause!

A sluggard has no yesterday;³⁰ (110) one deaf to justice has no friend; the greedy has no holiday. When the accuser is a wretch, and the wretch becomes a pleader, his opponent is a killer. Here I have been pleading with you, and you have not listened to it. I shall go and plead (115) about you to Anubis!"

Conclusion

Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, sent two guards to bring him back. Then this peasant was fearful, thinking it was done so as to punish him for this speech he had made. This peasant said: "A thirsty man's approach to water, an infant's mouth (120) reaching for milk, thus is a longed-for death seen coming, thus does his death arrive at last." Said the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru: "Don't be afraid, peasant; be ready to deal with me!" Said this peasant: (125) "By my life! Shall I eat your bread and drink your beer forever?" Said the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru: "Now wait here and hear your petitions!" Then he had them read from a new papyrus roll, each petition in its turn. (130) The high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, presented them to the majesty of King Nebkaure, the justified. They pleased his majesty's heart more than anything in the whole land. His majesty said: "Give judgment yourself, son of Meru!"

Then the high steward Rensi, the son of Meru, sent two guards [to bring Nemtynakht]. (135) He was brought and a report was made of [all his property] ----- his wheat, his barley, his donkeys, ---, his pigs, his small cattle ----- of this Nemtynakht [was given] to this peasant -----.

Colophon: It is finished -----.

NOTES

1. The Wadi Natrun.
2. The Farafra Oasis.

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3. Heracleopolis Magna (Ahnas), the metropolis of the twentieth nome of Upper Egypt and the capital of the Ninth/Tenth Dynasty.

4. So rather than Thutnakht, as shown by O. Berlev, *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, 1 (107) (1969), 3-30 (pointed out to me by K. Baer).

5. *Sm3-t3 n r3-w3t* was rendered "riverside path" by Gardiner, but this is a rather free rendering which hardly accounts for the term or for the situation. The text says that the house was *hr sm3-t3*, but it could not have stood on the path. The implied situation is that the house stood at the side of a narrow path which at this point merged with the "public road" on which the peasant was approaching. Hence I take *sm3-t3* to mean the "beginning", or similar, of the path.

6. The meaning of the passage was established by E. Wente in *JNES*, 24 (1965), 105-109, where he rendered: "Only one (wisp) has been destroyed. It is for its (i.e., the wisp's) price that I will buy back my donkey if you seize possession of it for a (mere) filling of its mouth with a wisp of Upper Egyptian barley," and explained it as a quick-witted response. I differ only in taking it as a rhetorical question rather than an assertion.

7. The god Osiris, who had a sanctuary in the neighborhood.

8. Among the epithets of Osiris are "lord of fear," "lord of awe."

9. The magistrates exculpate Nemtynakht by surmising that the peasant was a serf of his who had tried to do business with another landlord and was being punished for it.

10. Wordplay on *m3't*, "justice" and *m3'w*, "fair wind." The poetic speeches contain numerous wordplays and assonances. Where possible I have tried to imitate them, as in rendering *nm iwt iyt m ht-k* as "no accident will affect your mast," rather than "no mishap will befall your mast," or the like.

11. As Ranke explained in *ZAS*, 79 (1954), 72, the peasant makes for the high steward a titulary of five great names in analogy with the five great names of the royal titulary.

12. In order to goad the peasant to further speeches, the high steward threatens him with a beating.

13. The peasant quotes a proverb that embodies the *do ut des* principle.

14. The goddess Sakhmet.

15. I emend *iwt* to *nty*.

16. *Dmi* here, as in the *Dispute between a Man and His Ba*, line 150, cannot mean "cling to," but rather "press against," "attack."

17. I.e., this is the peasant's third plea.

18. A proverb similar to *Ptahhotep*, line 343: "Though one plans the morrow one knows not what will be."

19. Reading *mi* instead of *m*; the speeches of the peasant by and large make a clear distinction between the two. The high steward is identified with individual characters or things (steersman, balance, etc.) and is likened to larger entities, such as a troop without leader, etc.

20. Literally, "washes his heart." In *Ptahhotep*, lines 79 and 152, *t'-ib* is an "outburst of anger." See there n. 9.

21. *Bss grw*, "he who enters humbly." Here and in B 1, 298 *grw* is "humble", not "silent."

22. A wordplay on *htm*, "to provide," and *htm*, "to destroy."

23. *Swyt m tr m fw* is not: "Shade, act not as the sunheat," but rather: "Shade, don't make one into one who is *fw*," i.e., "dry."

24. *Wh'* is the *synodontis schall*; the other fishes are unidentified.

THREE TALES OF WONDER

From Papyrus Westcar (= P. Berlin 3033)

This important papyrus, the beginning of which is lost, contains a series of tales woven together by a narrative frame. The whole cycle consisted of at least five tales. Of the first, only the last words are preserved. The second has large lacunae, while the third, fourth, and fifth are complete except for the abrupt ending of the fifth tale. The three complete tales are translated here. The works are written in classical Middle Egyptian; the papyrus dates from the Hyksos period.

The setting of the tales is the Old Kingdom, specifically the time of the Fourth Dynasty: King Khufu is being entertained by his sons. First each son in turn tells a marvelous event that happened in the past. Then, when it is the turn of Prince Hardedef, instead of telling a story of past wonders

he asks permission to introduce a living magician. When the magician is brought to the court, he impresses everyone by his wonders, and, in conversation with the king, proceeds to prophecy the wondrous birth of the kings who were to found the next dynasty. This shift of focus from the present to the future provides the transition to the last tale, which describes the wondrous birth of the triplets who were to be the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty.

Publication: Erman, *Papyrus Westcar*. Sethe, *Lesestücke*, pp. 26-36. *Idem*, *Erl.*, pp. 32-45.

Translation: Erman, *Literature*, pp. 36-47. Lefebvre, *Romans*, pp. 70-90. Schott, *Liebeslieder*, pp. 176-187. Brunner-Traut, *Märchen*, pp. 11-24. For additional references see Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 73. The third tale begins on p. 4, line 17 of the papyrus.

The Magician Djedi

Now Prince Hardedef³ stood up to speak and said: ["So far you have heard examples] of the skills of those who have passed away, and one cannot tell truth from falsehood. [But there is a subject] of your majesty in your own time, (25) unknown to you [who is a great magician."] Said his majesty: "What is this about, Har[dedef, my son?]" [Said Prince Har[dedef: "There is a man (7, 1) named Djedi who lives

in Djed-Snefru. He is a man of a hundred and ten years who eats five hundred loaves of bread, half an ox for meat, and drinks one hundred jugs of beer to this very day. He can join a severed head. He can make a lion (5) walk behind him, its leash on the ground. And he knows the number of the secret chambers of the sanctuary of Thoth."

Now the majesty of King Khufu had been spending time searching for the secret chambers of the sanctuary of Thoth in order to copy them for his temple. Said his majesty: "You yourself, Hardedef, my son, shall bring him to me!"

Ships were made ready for Prince Hardedef. He journeyed (10) upstream to Djed-Snefru. After the ships had been moored to the shore, he traveled overland seated in a carrying chair of ebony, the poles of which were of *ssndm*-wood plated with gold.

Now when he had reached Djedi, the carrying chair was set down. Having got up to greet him, he found (15) him lying on a mat in the courtyard of his house, with a servant beside him anointing him and another rubbing his feet. Said Prince Hardedef: "Your condition is like that of one who lives above age—for old age is the time for death, enwrapping, and burial—one who sleeps till daytime free of illness, without a hacking cough. Thus greetings (20) to a venerable one! I have come here to summon you, commissioned by my father Khufu. You shall eat the delicacies that the king gives, the food of those who are in his service. He will convey you in good time to your fathers who are in the necropolis."

Said this Djedi: "In peace, in peace, Hardedef, king's son, beloved of his father! May your father, King Khufu, praise you. May he advance (25) you to rank among the elders. May your *ka* prevail over your enemy. May your *ba* know the way that leads to the portal that conceals the dead. Thus greetings (8, 1) to a prince!"

Then Prince Hardedef held out his hands to him and helped him up. He proceeded with him to the shore, holding his arm. Then Djedi said: "Let me have a barge to bring me my children and my books." Then two vessels and their crews were put in his service. Djedi journeyed (5) downstream in the ship in which Prince Hardedef was.

After he had reached the residence, Prince Hardedef entered in to report to the majesty of King Khufu. Said Prince Hardedef: "O king, my lord, I have brought Djedi." Said his majesty: "Go, bring him to me!" His majesty proceeded to the great hall of the (10) palace. When Djedi had been ushered in to him, his majesty said: "How is it, Djedi,

that I never got to see you?" Said Djedi: "He who is summoned comes, O king, my lord. I was summoned, and I have come."

