

PENGUIN CLASSICS

Writings from Ancient Egypt

Translated with an Introduction by TOBY WILKINSON

Translated and with an Introduction by
Toby Wilkinson

WRITINGS FROM ANCIENT EGYPT



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WRITINGS FROM ANCIENT EGYPT

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For Mike – *ir hrw-mswt nfr*

Map of Ancient Egypt


N
Mediterranean Sea
Megiddo
Gaza
Sharuhen
Sais
Leontopolis
Avaris
Bubastis
LOWER EGYPT
Heliopolis
FAYUM
Memphis
SINAI
Herakleopolis
R. Nile
Hermopolis
Amarna
UPPER EGYPT
Abydos
Wadi Hammamat
Thebes
Red Sea
Elkab
Elephantine
R. Nile
NUBIA
Semna
Napata
0 200 km
0 100 miles

Note on the Translations

Round brackets ( ) indicate words inserted by the translator to facilitate understanding or flow.

Square brackets [ ] indicate gaps due to damage to the original manuscript or monument; the text inside the brackets is a restoration on the basis of remaining traces or context, often drawing on parallel passages in the same or other texts.

Angled brackets < > indicate an erroneous omission by the ancient scribe; the text inside the brackets is a restoration by the translator.

An ellipsis … indicates a missing portion of the text where restoration is impossible, or a passage which defies translation (often owing to scribal error or misinterpretation).

Internal headings and *italic* interpolations in the translations are included to subdivide or explain sections of the text for the benefit of the reader.

Timeline

PERIOD/DATES (BC)/DYNASTY/KING	TEXT	DEVELOPMENTS IN EGYPT
Early Dynastic Period, 2950–2575		
First Dynasty, 2950–2750		
Second Dynasty, 2750–2650		
Third Dynasty, 2650–2575		Step Pyramid at Saqqara
Old Kingdom, 2575–2125		
Fourth Dynasty, 2575–2450		Great Pyramid at Giza
Fifth Dynasty, 2450–2325		
Nine kings, ending with Unas, 2350–2325	3.1, 7.1	Pyramid Texts
Sixth Dynasty, 2325–2175		
Five kings, ending with Pepi II, 2260–2175	1.1	Harkhuf's expeditions
Eighth Dynasty, 2175–2125		
		Civil war
First Intermediate Period, 2125–2010		
Ninth/Tenth Dynasty, 2125–1975		
Eleventh Dynasty (1st part), 2080–2010		
Three kings, including Intef II, 2070–2020	3.2	
Middle Kingdom, 2010–1630	7.2, 9.1	
Eleventh Dynasty (2nd part), 2010–1938		
Three kings, ending with Mentuhotep IV, 1948–1938	8.1	
Twelfth Dynasty, 1938–1755	11.3, 10.2, 4.2, 11.1, 11.5	Golden age of literature
Eight kings, including		
Amenemhat I, 1938–1908	6.1	
Senusret I, 1918–1875	11.2	
Senusret III, 1836–1818	1.2, 3.3, 8.2	
Thirteenth Dynasty, 1755–1630	4.1, 10.1	
		Civil war
Second Intermediate Period, 1630–1539		
Fourteenth Dynasty, c.*1630*		
Fifteenth Dynasty, 1630–1520		Hyksos invasion

Sixteenth Dynasty, 1630–1565		
Seventeenth Dynasty, 1570–1539		
Several kings, ending with Kamose, 1541–1539	2.1	
New Kingdom, 1539–1069	7.3	
Eighteenth Dynasty, 1539–1292	11.6	
Fifteen kings, including		
Ahmose, 1539–1514	8.3	Reunification
Thutmose I, 1493–1481	1.3	
Thutmose III, 1479–1425	2.2	Battle of Megiddo
Hatshepsut, 1473–1458	8.4	
Amenhotep III, 1390–1353	8.5	
Akhenaten, 1353–1336	1.4, 3.4, 8.6	Amarna revolution
Tutankhamun, 1332–1322	8.7	
Horemheb, 1319–1292	5.1, 9.2	
Ramesside Period, 1292–1069	11.4	
Nineteenth Dynasty, 1292–1190		
Twentieth Dynasty, 1190–1069		
Ten kings, including		
Ramesses V, 1150–1145	5.2	
Ramesses XI, 1099–1069	6.2	
Third Intermediate Period, 1069–664		
Twenty-first Dynasty, 1069–945		Political division
Twenty-second Dynasty, 945–715		
Twenty-third Dynasty, 838–720		
Twenty-fourth Dynasty, 740–715		
Twenty-fifth Dynasty, 728–657		
Five kings, starting with Piankhi, 747–716	2.3	Kushite conquest
Late Period, 664–332		
Twenty-sixth Dynasty, 664–525		
Six kings, starting with Psamtek I, 664–610	1.5, 8.8	
Twenty-seventh Dynasty (First Persian Period), 525–404		Persian conquest
Five kings, including Darius I, 522–486	1.6	
Twenty-eighth Dynasty, 404–399		
Twenty-ninth Dynasty, 399–380		
Thirtieth Dynasty, 380–343		
Thirty-first Dynasty (Second Persian Period), 343–332		
Macedonian Dynasty, 332–309		

Alexander the Great, 332–323 1.7

Ptolemaic Period, 309–30 Death of Cleopatra

Introduction

The written tradition

Ancient Egypt is a civilization famous for its monuments. The Great Pyramid and Sphinx at Giza, the tombs in the Valley of the Kings, the rock-cut temples of Abu Simbel: these define pharaonic culture in our imagination, conjuring up a world of god-kings, esoteric religion and vaulting ambition. They are rounded out by an image of ancient Egypt derived from museum visits: a civilization of mummies and gold masks, sarcophagi and statues, with only the occasional 'object of daily life' to remind us that the ancient Egyptians were real people. Architecture and art are the dominant themes, suggesting that ancient Egypt was a culture where the concrete took precedence over the abstract, the practical over the theoretical.

While these impressions are, to an extent, accurate, there is a huge missing dimension in such a view of ancient Egypt: the life of the mind, as expressed in the written word. Of course, writing is everywhere in pharaonic culture. Just about every tomb and temple wall, every coffin or statue, is inscribed with hieroglyphs. (This is the reason why, until comparatively recently, the discipline of Egyptology was dominated by philologists, often with a training in the Classics: nobody, it was argued, could understand or appreciate the civilization of ancient Egypt without being able to read its numerous inscriptions.) Papyri, too, are a quintessential product of the ancient Nile Valley – although museums often display them as artefacts rather than texts. Despite the preponderance of writing in ancient Egypt, we are often tempted to look upon it as mere decoration, rather than engaging with it as meaningful words.

There are good reasons for this accustomed blindness to the written tradition of ancient Egypt. First is the strangeness and apparent impenetrability of the script. Hieroglyphs are indeed pictures – they formed part of a unified system with 'art' – but their magic is their ability to serve as expressions of complex thoughts as well as pictorial representations. Hieroglyphic writing can convey concepts every bit as sophisticated, grammatical constructions every bit as complex, as Greek or Latin script.