His majesty said: "Is it true, what they say, that you can join a severed head?" Said Djedi: "Yes, I can, O king, my lord." (15) Said his majesty: "Have brought to me a prisoner from the prison, that he be executed." Said Djedi: "But not to a human being, O king, my lord! Surely, it is not permitted to do such a thing to the noble cattle!"⁴

A goose was brought him and its head cut off. The goose was placed on the west side of the great hall, its head on the east (20) side of the great hall. Djedi said his say of magic: the goose stood up and waddled, its head also. When one had reached the other, the goose stood cackling. He had a "long-leg"-bird brought him, and the same was done to it. His majesty had an ox brought to him, (25) and its head was cut off. Djedi said his say of magic, and the ox stood up. -----⁵

(9, 1) Then the majesty of King Khufu said: "It was also said that you know the number of the secret chambers of the sanctuary of Thoth." Said Djedi: "Please, I do not know their number, O king, my lord. But I know the place where it is." Said his majesty: "Where is that?" Said this Djedi: "There is a chest (5) of flint in the building called 'Inventory' in On. It is in that chest." Said his majesty: ["Go, bring it to me!"] Said Djedi: "O king, my lord, it is not I who shall bring it to you." Said his majesty: "Who then will bring it to me?" Said Djedi: "It is the eldest of the three children who are in the womb of Ruddedet who will bring it to you." Said his majesty: "I want it; but say: who is this Ruddedet?" Said Djedi: "She is the wife of a priest of Re, lord of Sakhbu, (10) who is pregnant with three children of Re, lord of Sakhbu.⁶ He has said concerning them that they will assume this beneficent office in this whole land, and the eldest of them will be high priest in On."

His majesty's heart grew sad at this. Said Djedi: "What is this mood, O king, my lord? Is it because of those three children? I say: first your son, then his son, then one of them." Said his majesty: (15) "When will Ruddedet give birth?" [Said Djedi]: "She will give birth on the fifteenth day of the first winter month." Said his majesty: "Just when the sandbanks of the Two-Fish Channel are dry! I would have crossed over myself, so as to see the temple of Re, lord of Sakhbu." Said Djedi: "Then I shall make four cubits of water over the sandbanks of the Two-Fish Channel."

His majesty went into his palace. His majesty said: "Let Djedi be assigned to the house of Prince Hardedef, to live (20) with him. Make

his rations a thousand loaves of bread, a hundred jugs of beer, one ox, and a hundred bundles of vegetables." One did all that his majesty commanded.

EGYPTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE BIBLE AND TO JUDAISM

1. Testimony of the Bible on African contribution to the religious worldview of Moses

Exodus 1, 20-22; 2, 1-10; and Acts 7, 17-23):

The (Hebrew) people, increased and grew strong... Pharaoh then commanded all his subjects, "Throw into the river every boy that is born to the Hebrews, but you may let all the girls live." Now a certain man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, who conceived and bore a son. Seeing that he was a goodly child, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took a papyrus basket, daubed it with bitumen and pitch, and putting the child in it, placed it among the reeds on the river bank. His sister stationed herself at a distance to find out what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe, while her maids walked along the river bank. Noticing the basket among the reeds, she sent her handmaid to fetch it. On opening it, she looked, and lo, there was a baby boy, crying! She was moved with pity for him and said, "It is one of the Hebrews' children." Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" "Yes, do so," she answered. So the maiden went and called the child's own mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will repay you." The woman therefore took the child and nursed it. When the child grew, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her son and called him Moses; for she said, "I drew him out of the water."... When the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise that God pledged to Abraham, the people had increased and become very numerous in Egypt, until another king who knew nothing of Joseph came to power (in Egypt). He dealt shrewdly with our people and oppressed (our) ancestors by forcing them to expose their infants, that they might not survive. At this time Moses was born, and he was extremely beautiful. For three months he was nursed in his father's house; but when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated (in) all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds. When he was forty years old, he decided to visit his kinsfolk, the Israelites.

Testimony of scholars of world religions

2 "As far as Christianity is concerned it may now be argued that, supported by the broader historical background, it had fiery Hebrew religion as its father. Egypt was its mother; Mesopotamia stood as godparent; Hellenism served as midwife. Throughout her life of almost two millennia, this Christian daughter born of Mother Egypt has remained relatively well informed about her ancient Hebrew paternal tradition-being reminded of it constantly by the Hebrew origins of its early layer of sacred scriptures. At the same time the mature daughter, Christendom, to this day has not been told about the identity of her deceased mother religion-whose theological and soteriological temperament she closely resembles. The ancient Egyptian civilization and its concomitant religiosity provided Hebrew religious tradition with its *raison d'être*. Egyptian theology furnished Greek philosophers, beginning with the Ionians and concluding with the Neoplatonists, with their ontological presuppositions. And Hebrew and Egyptian religion, assisted by Neoplatonism, contributed content and structure to orthodox Christian theology."

Karl W. Luckert, Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire: Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 27-29).

3. "During the second millennium B.C.E., respect for Egyptian achievements in the arts, sciences, and religion spread throughout the Mediterranean world. The Hebrew Bible refers to the "wisdom of Egypt," and early Greek philosophers like Thales and Pythagoras reportedly studied geometry in Egypt. Osiris and Isis were numbered among the official gods of the Roman Empire, and the promise of immortality in the Osiris myth may have influenced the Orphic mysteries of ancient Greece and prepared the way for Christianity. Furthermore, the Egyptian concept of Mayet (Maat), or world order, may have influenced the philosophy of Stoics, as well as the Logos of Saint John's gospel. Egyptian influences have survived to the present, Statues of Isis with the infant Horus in her arms are thought to have inspired the Madonna and child motif of the Christian tradition. Masonic ritual still keeps alive the memory of Egypt, as does the popular belief in spells, oracles, and astrological lore. In addition, the idea that divine wisdom or revelation should be written down and collected and that written books (scrolls) have greater prestige than oral traditions does seem to be largely an Egyptian invention. It was a popular assumption among the Greeks and Romans that books of revelation came from Egypt."(p.53)

Religions of the World (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, Third edition).

This important textbook is written by several scholars from important American universities: Norvin Hein (Yale University), Frank E. Reynolds (University of Chicago), Laura Grillo (University of Chicago), Niels C. Nielsen, Jr.(Rice University),....

4. "For three millennia, from the first dynasty around 3100 B.C.E. to the first centuries of the Common Era, when Egypt converted to Christianity, the rich and diverse elements of Egyptian religion were practiced. (...)The culture of Egypt attained high developments in religious ideas and also in artistic expression. In their religious interests the ancient Egyptians created a vast literature. Their very large sacred literature included mythological texts, guides for the dead, prayers, hymns, ... and philosophical wisdom texts. (...) The wisdom of Egypt influenced the Israelite religion as well as Greek philosophers."(pp.30-33)

Theodore M. Ludwig, The Sacred Paths of the West New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company, 1994.

5. Robert M. Seltzer agrees with many Biblicists on the influence of Egyptian and Babylonian religions on the Bible and Judaism:

"The Bible-the surviving religious literature of ancient Israel-faces in two directions. It draws on the ideas and skills of three previous millennia of Near Eastern creativity and it opens new paths. No appreciation of the Bible can overlook the degree to which it reflects elements common to other cultures. The physical structure of the universe, taken for granted by biblical writers, characterizes ancient Near Eastern literature as a whole... Like other peoples, ancient Israel recognized the efficacy of magic (Ex. 7:11-12), acknowledged the power inherent in blessings and curses (Num., chaps.22-24), and assumed the ability of some men to ascertain God's will through dreams, sacred dice, and oracles... Common to Israelite and other ancient religions are sacrificial offerings, a preoccupation with ritual uncleanness and purity, and atonement rites performed by priests set apart from the laity. Many forms of biblical writing have parallels in the literature of other peoples. Genesis borrows details from the Mesopotamian epics of Atrahasis and Gilgamesh in connection with the legend of a world-wide flood... Egyptian models are used for Psalm 104 and for a section of the book of Proverbs (22:17-23:11). As other ancient works are discovered in the future, it will become even more evident that the Bible is an integral branch of ancient Near Eastern literature as a whole."

(Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish experience in History. New York: Macmillan, 1980; pp.47-49).

6. Egypt and Israel (by Ronald J. Williams)

Ronald J. Williams, "Egypt and Israel," 10th chapter in J.R. Harris, ed., *The Legacy of Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Second edition, 1971); pp.257-290.

Main thesis of this chapter:

"It does not fall within the scope of this chapter to trace the further contributions of Egypt to the development of early Christianity. Nevertheless, enough has been said to show that Hebrew culture did not emerge in a vacuum, but was subjected to influences from many quarters, not the least of which came from the valley of the Nile... Egypt had long been renowned for her wisdom, as both Old and New Testaments affirm (1Kgs.4:30; Heb.5:10; Acts...). She had a long tradition of didactic treatises designed for the edification of the sons of officials who were trained to enter government service...."