Second, and equally odd to the Western mind, is the lack of an authorial tradition in ancient Egypt. While writers from ancient Greece and Rome are household names – Euripides and Plato, Pliny and Virgil – there is not a single named ancient Egyptian writer with an attributed body of work. A few sages were revered in ancient Egypt for their wisdom – men like Imhotep, deified centuries after his death as a god of learning and healing – and a very few were said to have composed writings – usually princes or high officials from the Pyramid Age, like Hordedef and Ptahhotep – but pharaonic culture valued perfection within an established tradition over individual creativity. Hence, just as there are no famous writers from ancient Egypt, so there are no known artists and precious few named sculptors. For Western scholarship, where a written work is inextricably linked with its author (ironically, a mode of classification that began in Egypt, in the Great Library at Alexandria), this represents a fundamental hurdle to the wider appreciation of ancient Egyptian writing.

Third, there is the lack of a 'way in'. Whereas, until comparatively recently, many school curricula in the West included at least a smattering of Latin, and perhaps some Greek, few people have ever managed to gain a working knowledge of ancient Egyptian. Hieroglyphs were first deciphered less than two hundred years ago; since then, the number of people who have ever been proficient in the ancient Egyptian language is probably fewer than a thousand worldwide.

Genre, style and script

If these obstacles can be overcome, a surprisingly rich and varied corpus of writing opens up. The concept of writing itself originated not in the Nile Valley but in the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates, Mesopotamia, around the middle of the fourth millennium BC. The Egyptians were always good at adopting and adapting others' inventions whenever they proved useful, and writing became established in Egypt during the process of state formation that led to the emergence of a unified kingdom around 3000 BC. From the earliest abbreviated labels identifying the contents or ownership of commodities or the actors in a scene of royal conquest, the written tradition in ancient Egypt lasted nearly 3,500 years; the last hieroglyphic inscription, a simple prayer, was carved on a wall in the temple of Philae on 24 August AD 394. Over this immense period of time, hieroglyphic writing was used for a wide variety of purposes.

Initially, it was a tool of economic management and power projection: the twin priorities of the Egyptian state (and, arguably, of every government in human history). Nothing could beat writing for recording goods entering and

leaving the Royal Treasury, or for identifying and personalizing scenes glorifying the deeds of the king. For some 600 years the written record of ancient Egypt is restricted to these two types of text. Then, at the height of the Old Kingdom (the twenty-fourth century BC), the first collection of religious writings appears, inscribed inside the pyramid-tombs of kings and their royal relatives. While some of the individual spells may have been composed much earlier and passed down orally, it was only at the end of the Fifth Dynasty (*c.* 2350 BC) that they were first carved in stone. What prompted this move from oral to written transmission is unclear, but the so-called Pyramid Texts (see Texts 3.1 and 7.1) began a tradition of mortuary texts that was to last for the succeeding three millenniums of pharaonic civilization. At about the same time as the Pyramid Texts were being carved, the first extended autobiographical inscriptions made their appearance in the tombs of high officials. Using the written word to glorify and memorialize the career of a private individual (albeit a member of the court) was a natural extension of the tradition of royal inscriptions.

The next significant development in the use of writing came at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. The period of political fragmentation and civil war – known as the First Intermediate Period – which followed the collapse of the Old Kingdom had witnessed major changes in Egyptian society, not least a loss of innocence about Egypt's place in the created order. The result, once central authority and royal patronage had been re-established, was an unprecedented flowering of writing. Indeed, for the first time in Egyptian history, we can justifiably use the word 'literature'. The Middle Kingdom in general and the Twelfth Dynasty in particular (the twentieth to eighteenth centuries BC) were a golden age of literary production. Cycles of hymns, poems, lamentations, teachings and prose tales were composed for the royal court. Some of these genres are familiar to the modern reader – the tales, for example, display a timeless mix of narrative pace and fantasy – while others are quintessentially Egyptian, most notably the teachings, which express in a series of maxims a set of ideal behaviours. Although all these texts were written for a tiny literate elite, and for an audience rather than a readership (oral recitation seems always to have been preferred to private reading), many of the works gained a wider popularity. Some became established classics and remained part of the Egyptian canon for centuries. It is remarkable to realize that The Teaching of King Amenemhat I for His Son (Text 11.2), written in the twentieth century BC, was still being studied and copied when Sappho was composing her verse fourteen centuries later. Teachings, alone among ancient Egyptian writings, were given titles. Tales and other works were typically nameless, a corollary to the lack of

an authorial tradition that was perpetuated even at the height of literary creativity during the Middle Kingdom.

By the early New Kingdom (the sixteenth century BC), when lyric poetry entered the written canon in the form of love poems, all the major genres of ancient Egyptian writing had been established. As well as economic, laudatory, religious, literary and poetic texts, writing was also used for private correspondence and to record legal and administrative matters, though relatively few examples of these everyday documents have survived. The vagaries of archaeological preservation also make it likely that some major works have been lost entirely, while others are known only from fragmentary and/or much later copies.

While the Pyramid Texts are written in an archaic form of the Egyptian language which we call Old Egyptian, the bulk of hieroglyphic texts are composed in the form of the language that was prevalent in the early Middle Kingdom. Perhaps because it was the language of the most popular and esteemed classics, Middle Egyptian came to be regarded as the preferred idiom for all official and literary compositions. Consequently, texts composed many centuries later used the same form of the language, even though spoken Egyptian had continued to evolve. The gulf between the spoken and written languages, even by the New Kingdom, must have been considerable. (Compare the notable difference between classical and spoken Arabic, or the growing gap today between written and spoken English.) Traces of the contemporary vernacular creep into the Great Hymn to the Orb (Text 3.4) and everyday speech is reflected in private correspondence (Texts 6.1 and 6.2); but otherwise, the language of the written record remained largely static, archaic and remote from everyday speech.

This must have reinforced the exclusivity of literacy in ancient Egypt, since only those trained at state-run scribal schools would have been exposed to the written register of expression. The most accurate estimates put the proportion of the population who could read and write at no more than 10 per cent, at any period of pharaonic history; for many centuries, it was probably far smaller. In Egypt, from the very beginning of the written tradition, literacy was synonymous with power, since the ability to read and write opened up a career in the bureaucracy that ran the country. The word for ‘scribe’ thus became the designation for any official and a mark of respect. Since membership of the government machine depended upon proficiency in reading and writing, the elite sent their sons (there is little evidence for the education of girls) to scribal schools to guarantee their access to the corridors of power. Men of ability from humble backgrounds could, and did, rise to the top, but they were the exception. For most of Egyptian history, the bureaucracy was a self-perpetuating elite, with

literacy as its exclusive currency. The vast majority of texts were composed by and for this small group at the apex of society.

This social context explains some of the notable stylistic features of ancient Egyptian writings. As well as being removed from everyday speech, writings were often consciously intellectual, making abundant use of wordplay through homophones and homonyms, in which the Egyptian language is particularly rich. (Compare Shakespeare's fondness for puns.) Epigrammatic and proverbial utterances are also common, as are metaphor and idiom. Texts are rarely overtly comic, although satire is apparent in many works. Above all, the language of the written word – which, as we have noted, was composed to be read out loud – aimed to conform to the elite ideal of 'perfect speech': words that reflected the skill and wisdom of the speaker and educated the listener.

In keeping with their elite milieu, most Egyptian writings overtly reinforced the established order of society. Moreover, official texts – autobiographical and royal inscriptions and battle narratives – deliberately presented an idealized version of events, since their purpose was to glorify and memorialize, not to serve as objective, factual accounts. Royal inscriptions never mention the fallibility of the king and only refer to departures from the ideal order – for example, natural disasters (Text 8.3) or civil wars (Text 2.1) – in order to present the king as the saviour and guarantor of stability. By contrast, fictional literature, which flourished during the Middle Kingdom, enjoyed the freedom to address the darker side of life, including such controversial topics as suicide (Text 4.2) and even regicide (Text 11.2). Part of the self-consciously intellectual character of such writings was the exploration of the tension between the ideal and the actual, within the safe boundaries of a text. It is for this reason that some of the writings of the Middle Kingdom can properly be described as 'literature', in the modern sense of the term.

From the New Kingdom onwards, literacy began to expand into the lower ranks of officialdom, and a larger – though still small – percentage of the population had either some familiarity with the written word, or access to the services of a village scribe, or both. This societal change is reflected in some texts, notably spells from the Book of the Dead (e.g. Text 7.3 (i)) and teachings (Text 11.6), which convey a middle-class viewpoint somewhat different from the elite perspective of earlier works. Even so, we never hear the voice of the vast majority of Egyptians, the illiterate peasantry who tilled the land, producing the agricultural bounty that made pharaonic civilization possible.

Register and voice are also linked with the scripts used for different ancient Egyptian writings. From the beginning of pharaonic history, official commemorative inscriptions, whether royal or private, secular or religious, were

generally written in fully formed hieroglyphs – 'monumental hieroglyphs' as they are often called, from their use on stone monuments. Anything carved in stone employed this kind of script, which, as noted above, was part of a unified system with ancient Egyptian art. By contrast, writings on papyrus – be they legal texts, letters, mortuary texts, prose tales, or teachings – generally employed a more cursive form of the script, better suited to pen and ink. For more formal works (particularly mortuary texts), an intermediate type of script ('cursive hieroglyphs') was common, whereas 'literary' works were more often written in a fully cursive script, known as hieratic. The relationship between hieratic, cursive hieroglyphs and monumental hieroglyphs is roughly the same as that between everyday handwriting, block capitals and printed text in present-day usage. By contrast, in the Late Period onwards, an entirely separate script, demotic, evolved from hieratic. Used at first only for commercial and legal documents, demotic became widespread by the Ptolemaic Period (its name is derived from the Greek for 'popular') and, until the advent of Roman rule, was used alongside Greek. Hence demotic is one of the three scripts (together with monumental hieroglyphs and Greek) carved on the Rosetta Stone. A considerable body of writings, including literary works, were composed in demotic; but the inaccessibility of the script, even to most Egyptologists (including myself), means that they have not been included in this anthology.

The anthology

Writings from ancient Egypt are not well known outside academic circles. While ancient Greek and Roman authors have long been available in translation and are widely accessible (not least as Penguin Classics), ancient Egyptian texts remain largely confined to the specialist literature. Many texts, if not most, have been translated only once, often many decades ago and usually by philologists whose aim was to produce accurate, literal translations rather than fluent, accessible editions. Some of the better-known texts, such as the autobiographical inscription of Harkhuf (Text 1.1), the Battle of Megiddo inscription (Text 2.2), the Great Hymn to the Orb (Text 3.4), The Dialogue of a Man and His Soul (Text 4.2) and The Teaching of King Amenemhat I for His Son (Text 11.2) are often quoted or excerpted, but complete translations are hard to find. Even the best-known texts, such as The Cannibal Hymn (Text 3.1) and The Tales of Wonder (Text 10.1), are under-appreciated compared with the products of other literary traditions. It is extraordinary that, apart from the semi-academic three-volume anthology by Miriam Lichtheim (now four decades old, although recently reissued with new introductions) and more recent anthologies of Middle

Kingdom literature by William Kelly Simpson and Richard Parkinson, there are no broad, accessible anthologies of writings from ancient Egypt currently in print.

The objective of this book is to fill that gap. As such, it is aimed primarily at the general reader who wishes to gain a better appreciation of ancient Egyptian writing in its many forms. Students and scholars who wish to engage with detailed textual and historical analysis are referred to the specialist literature cited in the Bibliography.

In making the selection, I have been guided by five principles. First, my aim has been to provide new, modern translations that are as fluent and accessible as possible. With this in mind, I have confined myself to texts written in one of the three phases of the classical ancient Egyptian language (Old, Middle and Late Egyptian) – a language with which I am sufficiently familiar to undertake my own translations from the original. Lacking such facility in demotic, I have excluded most writings (including substantial works of literature) from the Late Period, for which I would have had to rely on existing scholarly translations.

Second, my objective has been to survey the wide variety of genres – acknowledging that these are largely modern categories – in which ancient Egyptian writers worked. I have arranged the anthology in eleven sections – autobiographical inscriptions, battle narratives, hymns, lamentations, legal texts, letters, mortuary texts, royal inscriptions, songs, tales and teachings – and have chosen a representative selection of writings to illustrate each one.

Third, my intention has been to provide some sense of the huge chronological sweep of ancient Egyptian writing, to highlight both the innate conservatism of Egyptian culture and the subtle changes over time. The chosen texts span two millenniums, from the reign of Unas in the twenty-fourth century BC (Text 3.1) to the reign of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC (Text 1.7). No other civilization, ancient or modern, offers a comparable time span of literary production. Almost inevitably, the selection is dominated by works produced at two particular periods, the Middle Kingdom (especially the Twelfth Dynasty), which is acknowledged as the golden age of Egyptian literature, when many of its classics were produced; and the New Kingdom (especially the Eighteenth Dynasty), when royal inscriptions and battle narratives reached their apogee.

Fourth, while recognizing that writing was the preserve of the elite in ancient Egypt, I have tried to include works that shed light on the lives and beliefs of ordinary people, not just the preoccupations of the king and his immediate circle. Alongside battle narratives and royal inscriptions, which are undeniably propagandistic in tone and content, and hymns which reflect the tenets of official, state religion, I have therefore chosen legal texts and letters penned by,

or on behalf of, private citizens (Texts 5.2 and 6.1) and two texts used in scribal training that reflect a distinctly middle-class view of life (Texts 11.4 and 11.5).