Egyptian contribution to

1. Hebrew culture
2. Jewish names
3. Hebrew Language
4. Hebrew Bible (biblical content and language or mode of expression)
5. Judeo-Christian theology

Here are some of the most significant parts of that text:

Because of the unique position of Syria-Palestine as a bridge between Egypt and Western Asia, across which the military roads and trade routes passed, it was continually subject to the cross-currents which flowed from these centers of culture. As early as about 3000 B.C., for instance, there are evidences of Egyptian influence in Byblos. Indeed, from the time of the Old Kingdom right down to the Empire period, an Egyptian temple was to be found in this Phoenician city... During the Middle Kingdom (ca.2052-1786 B.C.) Egypt exercised an economic if not political dominion over Syria-Palestine. To this period belong the movements of the Hebrew patriarchs to and from Egypt recorded in the Old Testament (Gen. 12:10 ff.)... later Egypt was to be invaded and occupied by the Asiatic hordes known as the Hyksos. The period of their domination witnessed the movement of Semitic tribes into Egypt, and the Biblical account of Joseph is probably to be placed at the end of the Hyksos era. (Eventually Egyptians supported by Nubians expelled the Hyksos and regained the control of their country). The contacts between Egypt and Syria-Palestine became still closer when, during the New Kingdom, the latter territory became part of the newly created Egyptian Empire. The topographical lists of Thutmose III carved on the temple at Karnak and later copied by Ramses II and III, bear witness to his conquest... The soil of Palestine has also yielded evidence of Egyptian domination in the form of hieroglyphic inscriptions found at various sites...

To consider the important developments in the administration of the nascent Hebrew State under David and Solomon, during the reign of the former, Israel became the leading power in Syria-Palestine, and consequently required the creation of a military, economic, and governmental organization. It was only natural that David should look to Egypt for his models, either directly or through Phoenician intermediaries... Contacts between Egypt and the Hebrew people become increasingly important during the period of decline which followed the New Kingdom. In the time of David, a member of the Edomite royal house named Hadad fled to Egypt and was given political asylum by an unnamed Pharaoh (1Kgs.11:14-22), who may have been Siamun (c. 990-974 B.C.) or Psusennes (Psibkhenne; c. 974-940 B.C.) of the Twenty-first Dynasty. When Solomon succeeded to the throne, Hadad returned to Palestine to plague him.

In similar fashion Solomon's enemy Jeroboam later took refuge under Sheshonq I (O.T. Shishak; c. 940-919 B.C.) of the Twenty-second Dynasty (1 Kgs. 11:40). The account of Solomon's own marriage to an Egyptian prince again fails to name the Pharaoh who was her father (1 Kgs. 3:1)... In 301 B.C. Palestine came under the control of Ptolemy I, and was to remain so for a century. Many prisoners were brought back from his Palestinian campaigns, and during the third century he also imported Jewish soldiers to Egypt as mercenaries, granting them lands to be held under military tenure. Jewish settlers tended more and more to drift into Alexandria until, by the first century B.C., they formed the largest body of Jews outside Judaea. After the deposition and subsequent murder of the High Priest Onias IV, about 160 B.C., a further group of Jews emigrated to the southern Delta, where they built a temple at Leontopolis, which was eventually destroyed during the first century A.D.

In view of these numerous contacts between the two cultures occurring in both Egypt and Palestine, it was inevitable that Israel should fall heir to many features of Egyptian civilization. It will be our task in the following pages to draw attention to some of these.

The Hebrews' gradual assimilation to Egyptian ways is shown by the fact that they gave their children Egyptian names... Semites living in Egypt tended to give their children Egyptian names, and sometimes even to adopt them for themselves. Some of these names went with them to Palestine, and a few have survived even to the present day, such as Moses, derived from *msw*, 'child' (as in Ramses), Susanna, from *ssn* (earlier *sssn*) meaning 'lotus'... The Egyptian language, as might well be expected, also left an indelible mark on Hebrew vocabulary, and a number of loan-words are preserved in the Old Testament...

IMAGO DEI DOCTRINE and the CREATION STORY

A Hebrew doctrine which may owe something to Egyptian sources is that of the creation of man in the image of God. Attempts to show a dependence on Babylonian mythology are most unconvincing.

However, in a work of the Tenth Dynasty in which the sun-God Re is described as a beneficent creator, we read: 'They (i.e. mankind) are his likenesses (*snnw*) who have come forth from his body' (Merikare, 132). The concept appears again in the New Kingdom. At the end of the 'Instruction of Any', in a lively exchange of letters between Any and his son, the latter writes: 'Men are in the image of the god because of their custom of hearing a man in regard to his reply. It is not the wise alone who is in his image, while the multitude are dumb-beasts (Any, 10/8f). Later still, during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, Taharqa's sister Shepenwepet is described in a text at Karnak as the 'image' (*tit*) of the god Re. In the text just mentioned Re is called 'good shepherd of the people.' (*mniw nfr n rhyt*). This is a common figure in Egyptian texts, going back to the First Intermediate Period. The sage Ipuwer says of Re: 'He is the shepherd of everyone, in whose mind there is no evil. His herds are diminished, yet he has certainly spent the day caring for them. Mankind is referred to as 'this noble flock' and Merikare says: 'Men, the flock of the god (i.e. Re), are well provided for.' In the New Kingdom sun-hymns Re is spoken of as a good shepherd who is tireless, capable, and loving (P. Ch. Beatty iv. Rt 3/4, 4/3, 7/9, 8/6; vg. B.M. Stela 826, lines 7 and 11). The Biblical parallels are obvious (Isa. 40: 11; Mic. 2:12; Jer.31:10; Ezek.34:11 ff; pss.23:1; 78:52; 80:1 (Heb. 82); 95:7, etc.). However, it should be noted that Mesopotamian texts also occasionally employ the word *re'u*, 'shepherd', in speaking of the gods, although it is much more commonly used with reference to human rulers.

LAST JUDGMENT

During the First Intermediate Period in Egypt, the idea emerged of a final judgment of the deceased. Somewhat later Osiris became the final judge of all men. In the later copies of the 'Book of the Dead', vignettes frequently portray the scene of psychostasia, in which the heart of the deceased is weighed in the scales against ma'at, 'truth', 'justice', 'righteousness', while Anubis and Thoth preside over the proceedings (Pl.18). The Hebrew belief in a doctrine of immortality is late, however, and consequently the idea of a final judgement does not appear before the second century B.C. (Dan. 7:10; 12:1-3; Enoch 47:3; 90:20?ff; Heb.9:27; 1John 4:17; Jude 6; Rev.20:4,12-15). However, a few earlier passages in the Old Testament may reflect Egyptian ideas concerning psychostasia (Job 31:6; Prov.16:2; 24:12). Certainly the motif of scales in which the good and evil deeds of men are weighed in the final judgment appears in later Jewish writings (Enoch 41:1; 61:8; 2 Esd.3:34; Apoc. Of Elias 13:13f).

THE BOOK OF PROVERB AND WISDOM

The most striking example of borrowing from Egyptian texts is found in Prov.22:17 to 23:14. This small collection within the Book of Proverbs bears a remarkable similarity to the 'Wisdom of Amenemope.' The existence of an ostrakon containing a schoolboy's copy of a portion of the text is clear evidence of the fact that the original work is much earlier than the actual British Museum papyrus, which has been dated by some scholars as late as the sixth century B.C. The work may, indeed, be as early as the thirteenth century...

HYMNOLOGY AND THE BOOK OF PSALMS

It is probable that Israel owed as much to Mesopotamia as to Egypt in the area of hymnology, but her debt to the latter civilization was by no means inconsiderable. Indeed, literary dependence on the great Hymn to Aten (Anet 369-71) has been claimed for Ps.104. It cannot be denied that the similarity is impressive between this psalm and the hymn which was composed in the reign of the heretic king Akhenaten (c.1365-1348 B.C.)....

Egyptian language had an outstanding genius for story-telling. Subsequently, Egyptians bequeathed to the Hebrews various forms of "literary genre." Indeed, the most influential contribution of Egypt lay in the area of literary types and motifs. Peet, in his Schweich Lectures of 1929, made the statement that Egypt was 'the home of the short story, and one of her claims to literary recognition is that she produced the first short stories to be told for their own sake.' ...

THE EXPRESSION "WAY OF LIFE."

A frequent expression in Egyptian texts is the 'way of life' or 'way of the living' (w3t nt 'nhw. It occurs in the form w3t n 'nh (P. Ch. Beatty iv. Vs 6/4)

The Hebrew equivalents, which are all to be found in books which elsewhere reveal Egyptian influence, are d3rek (ha)hayyim (Jer. 21:8; Prov. 6:23) or 'orah hayyim (Ps.16: 11; Prov.2:19; 5:6; 15:24; cf. Prov.10:17).

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

In the Old Testament Yahweh is often referred to as a potter (e.g. Isa 29:16; 45:9; 64:8 (Heb.7). Jer. 18:2ff; Job10:9; 33:6). Saint Paul adopts this figure in Rom. 9:21: "Has the potter no authority over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for noble and another for ignoble use?" For this striking metaphor also an Egyptian prototype may be adduced.