Fifth, I have tried to include a mixture of better- and lesser-known works. Hence, I have included such classics as the obelisk inscription of Hatshepsut (easily read *in situ* by visitors to the temple of Karnak), The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor and the so-called 'Satire of the Trades', as well as selections from the three great collections of mortuary spells, the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead. Of the greatest literary works of the Middle Kingdom, I have omitted only The Tale of Sinuhe, which is already accessible to a wide readership through Richard Parkinson's magisterial edition. Among the less familiar works I have included are autobiographies and royal inscriptions from periods of political transition or turmoil (Texts 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.3, 8.7 and 8.8); two songs that reveal an unexpected ambivalence towards death (Texts 9.1 and 9.2); and teachings that tell us much about ancient Egyptian society and morality (Texts 11.1 and 11.6). Some of the texts that I have selected make their first ever appearance in a general anthology. They include the Kamose stela (Text 2.1), with its fascinating first-hand account of the battle against the Hyksos; the Will of Naunakht (Text 5.2), with its insights into ancient Egyptian law; the late Ramesside letters (Text 6.2), with their dramatic revelations about tomb-robbery; and the tempest stela of Ahmose (Text 8.3), with its rare description of a natural disaster.

Of course, when choosing just forty-odd texts from a 3,500-year written tradition, the resulting selection will inevitably have many omissions. A host of different anthologies could have been produced. It is my hope that this book may stimulate other authors to do so.

The challenge of translation

Translating between any two languages requires an act of imagination. Since a language represents not just a way of speaking but also a way of looking at the world, a translation which captures the spirit as well as the letter of the original is a near impossibility, even between contemporary European languages whose speakers share many aspects of culture. Translating from an ancient language – the voice of a culture remote in time, space and experience – is even more challenging. To produce an accurate and meaningful translation of an ancient Egyptian text requires the translator to enter into the mind of the writer. This is a formidably difficult task, however expert one's understanding of ancient Egyptian history and culture. There are concepts and beliefs that simply elude modern comprehension (especially in the mortuary texts); idioms and aphorisms

that defy translation; verb forms that have no parallel in Indo-European languages; and words whose meaning remains obscure. Also difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct are the original setting in which a text was written and recited and the audience for which it was intended; yet these factors will have influenced its composition, language and frame of reference to a great extent. Translating from ancient Egyptian requires not so much an act of imagination as a leap of faith.

In this book, I have consciously eschewed literal translations, for such renderings tend to obfuscate rather than illuminate the original meaning. Instead, I have aimed for 'sense translations' and have tried to make them as fluent, accessible and up-to-date as possible, so that a general readership, not necessarily well acquainted with ancient Egyptian civilization, can read and enjoy them. The ancient Egyptian language is rich and subtle, often in ways that cannot be easily expressed in English. Take, for example, the words *aa* and *wer*, both conventionally translated as 'great': the Egyptians seem to have understood a distinction – hence a god is often described as *aa* but seldom as *wer* – but it is beyond our grasp.

An even more complex challenge of translation surrounds the word *ib*. The hieroglyphic sign itself depicts a heart, and that is the basic meaning of the word. (The word *haty*, literally 'breast', can also be used to mean 'heart'.) But in ancient Egyptian belief, the heart was the seat of reason and intellect, as well as of emotion. Hence *ib* could also be used to mean 'mind', 'will' or 'desire'. In her obelisk inscription (Text 8.4), Hatshepsut writes that 'my heart told me to make for him (the god Amun-Ra) two obelisks of electrum'. Although this was an act of will, we might still say, in contemporary English, that this was her heart speaking, not her head. So in that context, I have translated *ib* as heart. A few lines later, however, Hatshepsut says 'I did this with clarity of mind'. Again, the word used is *ib*, but translating the expression 'clarity of heart' makes little sense in English. The word *ib* also appears in a number of compound expressions, for example *aut-ib*, literally 'wideness of heart', *sekhmekh-ib*, literally 'distraction of heart', and *meh-ib m*, literally 'to fill the heart with'; for the benefit of the reader, these are translated as 'joy', 'enjoyment' and 'to trust in', respectively. Perhaps most colourful of all is the expression *ia-ib*, literally 'to wash the heart', which is best translated as 'to vent one's anger' or 'to satisfy one's desire'.

Another fascinating example of an apparently simple word that poses difficulties for the translator is the common term *hem*. At its most basic, it seems to mean 'body, person'. On its own, it usually has the meaning 'servant'. Hence *hem-netjer*, 'god's servant', means 'priest'. But *hem* is also used in the ubiquitous expression *hem-ef*, literally 'his servant' or 'his person', as a

circumlocution for the king. Some scholars have opted for the literal translation, even though this is a meaningless expression in English. The English equivalent, though not a literal translation of the Egyptian, is ‘His Majesty’, and I have therefore adopted that as a better sense translation of the original. Royal names and titles in general are so culturally contingent as to be almost impossible to translate. Western culture has a preference for personal names, whereas other cultures may use more formal modes of address. For example, the late Emperor Hirohito is only ever referred to in his native Japan by his reign-name Showa, ‘radiant harmony’. Similarly, in ancient Egypt, kings would generally be known by their throne-name (e.g. Nebkheperura) rather than their personal name (Tutankhamun). Where necessary to aid understanding, the more familiar personal names have been used, or referenced in the notes.

Ancient Egyptian syntax poses another difficulty. In more formal texts especially, conjunctions such as ‘and’ and ‘but’ are rarely used. Moreover, discrete sentences are often juxtaposed (‘X happened. Y happened.’) where some connection would have been understood or conveyed in the recitation (‘X happened because Y happened’; ‘X happened, so Y happened’). These can only be guessed at by context; but to make the translations as fluent as possible, conjunctions and connections are needed, so they have often been inserted between words and sentences. (If adopting a more literal approach to translation, I would have written ‘These can only be guessed at by context. To make the translations as fluent as possible, conjunctions and connections are needed. They have often been inserted between words and sentences.’)

The Egyptian love of wordplay has already been noted, but this is nearly always impossible to convey in translation. Some of the more ingenious examples have therefore been explained in the notes, as have cultural references that are likely to escape the modern reader. Ancient Egyptian writings, steeped as they are in their own cultural and religious traditions, make frequent reference to place names and deities; rather than referencing each occurrence in a note, the most significant place names and deities named in the texts are explained in the Gazetteer of Places and Glossary of Deities that follow the main text.

The world of Egyptian writing

If we are able to penetrate the unfamiliar syntax, the abundance of metaphor and idiom, and the distinctive mode of expression, ancient Egyptian writing shines a light on pharaonic civilization every bit as illuminating as the surviving art, archaeology and monuments. For writing alone allows us to enter into the minds of the ancient Egyptians and see the world from their perspective.

The picture that emerges is a rich and complex one, with some dominant traits that may be described as quintessentially ancient Egyptian. First is the importance of status. As fount of all authority and ruler supreme, the king stood at the apex of Egyptian society; all political and economic power flowed from proximity to the royal court, and an individual's status therefore depended upon membership of one of the circles of authority radiating out from the monarch. The teachings emphasize this hierarchy and reinforce the (self-serving) message that literacy is the key to power, that status is projected as much by rhetorical brilliance as administrative competence. The stratified nature of Egyptian society is also acutely reflected in autobiographical inscriptions. These most self-conscious of texts also emphasize the confidence of the ruling elite (the product of a rigid hierarchy) and the dominance, if not monopoly, enjoyed by men and the male perspective in the government of ancient Egypt. Self-belief at the national level is conveyed in the battle narratives. They trumpet Egyptian cultural superiority and promulgate an official xenophobia – directed against either invaders or foreigners in general – that suited the government's propaganda purposes but which was at odds with Egypt's position as a country at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Battle narratives and royal inscriptions alike belie the fact that Egypt, at all periods, was a melting-pot of peoples and cultures.

A second major theme that emerges from ancient Egyptian writings is the relationship between the human and the divine. At the heart of the doctrine of divine kingship – a doctrine that underpinned the government of Egypt for three thousand years – lay a contract between the king and the gods. The king's role was to champion the gods, maintain and embellish their temples and uphold created order, in return for the gods' blessings on his rule. This quid pro quo is emphasized in all official texts, be they sacred or secular. Hymns and royal inscriptions alike explicitly reinforce the bonds between the royal and divine spheres. In such a system, religion served political ends; this was especially apparent at times of dynastic crisis or transition, as epitomized in the restoration decree of Tutankhamun (Text 8.7) and the Nitiqret adoption stela (Text 8.8). The king's sacred role in defending creation was an essential element in the Egyptians' binary world-view, which saw the universe as a constant struggle between Order and Chaos, Truth and Falsehood (the Egyptian term *maat* means both Order and Truth, *isfet* the polar opposite). When order, political or social, broke down, everything was thrown into chaos and confusion – the theme of the lamentations. Even the prose tales of the Middle Kingdom, not shackled by the decorum of official texts, do not seriously question the established social or cosmic order. The only notes of scepticism that creep into the whole corpus of

ancient Egyptian writing are found in the songs of the harpist; by questioning even the fundamental belief in a blessed afterlife, these extraordinary works hint at a more inquisitive and challenging attitude among Egyptians than is ever alluded to in the official record.

A third defining characteristic of ancient Egyptian society – or, at least, of the literate elite that produced and consumed most of the country's written works – is a penchant for bureaucracy. Lists are everywhere: lists of foreign tribute in battle narrative, lists of royal epithets in hymns, lists of sins not committed in the declaration of innocence (Text 7.3 (iii)). The very structure of the teachings, with their lists of maxims (Texts 11.1 and 11.6) or professions (Text 11.5), reflect this fondness for counting and accounting. Egyptian scribes were taught at an early age to keep a tidy mind and applied this lesson to the management of the country. The overwhelming desire to synthesize information, however complex, into a neat picture also found its way into religion, as illustrated in those most esoteric of Egyptian writings, the mortuary texts. Western scholars brought up in a monotheistic tradition have marvelled or despaired at the complex, confusing and inconsistent nature of ancient Egyptian religion. The Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead exemplify this approach, weaving together radically different strands of belief without any apparent contradiction, so that an afterlife with the stars, with the sun or with Osiris can all sit side by side, complementing each other and emphasizing in their differences the ineffability of the hereafter.

From the sublime to the mundane: ancient Egyptian writings also open up a window on the world of everyday life under the pharaohs. The letters of the farmer Heqanakht (Text 6.1) show that ordinary people's daily concerns have remained largely the same across the ages: financial and business matters and family relationships occupied Heqanakht's thoughts four millenniums ago, just as they occupy our thoughts today. The Teachings of Ptahhotep and Ani (Texts 11.1 and 11.6), while the products of more elevated strata of society, contain similar preoccupations. They reflect a small-scale village society in which families lived cheek by jowl, people knew their place and each other's business, families were sources of strength and strife, jobs and values were passed down from father to son, men busied themselves with politics while women got on with running the household – in short, a society not so very different from life in rural Egypt today.

In reflecting on the picture to be gleaned from ancient Egyptian writings, it seems appropriate to leave the last word to Jean-François Champollion, the man who deciphered hieroglyphics and made Egyptian writings accessible again after nearly two thousand years: 'Egypt is always herself, at all stages in her history.'

‘Study writings and commit them to memory; then all your words will be effective.’

The Teaching of Ani (*c*. sixteenth century BC)

‘Man perishes; his corpse turns to dust; all his relatives pass away. But writings make him remembered …’

Be a Writer (*c*. twelfth century BC)



Part One

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INSCRIPTIONS



In ancient Egypt, words had magical power: to utter a thought made it effective. Writing was even more sacred: to carve a text into stone made it permanent, everlasting. This fundamental belief about the power of the written word is reflected in the very term we use for ancient Egyptian characters – hieroglyphs, 'sacred carvings' – and it explains the idealistic nature of much ancient Egyptian writing, notably autobiographical inscriptions. All autobiographies tend towards the self-justificatory; ancient Egyptian autobiographies were shamelessly self-laudatory, for their purpose was to promulgate an idealized account of the writer's life, to stand for all eternity. We should not, therefore, expect warts-and-all descriptions, nor a balanced treatment of the highs and lows of a person's career. Rather, autobiographical inscriptions relentlessly emphasize the positive, carefully selecting only those episodes that reflect favourably on the subject.

In a society as hierarchical and monarchical as ancient Egypt, a person's status was defined, above all, by his or her relationship with the king. Many autobiographical inscriptions therefore place special emphasis on royal favour of one sort or another, whether royal commissions (Texts 1.1 and 1.2), battle honours (Text 1.3) or the closeness of the writer to the king's inner circle (Texts 1.4 and 1.6). Only in times of internal political strife, when the throne was contested, would an official deliberately eschew references to the king – to avoid backing the wrong side, as much as anything else – and focus instead on his own role as the protector of the people and champion of the gods (Texts 1.5 and 1.7).

Although actual historical references are incidental to the main purpose of the text, they are none the less illuminating. Indeed, autobiographical inscriptions often constitute our main or sole source for important political events, especially those that threatened Egyptian hegemony or royal power in some way and could not therefore be easily recorded in state inscriptions. Examples include the political developments along the Nubian Nile in the early Sixth Dynasty (Text 1.1), the civil war against the Hyksos and the rise to power of the Eighteenth Dynasty (Text 1.3), the sack of Thebes by the Assyrians (Text 1.5), the first Persian conquest of Egypt (Text 1.6) and the Second Persian Domination (Text

1.7). Autobiographical inscriptions occasionally provide rare insights into sacred religious rituals (Text 1.2) or a new king's policies (Text 1.4).