Ronald J. Williams, "Egypt and Israel," 10th chapter in J.R. Harris, ed., The Legacy of Egypt (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Second edition, 1971); pp.257-290.

Stephens L. Harris, Understanding the Bible McGraw-Hill, 2011

CHAPTER 3

The Ancient Near East The Environment That Produced the Bible

Key Topics/Themes Archaeological evidence indicates that humans have inhabited the Near East for tens of thousands of years. Sites of prehistoric villages, small towns, and other settlements abound from central Anatolia (modern Turkey) to Syria to Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). It was not until about 3200 BCE, however, that the first large urban centers were established. Originating in southern Mesopotamia, the first urban civilization (Sumer) produced a written literature about the gods, the creation of the world, and the afterlife that significantly influenced the biblical worldview. Whereas

Sumerian and later Babylonian city-states typically remained relatively small and autonomous, the Egyptians created the first unified national state in the mid-third millennium BCE. For most of its history, Israel, located geographically between powerful empires in Egypt and Mesopotamia, was dominated politically by a succession of Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek invaders. Events recounted in the Hebrew Bible are set almost entirely in this ancient Near Eastern context.

KEY QUESTIONS

- In what ways do aspects of ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture anticipate ideas and beliefs that later appear in the Hebrew Bible?
- How does the New Testament reflect the Greco-Roman culture in which it originated?



The Bible and the Ancient Near East

According to the Book of Joshua, God himself emphasizes the strong connection between Israel and the older cultures of the ancient Near East: "Yahweh the God of Israel says this, 'In ancient days your ancestors lived beyond the River [Euphrates]—such was Terah the father of Abraham and of Nahor—and they served other gods'" (Josh. 24:2). Asking that the Israelites now abandon "the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt"—and which some were then still

worshipping—Yahweh again commands his people to honor him alone (Josh. 24: 14–15, 23; cf. Exod. 20:2–3). Fully aware that Israel had imported religious traditions from both Egypt and lands "beyond the Euphrates," several biblical authors highlight the tension between Yahweh's demand for exclusive devotion and Israel's Near Eastern heritage, with its multiplicity of gods and myths about the world's creation and a great prehistoric flood.

The region "beyond the River" to which Joshua refers is **Mesopotamia**, an area at the head of the Persian Gulf in what is now southern Iraq (Figure 3.1). Meaning "the land between the rivers"—a name the Greeks assigned it—Mesopotamia is a flat, swampy territory lying between the **Tigris** and **Euphrates**, two of the four rivers that traditionally bordered Eden (Gen. 2:10–14). In the long narrative from Genesis 12 through 2 Kings 25, Israel's story begins and ends in Mesopotamia. According to Genesis, Abraham was born in Ur, one of the area's oldest cities, and then moved to Haran in northwest Mesopotamia. When God summoned him, he and his family then traveled through Canaan to Egypt and back again, their itinerary encompassing

virtually the entire geographical extent of the biblical world (Gen. 11:26–13:1). At the conclusion of 2 Kings, Abraham's Israelite descendants have come full circle, with exiles from Judah forcibly transported to Babylon, capital of a new Mesopotamian empire. Significantly, it is from Babylon that the priest-scribe Ezra later brings an edition of the Torah back to Jerusalem, where he introduces "the book of the law of Moses" to a crowd of returned exiles (Ezra 7; Nehemiah 8).

Given the dual traditions that Israel's ancestors originated in Mesopotamia—and that at least part of the Mosaic law code was developed there—we are not surprised to find many biblical texts reflecting a definite Mesopotamian influence. From a belief that the pre-creation world was an abyss of boundless water; to the story of a single household surviving a global flood; to concepts of a gloomy subterranean Underworld, biblical writers commonly echo ancient Mesopotamian

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PART ONE THE HEBREW BIBLE

traditions (see the discussion of the two Genesis creation accounts in Chapter 4). While freely borrowing from the oral and written literature of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, however, the Bible's authors consistently transform them into something startlingly new. Whereas all other peoples in antiquity, including Egyptians and Babylonians, practiced **polytheism** (belief in many gods), ancient Israel eventually began a religious revolution by embracing **monotheism** (belief in only one God). By making Israel's God the sole ruler of the universe, biblical authors extensively revised traditions inherited from other cultures, giving to Yahweh both the creative and the destructive qualities of Mesopotamian gods (see Chapter 15). In our survey of ancient Near Eastern history and culture, we will focus on practices and beliefs that anticipate concepts presented in the Hebrew Bible.

A Prologue to the Biblical World

For thousands of years before Israel came into existence, the **Fertile Crescent**—a strip of arable land curving from the head of the Persian Gulf northwestward to Syria and then southward through Canaan into Egypt—was studded with tiny villages and other settlements. At **Jericho**, famous for its walls that tumbled before the blast of Joshua's trumpets, archaeologists have discovered evidence of human habitation dating back to 9000 BCE. Lying six miles west of the Jordan River, north of the Dead Sea, Jericho is the world's oldest known walled town. Archaeological excavations have uncovered the ruins of a circular stone tower thirty feet high, as well

as plastered, painted skulls with eyes made from sea-shells. Like other figurines from the Stone Age, these reconstructions of human faces probably had a religious meaning that is now impossible to know.

Repeatedly abandoned and then resettled, perhaps because of invasions or fluctuations in the climate, Jericho's ruins now form a high mound of rubble called a **tel**. Composed of numerous layers of debris, each representing a different period of settlement, tels mark the sites of ancient cities throughout the Near East (see Box 3.1).

Only recently discovered, another important site, called **Ain Ghazal** (Arabic for "the spring of the gazelle") is located northeast of modern Amman, Jordan, near the Zarqa River (the biblical Jabbok). Established in about 7200 BCE, Ain Ghazal was inhabited continuously for about 2,000 years. At its height, the town covered thirty acres, about ten times the size of contemporaneous Jericho.



Sumer: Cradle of Western Civilization

Shortly after 3500 BCE, a people called the **Sumerians** founded the earliest cities, such as **Ur**, Abraham's birthplace, and **Uruk**, home to King **Gilgamesh**, the first hero of Western literature (Figure 3.2). Remarkably innovative, the Sumerians constructed elaborate irrigation systems, erected monumental temples to their gods, and devised the first law codes to protect property and foster social order. By inventing the wheel (fourth millennium



Egypt, the First National State

The name *Egypt* derives from *Aiguptos*, the Greek version of *Hut-Ptah*, the "Temple of Ptah," the term by which the Egyptians identified their country. The "temple," or holy dwelling place of Ptah, the Egyptian creator god, was the long strip of fertile land bordering the Nile River. Beyond this narrow cultivated zone, watered by annual inundations of the Nile, stretched vast, inhospitable deserts that effectively isolated Egypt from its neighbors. Whereas the broad plains of Mesopotamia were easily—and frequently—invaded by foreign armies, Egypt's unique geographical features allowed it to develop independently of most foreign influences. Bordered on the east and west by arid wastes and on the south by a rugged terrain through which the Nile flowed in impassable cataracts, ancient Egypt enjoyed an uninterrupted period of stability and nation building.

From Kingdom to Empire

Beginning as a coalition of small political districts called *nomes*, Egypt first evolved into two distinct kingdoms, known as Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. In about 3100 BCE, the two kingdoms were merged under the rule of Narmer, king of Upper (southern) Egypt. From this point on, Egyptian pharaohs wore a headdress combining the white crown of Upper Egypt with the red crown of Lower Egypt.

Historians divide subsequent ancient Egyptian history into three major periods: the Old Kingdom, or Pyramid Age (Third to Sixth Pharaonic Dynasties, c. 2686–2160 BCE); the Middle Kingdom, or Feudal age (the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties, c. 2030–1720 BCE); and the New Kingdom, or Empire (the Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties, c. 1570–1075 BCE). Under the Empire, New Kingdom pharaohs such as Thutmose I extended Egypt's dominion northeastward into Canaan. In about 1490 BCE, Egyptian forces defeated a coalition of more than one hundred rulers of Syrian and Canaanite city-states at the Battle of Megiddo, a site that in later history marked several decisive Israelite defeats. (Apparently regarded as of crucial significance in biblical history, sixteen centuries later Megiddo lent its name—*Har-Megiddo* [Armageddon]—to identify the place where cosmic good and evil would fight their ultimate battle [Rev. 16:16].) Until near the end of the New Kingdom, Egypt maintained a line of military fortresses in Canaan, guarding against unwanted incursions from Mesopotamia or Asia Minor.