The remarkable longevity of the genre underscores the emphasis that ancient Egyptian society placed on personal achievement and status, preoccupations also reflected in funerary provision. Despite their rootedness in time and place, autobiographical inscriptions also demonstrate the essential conservatism of ancient Egyptian officialdom. The general form and style of such inscriptions remained largely unchanged over two millenniums, as attested by the seven examples translated here, which span the twenty-third to the fourth centuries BC. Certain phrases that occur in the autobiographical inscription of Padiusir (Text 1.7, dating from the 330s BC), such as 'I was one revered by his father, praised by his mother', could have been written centuries earlier.

Finally, it is no accident that all seven inscriptions belong to men. Although women in ancient Egypt enjoyed full legal rights (see Text 5.2), were mistresses in their own households (Text 11.6), could serve as priestesses in local and state temples (Text 8.8) and often played important political roles in the royal family (Text 8.4), the highest ranks of the bureaucracy remained exclusively male throughout the entire three thousand years of pharaonic civilization. In ancient Egyptian art, women generally played a supporting role (for example, on the stela of Bak, on which is carved Text 1.4). But in men's autobiographies, women are conspicuous by their complete absence.

1

Harkhuf

*The autobiographical inscription of Harkhuf is carved on the façade of his tomb, which is cut into the sandstone cliffs at Qubbet el-Hawa, high above the Nile and close to the modern city of Aswan. Crisply executed and well preserved, the hieroglyphs are still easy to read, over four thousand years after they were carved. The main interest of the inscription is its account – the oldest known from ancient Egypt – of foreign travel, specifically the four expeditions accomplished by Harkhuf to the distant land of Yam, somewhere on the Upper Nile, during the Sixth Dynasty reigns of kings Merenra (*c. *2270 BC) and Neferkara Pepi II (*c. *2260–2175 BC*).

As a native of the First Cataract region and a chief of desert scouts, Harkhuf was ideally placed to lead these expeditions into potentially hostile Nubian territory. Their purpose was threefold: to bring back exotic produce for the royal court, to secure Egyptian access to trade routes with sub-Saharan Africa and to gain first-hand knowledge of the political developments unfolding on Egypt's southern frontier. Harkhuf's inscription is our best source for the rise of Nubian polities at the end of the Pyramid Age and the shifting alliances that threatened Egypt's influence in the region.

Evidently the proudest moment in Harkhuf's long and eventful career was receiving a letter from the young king Neferkara Pepi II during the journey home from the fourth and final expedition. Harkhuf had the entire text of the letter carved verbatim on the façade of his tomb, to stand for eternity as a mark of his sovereign's special favour. The language of the letter vividly conveys the excitement of the boy-king at the prospect of seeing the dancing dwarf Harkhuf was bringing back from Yam and allows us a rare glimpse into the private thoughts of an Egyptian monarch.



Autobiographical inscription of Harkhuf (Toby Wilkinson)

Above the entrance to the tomb are carved the offering formula, Harkhuf's titles and a long list of his virtues, using the standard phraseology. The autobiographical inscription itself is carved in fifty lines, ten to the left of the entrance, fourteen to the right and twenty-six to the far-right.

Titles

The high official, unique friend,[1] lector-priest,[2] chamberlain, warden of Nekhen, mayor of Nekheb,[3] royal seal-bearer, overseer of (desert) scouts, privy councillor of all the affairs of southern Upper Egypt, confidant of his lord, Harkhuf.

The royal seal-bearer, unique friend, lector-priest; overseer of (desert) scouts who brings back the products of all foreign lands for his lord and who brings tribute for the King's Ornament;[4] overseer of all foreign lands belonging to southern Upper Egypt,[5] who spreads dread of Horus[6] throughout the foreign lands and who does what his lord praises; the royal seal-bearer, unique friend,

lector-priest, overseer of (desert) scouts, revered before Ptah-Sokar, Harkhuf – he says:

The three expeditions to Yam

Now the Majesty of Merenra, my lord, sent me together with my father, the unique friend and lector-priest Iri, to Yam to open up the route to this foreign land. I accomplished it in seven months. I brought back from there all (sorts of) beautiful and exotic produce and was praised for it very greatly.

His Majesty sent me a second time, alone. I set out on the Elephantine road[7] and came back via Irtjet, Mekher, Teres and Irtjetj[8] in eight months. I came back bringing a great quantity of produce from this foreign land, the like of which had never before been brought back to this land. I came back via the territory of the ruler of Satju and Irtjet, having opened up these foreign lands. I have not found this to have been done by any unique friend and overseer of (desert) scouts who went to Yam previously.

Then His Majesty sent me a third time to Yam. I set out from Tawer-province on the oasis road.[9] I found the ruler of Yam had gone to Tjemeh-land[10] to smite the Tjemeh to the (very) western corner of heaven. I set out after him to Tjemeh-land and pacified him so that he praised all the gods for the (Egyptian) sovereign. [I sent a messenger …] to let the Majesty of Merenra, my lord, know [that I had set out to Tjemeh-land] after the ruler of Yam. Now when I had pacified that ruler of Yam, [I returned …] upstream of Irtjet and north of Satju, (where) I found the ruler of the confederacy of Irtjet, Satju and Wawat.[11] I came back with 300 donkeys laden with incense, ebony, precious oil, grain, leopard skins, elephant tusks, throw sticks: all good produce. Now when the ruler of Irtjet, Satju and Wawat saw the strength and number of the Yamite troops which had come down with me bound for the (royal) Residence, not to mention the army sent with me, this ruler escorted me, gave me cattle and goats and guided me along the mountain roads of Irtjet – (all) because of the outstanding vigilance I had shown, more than any unique friend and overseer of (desert) scouts who had been sent to Yam previously.

Now when this servant journeyed downstream towards the Residence, the high official, unique friend and overseer of the storerooms Khuni was made to come to meet me, with ships laden with date-wine, cake, bread and beer.

The high official, royal seal-bearer, unique friend, lector-priest, god’s seal-bearer, privy councillor, the revered Harkhuf.

The king’s letter

The king’s (Pepi II’s) own seal. Year 2, third month of the inundation season, day 15. Royal decree (to) the unique friend, lector-priest, overseer of (desert) scouts Harkhuf:

One is aware of the content of this message of yours which you made for the king at the palace, letting it be known that you have come back in safety from Yam together with the army which is with you. You have said in this message of yours that you have brought all produce, great and beautiful, which is given by Hathor, lady of Imaau, for the spirit of the Dual King Neferkara, who lives for ever and ever. You have (further) said in this message of yours that you have brought a dwarf of the god’s dances[12] from the land of the horizon-dwellers, like the dwarf which the god’s seal-bearer Bawerdjed brought from Punt[13] in the time of (King) Isesi.[14] You have said to My Majesty that never was his like brought back by any other who did Yam previously.

Indeed, you know how to do what your lord loves and favours. You wake and you sleep planning to do what your lord loves, favours and commands! His Majesty will provide for your needs, abundantly and excellently, for the benefit (even) of your son’s son, for ever – so that all the people will say, when they hear what My Majesty has done for you: ‘Is there anything like it, what was done for the unique friend Harkhuf when he came back from Yam because of the vigilance he showed in doing what his lord loves, favours and commands!’

Come downstream to the Residence at once! Hurry and bring with you this dwarf that you have brought from the land of the horizon-dwellers, alive, prosperous and healthy, for the god’s dances, to amuse and to delight the heart of the Dual King Neferkara, who lives for ever. When he goes down with you into the boat, have excellent people around him on deck lest he fall in the water. When he lies down at night, have excellent people lie down around him in his hammock. Inspect ten times a night! My Majesty wishes to see this particular dwarf more than the produce of Sinai and Punt!

When you arrive at the Residence, this particular dwarf being with you, alive, prosperous and healthy, My Majesty will do for you great things, more than was done for the god’s seal-bearer Bawerdjed in the time of Isesi, in accordance with My Majesty’s desire to see this particular dwarf. Orders have been despatched to the chief of the new settlements, the friend and the overseer of priests to command that supplies be taken from what is under their control in every storehouse and every temple that is not (tax-)exempt.

1. This widely attested title, also translated ‘sole companion’, was apparently bestowed by the king on his closest courtiers as a mark of royal favour.
2. A lector-priest was responsible for the composition and curation of sacred texts for use in temple liturgy; in ancient Egypt, it was not uncommon for high-ranking civil officials also to hold sacred offices.
3. Two courtly titles of unclear significance.
4. A title for the king’s wife.
5. i.e. Nubia.
6. i.e. the king.
7. The desert road leading southwards from the island of Abu (classical and modern Elephantine), at the foot of the First Nile Cataract.
8. Four polities in Lower Nubia.
9. The desert route running from the Nile Valley westwards to the Kharga Oasis and thence southwards to the Darfur region of Sudan. This route is still used by camel trains today, and is called in Arabic the Darb el-Arba’in, ‘the road of forty (days)’. Harkhuf must have left it at some point, turning eastwards back towards the river.
10. An area of the Libyan Desert, to the west of the Nubian Nile Valley.
11. Between Harkhuf’s second and third expeditions, the ruler of Irtjet and Satju appears to have added Wawat (northernmost Nubia) to his expanding confederacy.
12. i.e. a dancing dwarf believed to possess some special connection with the divine.
13. A land, probably modern coastal Sudan/Eritrea, famed by the ancient Egyptians for its exotic produce.
14. Djedkara Isesi, eighth king of the Fifth Dynasty (*c*. 2360 BC).

2

Ikhernofret

The inscription of Ikhernofret is carved on a round-topped limestone stela from Abydos (now in Berlin), set up as a memorial to its owner, who served at the royal court under the Twelfth Dynasty king Senusret III (c. 1836–1818 BC). At the top of the stela, under the winged sun disc, a standing figure of Osiris, god of the dead, faces the titles of Senusret III. At the bottom, Ikhernofret himself is shown sitting before an offering table and members of his family. Between these two scenes, the autobiographical inscription is set out in twenty-four horizontal lines of hieroglyphs.

The principal interest of the inscription lies in its (veiled) account of the 'mysteries of Osiris', a religious festival that took place at Abydos annually throughout the Twelfth Dynasty to celebrate the kingship, death and resurrection of Osiris. Abydos was the god's main cult centre: the nearby burial ground of Egypt's earliest kings gave the site a special antiquity and sanctity, and its associations with death and rebirth made it a natural focus for Osiris-worship. On at least one occasion during the reign of Senusret III, Ikhernofret was given responsibility for organizing and supervising the annual festival, and his account provides important details of the rites. At their heart was the 'great following' that accompanied the cult image of Osiris, enclosed in a barque-shrine, when it processed from his temple to the ancient necropolis and back again. This spectacle, which included ritualized attacks on the god's barque-shrine, was so religiously charged that numerous private individuals set up memorials along the so-called 'terraces of the great god' lining the processional way, in order to participate vicariously. Ikhernofret's stela was one such monument and it provides a rare description of one of the most important religious festivals of ancient Egypt.

Long live the Horus 'Divine of forms', the Two Ladies[1] 'Divine of births', the Golden Horus who has come into being, the Dual King Khakaura, the son of Ra

Senusret, give life like Ra for ever. A royal decree to the member of the elite, high official, royal seal-bearer, unique friend, overseer of the Twin Gold Houses, overseer of the Twin Silver Houses,[2] chief seal-bearer, the revered Ikhernofret:

My Majesty has commanded that you journey upstream to Abydos in Tawer-province to perform a service for my father Osiris-foremost-of-the-westerners:[3] (namely) to embellish his secret image with the electrum[4] which he had My Majesty bring back from furthest Nubia in victory and justification. You will do this successfully for the benefit of (my) father Osiris, because My Majesty has sent you and is depending on you to act to My Majesty's satisfaction, and because you were brought up as My Majesty's disciple. (Indeed) you have become My Majesty's foster-child, unique pupil of the palace. My Majesty appointed you as a friend when you were (only) a young man of twenty-six. (My) Majesty did so having recognized you as wise and articulate, (with) born intelligence. My Majesty [sends] you to do this (task) having realized that there was no one who could do it except you. Go, then, and come back when you have done exactly as My Majesty has commanded.

I did exactly as His Majesty decreed (in) carrying out what my lord commanded for his father Osiris-foremost-of-the-westerners, lord of Abydos, great power in Tawer-province. I acted as his beloved son[5] for Osiris-foremost-of-the-westerners. I embellished his great barque, eternal and everlasting. I made for him the carrying-shrine that exalts the beauty of foremost-of-the-westerners, in gold, silver, lapis lazuli, bronze, boxwood and cedar. The gods in his retinue were fashioned and their shrines made anew. I made the priests on duty [diligent] at their tasks; I made them observe the daily rituals and the seasonal festivals. I directed work on the neshmet-barque[6] and I fashioned the cabin. I adorned the breast of the lord of Abydos[7] with lapis lazuli and turquoise, electrum and every precious stone as ornaments of the god's body. I clothed the god in his regalia in my capacity as master of the secrets, my duty as stolist.[8] My hands were pure when adorning the god; (I was) a ritual priest with respectful fingers.

I masterminded the procession of Wepwawet when he goes forth to protect his father; I repulsed the attackers of the neshmet-barque and slew the enemies of Osiris. I (also) masterminded the great procession that follows in the god's footsteps. I enacted the sailing of the god's barque, with Thoth as steersman. I furnished the boat *Risen in Truth Is the Lord of Abydos* with a cabin. Wearing his beautiful regalia, (Osiris) proceeded to the vicinity of Peqer.[9] I cleared the god's path to his tomb in front of Peqer. I protected Wennefer[10] on that day of the great battle. I slew all his enemies on the shore of Nedyt.[11] I caused him to go inside

the great barque; it exalted his beauty. I made the eastern deserts joyful and created rejoicing in the western deserts when they saw the beauty of the neshmet-barque as it landed at Abydos and brought [Osiris-foremost-of-the-westerners, lord] of Abydos to his palace. I followed the god to his house. His purification was made, his throne was laid out. I loosened the knot inside the … and he [came to rest] among his followers.