Egypt's Enduring Legacy

The Egyptian system of writing in pictorial characters—**hieroglyphics**—developed at about the same time as, or shortly after, the invention of cuneiform script in Mesopotamia. The Egyptians also made spectacular advances in mathematics and astronomy, devising a calendar based on the solar year of 365 days. This calendar featured twelve months of thirty days each, to which five festival days were added to round out the year. The familiar practice of dividing the day into twenty-four hours and beginning a new day at midnight is also a legacy from ancient Egypt.

Egypt's numerous gifts to the modern world include the science of geometry. Devising methods to compute the areas and volumes of abstract geometric forms, Egyptian architects applied these skills to build the world's first large-scale structures in stone. An edifice of massive grandeur, the multitiered Step Pyramid was constructed for King Zoser (Djoser) about 2650 BCE. Erected shortly afterward, the enormous pyramids at Giza still tower hundreds of feet above the Nile Valley, the sole survivors of the ancient world's Seven Wonders.

Egypt's great pyramids and colossal sphinx at al-Jizah were already many centuries old when Abraham's grandson Jacob and his eleven sons, driven by famine in Canaan, sought refuge in the prosperous Nile region.

Because the Nile supplied Egypt's extensive irrigation system even in many drought years when crops in neighboring areas failed, Ptah's land attracted many nomadic peoples hoping to secure Egyptian grain. According to Genesis, Israel's ancestors—the tribes of Jacob (Israel)—were among many who settled temporarily in the delta region.

One popular theory holds that Semitic nomads were welcome in Egypt at the time Israelite tribes entered because Egypt was then ruled by foreigners known as the **Hyksos**. Although native Egyptian control of the country was rarely surrendered, in the seventeenth century BCE the Semitic Hyksos infiltrated the population, eventually usurping pharaoh's throne. In 1560 BCE, an Egyptian revolt expelled the Hyksos rulers and established the Eighteenth Dynasty (see Chapter 4). This native royal line included some of Egypt's most famous rulers, including Queen Hatshepsut, the great military strategist Thutmose III, and Amenhotep IV.

Amenhotep IV, who changed his name to **Akhenaten** (1364–1347 BCE), scandalized the Egyptian priesthood by ordering that only a single deity, the sun god Aten (Aton), be universally acknowledged. Whereas some historians believe that Akhenaten established the world's first monotheism, many think that his cult of Aten was really an example of **henotheism**—worship of a single god while conceding the existence of other deities. Although Akhenaten's religious experiment was brief—his youthful successor Tutankhamen revoked his reforms—it may have set a precedent that indirectly influenced Moses' concept of Yahweh's "jealousy." The revolutionary belief that a single god could require his devotees to honor no other gods is the cornerstone of the Mosaic religion.

Correspondence preserved in the ruined archives of Tell el-Amarna, the site to which Akhenaten moved his capital, gives a vivid picture of Egypt during the dominion of Aten. The Amarna Age, the period of Akhenaten's reign, and the exclusive cult of the sun were largely forgotten by 1306 BCE, when Rameses I founded a new royal dynasty, the nineteenth. Under Rameses II (1290–1224 BCE), the Egyptian Empire reached its zenith in prosperity and prestige. Many historians believe that **Rameses II**, a vigorous—and vainglorious—leader was the pharaoh of the Exodus (Figure 3.11). Rameses made a habit of recording his military defeats, as well as his genuine victories, as complete triumphs. If a band of Hebrew slaves did escape from Egypt during his long reign, it is not surprising that court scribes did not see fit to mention it.

The earliest known reference to Israel as a distinct people appears on a victory inscription of **Merneptah**,

Rameses II's son and successor. Merneptah (Figure 3.12) boasts of his conquests in Canaan, claiming to have laid Israel waste, indicating that the Israelites were already established in Canaan by the late 1200s BCE, the approximate time of Merneptah's campaign.

One of the most important finds of modern archaeology is the justly famous **Rosetta Stone**, a large, flat slab of basalt inscribed with the same message in three different scripts—Greek, hieroglyphic, and demotic. In the 1820s, a French scholar, Jean-François Champollion, deciphered the inscriptions and thereby discovered the key to reading Egyptian hieroglyphics. Champollion's breakthrough allowed scholars for the first time to understand previously inaccessible works of Egyptian literature. Scholars have since translated many Egyptian documents related to the biblical text, finding several parallels to the Book of Proverbs, Job, and other examples of wisdom writing. (See Chapter 7.)



FIGURE 3.12 The Stele of Merneptah (c. 1212–1202 BCE), son of and successor to Rameses II, contains the first extrabiblical reference to Israel's existence. Advertising his victories over various Canaanite states, Merneptah claims that he has so devastated Israel that its "seed [offspring] is not," a conventional military boast. A double figure of the god Amon appears at the top center, with Pharaoh Merneptah (also in double representation) standing on either side of the deity.



Egyptian-Israelite Affinities

Many similarities and affinities exist between ancient Egyptian and Israelite cultures (see Box 3.3). For example, Moses' name, like those of many subsequent Israelite priests, is Egyptian. His name is derived from the Egyptian verb *msw* (to be born) or the noun *mesu* (child, son). The same root appears in such Egyptian names as Thutmose and Ahmose.

Some scholars believe that Egyptian ethical and religious motifs, such as the concept of **Maat**—which combined justice, truth, right thought, and good conduct—helped shape ancient Israel's view of divine righteousness. Another possible connection between the Egyptian and Israelite religions appears in the way in which the two peoples housed their gods. In Egypt,

statues of the gods—visible symbols of the divinity's invisible presence—were hidden away in windowless sanctuaries. Because the statues were protected from public gaze by massive stone walls, the god's holiness was enhanced by elements of secrecy and mystery. Only official priests and the pharaoh himself were allowed into the inner room that contained the deity's sacred image. In Israel, King Solomon built a similar kind of temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, on which Yahweh's *kavod* (glory) was enthroned. In some biblical writers' judgment, however, Solomon allied himself too closely with Egypt, marrying the pharaoh's daughter and erecting shrines to the gods of his many foreign wives in the Temple precincts (1 Kings 9:16–18, 21; 11:1–8). Even after Solomon's time, the temple rituals continued to resemble those of Egypt: Only the hereditary high priest was permitted to enter the sanctuary's innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies that sheltered Yahweh's unseen presence. (See Box 3.3 for an account of possible links between Egyptian myths and biblical concepts of creation.)

Perhaps Egypt's most lasting contribution to biblical religion was the ritual practice of **circumcision**. The surgical removal of the foreskin (prepuce) from the penis, circumcision was a physically distinguishing mark on all Israelite males. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, this originally Egyptian practice spread to a few other nations, whereas the majority of men "leave their private parts as nature made them" (*The Histories*, Book 2, 37; cf. Josh. 5:2–6 and Jer. 9:25–26). In ancient Israel (and in modern Judaism), all male infants, when eight days old, routinely had the foreskin amputated (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59; Phil. 3:5). This ancient Egyptian rite, in fact, is interpreted as the indelible "sign" of God's covenant with Abraham and all his descendants: "My Covenant shall be marked on your bodies as a Covenant in perpetuity" (Gen. 17:9–14).

The Near Eastern Powers and the Land of Israel

In many ways, Israel's destiny was shaped by its geography. Situated at the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea on a narrow land bridge between Mesopotamia and Egypt, ancient Israel saw its territory conquered again and again by the superior military might of its imperial neighbors. Repeatedly overrun by invading armies, Israel endured a series of humiliating defeats and foreign occupations that helped shape a biblical worldview emphasizing divine judgment and communal suffering. According to the biblical record, Israel enjoyed national unity and political independence only briefly, during the reigns of its first three kings, Saul, David, and Solo-

Part 2
OTHER RELIGIONS OF AFRICA
(ATR: SACRED TEXTS)

African Sacred Texts:

A guide to African Spirituality and Values

“African wisdom is not merely a convenient expression; it is something that exists. It is a collection of unique precepts that enable the people of traditional Africa to settle as harmoniously as possible the disputes that mar human relationships.”

Balandier, Georges and Maquet, Jacques, Dictionary of Black African Civilization. (New York: Leon Amiel,); p.336.

“Undoubtedly prompted by the demon of literature, the ethnographers who tell us of African trances emphasize their brutality. But African mysticism has its nuances, half-tones, and melodic lines. Among the Yoruba and Fon there is an entire civilization of spirituality comparable to that of the wood carvings and bronzes of Benin.”

Bastide, R., Le Candomblé de Bahia, cited by Zahan, Dominique, The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press); p.126.

“Africans are civilized to the marrow of their bones!

The idea of the barbaric Negro is a European invention.”

(Leo Frobenius, German Africanist)

Cited by Césaire, Aimé, Discourse on Colonialism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); p.32.

I. The Essence of Religion

II. Concept of God: Nature and Characteristics of the Supreme Being

III. Religion and Politics: Centrality of the Ethic of Good Governance

IV. The African Book of Proverbs

V. The African Vision of Wisdom and Truth

I. THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION

Text 1. The essence of African traditional religions

Iwà lesin (Good Character is the essence of Religion)

Where did you see Iwa? Tell me!

Iwà, iwà is the one I am looking for.

"A man may be very, very handsome

Handsome as a fish within the water

But if he has no character

He is no more than a wooden doll."

Iwà, iwà is the one I am looking for.

If you have money,

But if you do not have good character,

The money belongs to someone else.

Iwà, iwà is the one we are searching for.

If one has children,

But if one lacks good character,

The children belong to someone else.

Iwà, iwà is the one we are searching for.

If one has a house

But if one lacks good character,

The house belongs to someone else.

Iwà, iwà is what we are searching for.

If one has clothes,

But if one lacks good character,

The clothes belong to someone else.

Iwà, iwà is what we are looking for.

All the good things of life that a man has,

If you have money,

If he lacks good character,

They belong to someone else.

Iwà, iwà is what we are searching for.

Each individual must use his own hands

To improve on his own character

Anger does not produce a good result for any man

Patience is the father of good character

If there is an old man who is endowed with patience

He will be endowed with all good things

It is honesty which I have in me,

I do not have any wickedness

Iwà lèsin, Good character is the essence of religion

(Yoruba Religion)

Wande Abimbola, "Ifa: A West African Cosmological System." in Thomas D. Blakely, et al., eds., *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*. (London and Portsmouth: James Currey and Heinemann, 1994); p.114; and George Anastaplo, "An Introduction to 'Ancient' African Thought" in *The Great Ideas Today, 1995*; *Britannica Great Books of the Western World*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995; p.176

Text 2. A Universal Prayer

In Kenya, the “Meru Prayer” offers us a magnificent example of African “universal prayer” transcend tribalism, and nationalism:

Kirinyaga (God), owner of all things,
 I pray to Thee, give me what I need,
 Because I am suffering, and also my children,
 And all the things that are in this country of mine.
 I beg Thee, the good one, for life,
 Healthy people with no disease.
 May they bear healthy children.
 And also to women who suffer
 Because they are barren, open the way
 By which they may see children.
 Give goats, cattle, food, honey,
And also the trouble of the other lands
That I do not know, remove.

A. Shorter, ed., *The Word That Lives: An Anthology of African Prayers*, mimeo, n.d., p.32. cited by Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion; the Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis books, 1997); pp.197-198.

Text 3. Equality between Men and Women

OSUN AND THE POWER OF WOMAN

(A tale from Yoruba religion in the equality between men and women)

Olodumare, the supreme creator, who is both female and male, wanted to prepare the earth for human habitation. To organize things, Olodumare sent the seventeen major deities. Osun was the only woman; all the rest were men. Each of the deities was given specific abilities and specific assignments. But when the male deities held their planning meetings, they did not invite Osun. "She is a woman," they said.

However, Olodumare had given great powers to Osun. Her womb is the matrix of all life in the universe. In her lie tremendous power, unlimited potential, infinities of existence. She wears a perfectly carved, beaded crown, and with her beaded comb she parts the pathway of both human and divine life. She is the leader of the aje, the powerful beings and forces in the world.

When the male deities ignored Osun, she made their plans fail. The male deities returned to Olodumare for help. After listening, Olodumare asked, "What about Osun?" "She is only a woman," they replied, "so we left her out." Olodumare spoke in strong words, "You must go back to her, beg her for forgiveness, make a sacrifice to her, and give her whatever she asks." The male deities did as they were told, and Osun forgave them. What did she ask for in return? The secret initiation that the men used to keep women in the background. She wanted it for herself and for all women who are as powerful as she is. The men agreed and initiated her into the secret knowledge. From that time onward, their plans were successful.

Cited in Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*. New York: Prentice Hall, 8th edition, 2011; p.43

Text 4. EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN ANCIENT EGYPT

The Great Hymn to Isis:

*Goddess of Numerous games,
pride of the female sex,
thou reigneth in the sublime and infinite.*

*Thou wanteth women
to come and anchor with men
It is thee the mistress of the earth
Thou maketh the power of women equal to that of men*

(Hymn preserved on a oxyrhinchos papyrus, number 1380; 2nd century B.C.; cited by Obenga, Théophile, Ancient Egypt and Black Africa. (London : Karnak House, 1992); p.168.

II. CONCEPT OF GOD:

THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUPREME BEING

"Vidye kadi kula, umwite ukwitaba, umulonde bukwidila."

(God is not far away, if you call upon him he will respond, but if you take the road to walk toward him, you will never reach him)

Luba-Bantu proverb on immanence and transcendence

Text 5.

The Cosmotheandric dimension of traditional spirituality

(By Birago Diop, a Senegambian poet)

SUPERNATURAL REALM

(Creator, Spirits, Ancestors)

Hear more often things than beings,
the voice of the fire listening,
hear the voice of the water.
Hear in the wind
the bushes sobbing,
it is the sigh of our forebears.

Those who are dead are never gone:
they are there in the thickening shadow.
The dead are not under the earth:
they are in the tree that rustles,
they are in the wood that groans,
they are in the water that runs,
they are in the water that sleeps,
they are in the hut,
they are in the crowd,
the dead are not dead.

Those who are dead are never gone,
they are in the breast of the woman,
they are in the child who is wailing
and in the firebrand that flames.
The dead are not under the earth:
they are in the fire that is dying,
they are in the grasses that weep,
they are in the whimpering rocks,
they are in the forest,
they are in the house,
the dead are not dead.

Text 6. Theology of a Pygmy hymn:

In the Beginning was God,
 Today is God,
 Tomorrow will be God.
 Who can make an image of God?
 He has no body?
 He is as a word which comes out of your mouth.
 That word! It is no more,
 It is past, and still it lives!
 So is God.

Text 7. Theology of the Gikuyu people:

God
 He has no Father nor mother,
 nor wife, nor children;
 He is all alone.
 He is neither a child nor an old man;
 He is the same today as He was yesterday.

Text 8. **Obatala the King We Praise**

Obatala,
 The Oba (king) that we praise,
 The truly king,
 Who was born in the city of Igbo,
 And went to become king in the city of Iranje.
 The great Orisa,
 The divinity of Igbo.
 They showed him ingratitude,
 They tricked him with palm wine,
 They then deserted the divinity from heaven.
 When they had all vanished,
 Then they asked where else could the secret be found?
 Whom shall we worship annually?
 The Igbo divinity,
 You shall we worship annually.
 You, who proposes and disposes;
 You shall we worship annually.

From Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976); p.44

Text 9. Theology of a *Galla Prayer*:

O God,
 Thou hast given me a good day,
 Give me a good night;
 Thou hast given me a good night,
 Give me a good day!

Text 10. Theology of a *NUER Prayer, Sudan*:

Our Father,
 It is thy universe, it is thy will
 Let us be at peace,
 Let the souls of the people be cool.
 Thou art our Father;
 Remove all evil from our path.

Text 11. Theology of *Susu Prayer (Guinea)*:

Father, O mighty Force,
 That Force which is in everything,
 Come down between us, fill us,
 Until we become like thee,
 Until we become like thee.

Text 12. Theology of a Boran Prayer (Kenya)

Set me free, I entreat thee from my heart;
 If I do not pray to thee with my heart,
 Thou hearest me not.
 If I pray to thee with my heart,
 Thou knowest it and art gracious unto me.

III. RELIGION AND THE AFRICAN VISION OF POLITICAL POWER

No legitimate Government without Religious Ethic

“Power has always been conceived of by Africans in the least despotic light possible. The more important it is, the more reason to share it in order to avoid the individualization that could generate social abuses and disturbances.”

Dominique Zahan, “Some Reflections on African Spirituality.” In Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *African Spirituality. Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*. (New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000); P.7

In East Africa, we have an interesting example of Bumuntu Ethic and vision of power in the Kingdom of the Zanj people. According to the testimony of Abu al-Hasan al-Masudi who visited the region in about A.D.925, The Zanj people considered their ruler as a "king of kings" and gave him the title "Waqlimi" which means "supreme Lord." But they could not tolerate any violation of their rights by him as al-Masudi tells us:

The Zanj give this title to their sovereign because he has been chosen to govern them with equity. But once he becomes tyrannical and departs from the rules of justice, they cause him to die and exclude his posterity from succession to the throne, for they claim that in behaving thus he ceases to be the son of the Master, that is to say, of the king of heaven and earth.

Basil Davidson, *The Search for Africa: History, Culture, Politics*. (New York: Times Books, 1994); p.36.

Hence Basil Davidson could rightly conclude:

A majority of African societies have been like the Lozi of Western Zambia who are apparently terrified of giving away power, even power to protect, for once a man is elevated it is feared he will stand against those he ought to care for. Even societies with chiefs and kings seldom deprived themselves of the right of deposition, at least up to the nineteenth century; and the founding notion of England's Magna Carta, that you could justly act against an unjust ruler, was deeply rooted here.

Basil Davidson, *The African Genius: An Introduction to African Cultural and Social History*. (Boston, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1969); p.75.

Text 1.

“Chieftdom among the Ashanti is considered an office with heavy responsibilities to the people. The Chief, called Ohene or Omanhene, is regarded as a sacred personage descended from an ancient clan founder through the female line. In former times the Omanhene was credited with supernatural powers, for which reason he acted as intermediary between the people and the ancestral dead. His decisions and judgments were thought of as coming from the ancestors, and accordingly his words were sacred. Nevertheless, he had to rule in conformity with clearly defined principles, and his personal behavior and his attitude towards his subjects were subjected to minute scrutiny. On the occasion of his enstoolment, his senior councillors made known to him through his spokesman or ‘translator’ what was expected of him. (This was an admonishment to the new king to behave well and rule wisely)... Thus, as noted by Rattray: ‘To all outward appearance and to superficial observers, who included the populace, the Chief was an autocrat. In reality every move and command which appeared to emanate from his mouth had been discussed in private and been previously agreed upon by his councillors, to whom every one in the tribe had access and to whom popular opinion on any subject was thus made known.’ (R.S. Rattray, *Law and Constitution*. London: Oxford University Press, 1956). Such was the ideal, at any rate, and serious infringement of the custom could lead to destoolment.”

Harold Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings, and Humor of Africa*. (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1996); pp.11-112.

Text 2. An Ashanti praise song for the king of justice and wisdom

Beside the investiture speech, the Ashanti have a wonderful tale on the sage king.

The story surrounds the investiture of Adoko, the king of the Agona people, who succeeded his cousin. When at the end of a long procession, the new king sat on the royal stool, many bards appeared singing the praise of the new ruler. However Adoko was impressed only by the song of the last bard, an old man who had seen during his life many kings "come and go." He sang as follows:

Our new father is Adoko,
He is great indeed,
But our former chief had no greatness.

Our new father is Adoko,
He is wise,
But our last chief understood nothing.

Our new father is Adoko,
He is generous,
Even though our last chief was stingy.

Adoko is our father,
He cares for the welfare of all,
But our last chief did not care.

Nana Adoko is here,
He will judge our lawsuits with justice,
Our former chief cared little for such things.

Our former chief is gone
He only slept and grew fat
Until he was claimed by death.

But Nana Adoko sleeps little,
He is our good father
Who watches over our affairs.

When Adoko heard this song he thought that the people really recognized him as the wisest ruler they have ever known. He thought: "Indeed, I am the great Adoko. Who has ever said it so well? And my cousin, the chief who has gone, was he not truly the poorest of rulers? How sharp and understanding these people are! How wise is this old bard!"

Satisfied by the praise, Adoko ordered his servants to distribute gifts among all the people at the celebration and said to the old bard: "This song, it is good. I shall make you the first singer of Agona as long as I live." Then the king asked the old bard: "Who is the maker of the song you sang? He must be a great singer indeed. Are you the maker of this song?" The old bard answered: "Oh, no. I am not the composer. This song was made in ancient time, and we sing it each time a new chief is appointed over us. We merely change the name of the chief."

The story then concludes that when Adoko grew old and died, a bard sang to the new chief:

"Our new father is Mahama,
He is great indeed,
But our former chief had no greatness."

Harold Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings, and Humour of Africa*. (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1996); pp.114-115.

Text 3. Some investiture Speeches

I. Prayers for the Good King, the servant of the ancestors

1. Investiture Prayer of the Baluba:

Oh, Mulopwe, King of Bana-Ba-Mbidi Kiluwe,
Listen to the voice of the ancestors,
Listen to Shakapanga,
Live and reign well as your illustrious ancestor Kalala Iunga Mwine Munza...

I remind you that your forefather Kalala Ilunga was a wise man...
Remember your people,
Do not be satisfied merely to take their tribute;
Give them of your wisdom and of your protection
and the success of your kingdom will be assured.

, William J. and Childs, S.Terry, "Forging Memory" in Roberts, Mary Nooter and Roberts, Allen F.
Art and the Making of History. (New York: The Museum for African Art, 1996); p.64.

2. The Asante Investiture Speech

Oh, King of the Ashanti,
Listen to the voice of Okyeame,
Listen to the voice of the Ancestors
Listen to the Councillors
Listen to the voice of the people

We do not wish that
 he should disclose the origin (ethnicity) of any person.
We do not wish that
 he should curse us
We do not wish him to be greedy.
We do not wish that
 he should refuse to listen to advice
We do not wish that
 he should call people "fools."
We do not wish that
 he should act without advice.
We wish that he would always have time for his advisers.
We do not want personal violence.

Cited by Ayittey, George B.N., *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p.57.

3. Investiture Prayer of the Asanti people of Bekwai

A. – The voice of the People:

O King of Bekwai,
 Listen to the ancestors,
 Listen to the people
 Because the Ko'ntire and he Akwamu say I must give you the Stool,
 Because the Advance-guard say I must give you the Stool,
 Because the Rear-guard say I must give you the Stool,
 Because the mean and women of Bekwai say we must give you the Stool,
 When a sickle breaks, we put a new shaft in it.
 Today you uncle (previous king) lay down and did not rise up, so we have brought his gun to give you.
 Today the Bekwai people consulted together, and they say that you are their choice, they declare that we must give you the Stool of Aguyebofo.
 Do not take it and go after women.
 Do not take it and drink spirits.
 Do not take it and make civil war.
 When we give you advice, listen to it.
 Do not take the Stool and abuse your elders.
 Do not take it and gamble with the people.
 We do not wish shame.
 We bless the Stool, Kuse! Kuse! Kuse!
 The elders say we are to take this Stool and give it to you.
 (Another investiture prayer from the Ashanti State of Bekwai,)

B.- The response of the new king (pledge of good behavior):

"I beg pardon of Sunday, the forbidden name of which I speak;
 I implore Small-pox, the forbidden name of which I speak;
 I supplicate the great forbidden name, the name which I speak, saying that:
 Today, you, the people of Bekwai, have taken my grandsire's gun which you have given me;
 I am the grandchild of Aguyebofo, whose gun you have this day given me;
 if it is not a good government with which I govern you,
 or if I gamble with my grandsire's town;
 if I go after women;
 if I do not listen to the advice of my councillors;
 if I make war against them;
 if I run away;
 then I have violated the great forbidden names of Sunday and of Small-pox."

Harold Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings, and Humor of Africa*. (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1996); pp.112-113.

4. Prayer of the Ashanti people of Juaben:

A.- The Voice of the People:

Oh King

Listen to the voice of the ancestors,

Listen to the voice of the people.

“Do not seduce the wives of your elders,

Do not seduce the wives of your young men,

Do not disclose the origin whence your people came.

Let your ears hear our advice,

Do not act foolishly towards your subjects, or your clan, or your children.

Be humble.

Do not spoil the Stool heirlooms.”

B.- King’s answer after each admonition “I agree to that,” or “I have heard.”

Harold Courlander, *A Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings, and Humor of Africa*. (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1996); pp.113.

5. The Dagomba Investiture Prayer (Northern Ghana):

Oh, Na, King of the Dagomba,

Listen to the voice of the ancestors,

Listen to the voice of the people

If anyone is oppressed, and he comes to you save him.

Do not look behind you when you walk;

Do not be afraid.

Do not beat people.

Do not go after men’s wives.

If we advise you, hear our advice.

If you advise us, we will listen.

Cited by Ayittey, George B.N., *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), p.77.

IV. THE AFRICAN BOOK OF PROVERB (A Brief Selection)

Proverbs on **Bumuntu** (Personhood):
Every human being is sacred

1. "Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nnye asase ba"
(All men are children of God, no one is a child of the earth).

-Akan Proverb-

Kwame Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Revised edition, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995; p.19

2. In Yoruba religion, the High God Orinsala, the molder of human bodies, is praised as "the husband of hunchback" (*Oko abuké*), "the husband of lame" (*Oko aro*), and "the husband of dwarf with a big fat head" (*Oko arara bori pètê*).

Wande Abimbola, "Ifa: A West African Cosmological System." in Thomas D. Blakely, et al., eds., *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*. (London and Portsmouth: James Currey and Heinemann, 1994); p.111.

3. "One is not born with a bad head, One takes it on the earth"
(*ti bone wofa no fam, womfa nnwo*).

Akan proverb (against determinism, and fate)

4. "one can indeed bear a child greater than oneself."

Paula Girshick Ben-Amos, "The Promise of Greatness: Women and Power in an Edo Spirit Possession" in Thomas D. Blakely, et al., eds., *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*. (London and Portsmouth: James Currey and Heinemann, 1994); p.121.

5. "**Munda mwa mukwenu kemwelwa kuboko, nansha ulele nandi butanda bumo**"
(None can put his arm into another person's inside, not even when he shares his bed).

- Luba Proverb -

Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*. (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969), p.105.

6. "Chaona munzako chapita mawa chili paiwe"
(What your neighbour has experienced is gone, tomorrow it will be your turn)

Chewa Proverb

7. Wanthu ndi mchenga saundika (Human beings are like sand out of which one cannot make a mountain) Chewa Proverb.

These two proverb in the Chichewa language of the Chewa people are from Didier N. Kaphagawani, "African conceptions of Personhood and Intellectual identities" in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux, eds., *The African Philosophy Reader*. (London, New York: Routledge, 1998); p.173.

8. “*Iwa rere l’èso eniyan*” (Good character, good existence, is the adornment of a human being). Yoruba proverb

9. The *Ifa* corpus is even more explicit: “*Owo ara eni, Là aṣì I tunwa ara enii se*”(Each individual must use his own hands to improve on his own character). This concept of free will and personal responsibility finds an interesting echo in the Luba proverb, “*Vidye wa kuha buya nobe wa mukwashako*”

10. As Chinua Achebe pointed out, in Africa, “age was respected, but achievement was revered,” and young people had to strive for their own excellence and greatness since the ancestral wisdom teaches that “a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness” in a society which ridicules lazy people and where “a man is judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.”

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), pp. 8 and 19.

Proverbs on Personal Responsibility

The African vision of solidarity, sense of community, familyhood, and hospitality does not condone laziness. The individual does not have the right to exploit the generosity of others. This concept of free will and personal responsibility finds an interesting echo in the Luba, Yoruba, Akan proverbs, and many others.

1. “*Vidye wa kuha buya nobe wa mukwashako*”

(God gave you beauty, but you must help him, by taking care of yourself)

Luba proverb (from my memory)

2. “*Kalele Kadia Tulo.*”

(Let the one who sleeps eat his sleep)

Luba proverb, from my memory.

3. “*Owo ara eni, Là aṣì I tunwa ara enii se*”(Each individual must use his own hands to improve on his own character). Yoruba proverb, in *Ifa* corpus

VI. THE AFRICAN VISION OF WISDOM AND TRUTH AND ATTITUDE VIS-À-VIS OTHER RELIGIONS

In Ghana, the Akan have a tale about Ananse Kokrofu, the Great Spider, who wanted to keep wisdom for himself and hide it from everybody, but wisdom escaped from his hand and fell on the ground, thus becoming available to everybody. The legend goes as follows:

“Ananse collected all the wisdom in the world and shut it up in a gourd, Then he began climbing the trunk of a tree so as to keep this precious gourd safe at the top. But he got into difficulties only half-away up, because he had tied the gourd to his front, and it hampered him in his climbing. His son Ntikuma, who was watching at the bottom, called up: ‘Father, if you really had all the wisdom in the world up there with you, you would have had the sense to tie that gourd on your back.’ His father saw the truth of this and threw down the gourd in a temper. It broke on the ground, and the wisdom in it was scattered about.

Men and women came and picked up what each of them could get and carry away. Which explains why there is much wisdom in the world, but few persons have more than a little of it, and some persons have none at all.”

Basil Davidson, *West Africa before the Colonial Era. A history to 1850*. (London, New York: Longman, 1998); p.148.

Because of its firm belief that God, the creator of all, does not reveal truth only to a selected few and hide it from his other children, African traditional religions are fundamentally tolerant of other religions, and reject exclusivist claims such as the famous Christian “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus”:

African traditional religion is one of the ways in which Africans have experienced God's salvific activity in their history, which is an affirmation of God's presence with African people. This should come as no surprise since God is the God of all humankind and he is not so unkind as to withhold his presence from others. God's divine truth and salvation have not been confined to a favoured few; on the contrary, God is God because he is accessible to all, and his revelation does not lead to the denial of his presence in certain areas of the world and an affirmation of his presence elsewhere ... The good elements in African traditional religions were put there by God and this clearly demonstrates that God has no favorites and that he shares his truth with all, but does not hide it from others and share it only with those whom he favours. The African religious experience helps to give us a broader and much deeper understanding of God, and rescues us from the limitations which partial human appropriation of God's activity and revelation tend to place on God... “

Opoku, Kofi Asare, “African Traditional religion: An enduring heritage” in Olupona, Jacob K. and Nyang, Sulayman S., eds., *Religious Plurality in Africa*. (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993); pp. 69-70.

As many other scholars have pointed out for decades, it is basically in the field of religious liberty that Africa brings a major contribution to the world. According to the Catholic theologian, Benezet Bujo, religious wars were unknown in African traditional society. Summarizing the Islamic view, Ali Mazrui, a Muslim scholar, is more explicit :

Of the three principal religious legacies of Africa (indigenous, Islamic, and Christian), the most tolerant on record must be the indigenous tradition. One might even argue that Africa did not have religious wars before Christianity and Islam arrived, for indigenous religions were neither universalist (seeking to convert the whole of the human race) nor competitive (in bitter rivalry against other creeds)... Like Hinduism and modern Judaism-and unlike Christianity and Islam- indigenous African traditions have not sought to convert the whole of humanity. The Yoruba do not seek to convert the Ibo to the Yoruba religion-or vice versa-and neither the Yoruba nor the Ibo compete with each other for the souls of a third group, such as the Hausa. Because they are not proselytizing religions, indigenous African creeds have not fought with each other. Over the centuries, Africans have waged many kinds of wars with each other, but they were rarely religious ones before the universalist creeds arrived.

Writing from the perspective of the Yoruba religion of Nigeria, Abimbola observed that religious tolerance comes from creation myths which maintain the idea of a universal common descent of all human beings from the same God creator, Obatala:

In the African primal traditions there is a continuing witness against violence, brute force and intolerance of each other's beliefs. The African point of view is one in which there is respect for all the religious traditions of humankind. While we hold steadfastly to our own beliefs, we respect the right of others to practice their own religions in their own ways, provided they do not infringe on the right of other people. Furthermore, we believe that religious freedom is a condition precedent to world peace and individual freedom. We believe that we all can live together in peace if we are prepared to respect one another's point of view...

This is why, the Nigerian writer and philosopher, Wole Soyinka (Nobel Prize laureate), calls us to the rediscovery of the wisdom of African traditional religions in a world where the competition between Christianity and Islam has spread intolerance and, even in some cases, violence:

Tolerance means humility, not daring to presume that one has found the ultimate answer to Truth or daring to claim that only through one's intuitions will be found the sole gateway to Truth. All the major religions, the so-called world religions that are built on such claims, have inflicted competitive agonies on humanity since the beginning of time. It is time that we call such religions to their own altars of repentance. There are religions in the world that point the way to the harmonization of faiths; it is the loss of the world that many of them are little known... Before Islam or Christianity invaded and subverted our worldviews, before the experience of enslavement at the hands of both Arabs and Europeans, the African world did evolve its own spiritual accommodation with the unknown, did evolve its own socio-economic systems, its cohering systems of social relationships, and reproduced its own material existence within an integrated worldview, that those systems are still very much with us and have indeed affected both liturgy and practice of alien religions even to the extent of rendering them docile and domesticated.

Thus, whenever, in contemporary times, the aggressive face of one or the other of these world religions is manifested, our recourse is primarily to the strengths of those unextinguished virtues of our antecedent faiths, the loftiest of which will be found to be expressed in such attitudes of tolerance - the genuine, not the nominal, rhetorical, or selective kind, not tolerance as an academic exercise of exterior comparisons, but one that is demonstrable by the very histories of our deities..., as recorded in their mythologies...

A periodic visitation to the world of the Yoruba - or indeed to any of the "invisible" worldviews - must be deemed a contemporary necessity for millions of Africans, including the non-Yoruba, the non-Christian, the non-moslem, as well as Christians and Moslems, for whom this will surely serve as a catalyst for a systematic assessment of their own cultures and values.

The gods are paradigms of existence. Monotheism is thus only an attempted summation of such paradigms... We find, therefore, that Revelation as Infallibility is a repugnant concept in Yoruba religion...

The dominant religions of the world and their theologies as perceived in present day have meant not the search for or the love of, but the sanctification and consolidation - at whatever cost, including massacres and mayhem - of mere propositions of Truth, declared Immutable Revelation. It has meant the manipulation of Truth, the elevation of mere Texts to Dogma and Absolutes, be those Texts named Scriptures or Catechism. This failure to see transmitted Texts, with all their all-too-human adumbrations, as no more than signposts, as parables that may lead the mind toward deeper quarrying into the human condition, its contradictions and bouts of illumination, a reexamination of the phenomena of Nature, of human history and human strivings, of building of Community - it is this failure that has led to the substitution of dogma for a living, dynamic spirituality. And this is where the Yoruba deities have an important message to transmit to the world.

There is an urgency about this, as the world is increasingly taken over by the most virulent manifestations of dogmatic adhesion, the nurturing terrain of which even tends to undermine my earlier attribution of such eruptions to Textual or Scriptural authority. In many of these instances, the defenders of the Text have never even seen the Test or are incapable of reading them, yet they swear by them and indeed presume to act on them.

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