NOTES

1. A royal title associating the king with the tutelary goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nekhbet and Wadjet.
2. Two titles connected with the Royal Treasury.
3. The manifestation of Osiris as lord of the necropolis (the west was the land of the dead, hence ‘the westerners’ was a euphemism for ‘the dead’).
4. A naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver, lighter in colour than pure gold and more valued in ancient Egypt.
5. In other words, Ikhernofret performed the duties of a male heir, honouring his father.
6. The sacred barque of Osiris.
7. i.e. the statue of Osiris.
8. The priest who clothed the statue of a deity.
9. Area of the Abydos necropolis where the tombs of Egypt’s earliest kings were situated, and therefore revered as a place of special sanctity and antiquity.
10. Epithet of Osiris meaning ‘eternally incorruptible’, referring to his resurrection from the dead.
11. Mythical location associated with the death and resurrection of Osiris.

3

Ahmose, Son of Abana

The autobiographical inscription of Ahmose, son of Abana, is set out in carved and painted hieroglyphs on a wall of his tomb-chapel, cut into the cliffs at Elkab (ancient Nekheb) in southern Upper Egypt. Its interest and importance lie in Ahmose's first-hand account of the military campaigns that ushered in the reunification of Egypt at the start of the New Kingdom.

At the end of the Second Intermediate Period (the mid-sixteenth century BC), Egypt faced the twin existential threats of an occupying force of Asiatic rulers (the Hyksos) in the north of the country and invasions from the south by the forces of the Nubian kingdom of Kush. Nekheb had been a significant town, economically and politically, since early times; at this moment of crisis, its ruling class spearheaded the Egyptian (Theban) fightback against the Hyksos and Kushite threats, thereby playing a decisive role in the wars of liberation and reunification that re-established Egyptian independence under the Theban Eighteenth Dynasty.

*Ahmose, son of Abana, recounts how his father served under Seqenenra Taa II, penultimate king of the Seventeenth Dynasty (*c. *1545 BC), who launched the campaign to drive out the Hyksos and their allies from Lower Egypt. Ahmose himself served under the first three kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty: Nebpehtyra Ahmose (*c. *1539–1514 BC), Djeserkara Amenhotep I (*c. *1514–1493 BC) and Aakheperkara Thutmose I (*c. *1493–1481 BC). As a marine, Ahmose was at the heart of the fighting, which included the final battle against the Hyksos, waged in and around their Delta capital of Avaris (ancient Hutwaret, modern Tell el-Dabca) and an attack on their Levantine stronghold of Sharuhen (modern Tell el-Farah or Tell el-Ajjul) to create a defensive buffer zone against future invasion. Ahmose also took part in campaigns to defeat Kush and conquer Nubia and in operations to put down two rebellions. The references to the failed insurrections led by Aata (probably a Nubian) and Tetian (probably a native Egyptian) provide rare evidence for a degree of internal resistance to early*

Eighteenth Dynasty rule. At the end of his military career, Ahmose, son of Abana, accompanied Thutmose I on his campaign against the northern Mesopotamian Kingdom of Mittani, which marked the beginning of Egypt's imperial expansion into the Near East.

The head of the marines, Ahmose, son of Abana, true of voice,[1] he says: I speak to you, all the people, to let you know all the good things which happened to me. (For) I have been rewarded with gold on seven occasions in the sight of the whole land and with male and female slaves likewise. I have been granted great areas of land. For the reputation of a brave man lies in what he has done: it will not perish in this land for ever.

He says as follows: I spent my upbringing in the town of Nekheb, where my father was a soldier of the Dual King Seqenenra the brave, true of voice. Baba son of Ra-inet was his name. I grew up to be a soldier in his place on the ship *Wild Bull* in the time of the Lord of the Two Lands Nebpehtyra, true of voice. I was (then) a young man, who had not yet taken a wife; I slept in a hammock made of netting.

After I had established a household, I was taken on to the ship *Northern* because I was brave. I followed the sovereign – life, prosperity, health[2] – on foot when he travelled in his chariot. When the town of Avaris was besieged, I fought bravely on foot in His Majesty's presence. Then I was appointed to (the ship) *Risen in Memphis*. There was a naval battle on the canal of Avaris. I took a captive and carried off a (severed) hand.[3] When it was reported to the king's herald, I was given the gold of valour. Then there was fighting again in this place. I took another captive there and carried off a(nother) hand. I was given the gold of valour once again. Then there was fighting in Egypt to the south of this town. I took a man as a living captive. I went down to the water – for he was captured on the town side – and I crossed over the water carrying him. When it was reported to the king's herald, behold I was rewarded with gold once more. Then Avaris was plundered and I carried off plunder from it: one man and three women, making four people in total. Then His Majesty gave them to me as slaves. Then Sharuhen was besieged for three years. Then His Majesty plundered it and I carried off plunder from it: two women and a hand. Then I was given the gold of valour and captives were given to me as slaves.

Now after His Majesty had slain the Bedouin of Asia, he sailed upstream to Upper Nubia to destroy the Nubian bowmen. His Majesty made a heap of corpses of them and I carried off plunder from there: two living men and three hands. Then I was rewarded with gold once more and I was given two female

slaves. On His Majesty's return downstream, he rejoiced in valour and victory, having taken possession of southerners and northerners (alike).

Then Aata came from the south. His fate brought on his doom. The gods of Upper Egypt pinned him down and he was discovered by His Majesty at Tentaa. Then His Majesty took him away as a living captive and all his people as easy prey. I took two young warriors as captives from Aata's boat. I was given (as a reward) five people and a five-*setjat*[4] parcel of land in my town. The same was done for the entire crew.

Then that enemy came – Tetian was his name – having gathered to himself the disaffected. Then His Majesty slew him; his crew was annihilated. Then I was given three people and five *setjat* of land in my town.

I conveyed the Dual King Djeserkara, true of voice, when he travelled upstream to Kush to widen the frontiers of Egypt. His Majesty struck down that Nubian bowman in the midst of his army. They were carried off in fetters, none missing; those who (tried to) flee were mown down as if they had never been. Now I was at the head of our expeditionary force and I fought – truly. His Majesty saw my valour when I carried off two hands to present to His Majesty. His[5] people and his cattle were hunted down and I carried off a living captive to present to His Majesty. I brought [His] Majesty back to Egypt in two days from the upper reaches (of the Nile) and was rewarded with gold. I brought back two female slaves as plunder in addition to those I had presented to His Majesty. Then I was promoted to Warrior of the Ruler.

I conveyed the Dual King Aakheperkara, true of voice, when he travelled upstream to Upper Nubia to crush rebellion throughout the hill-countries and to drive away those who had infiltrated the desert region. I showed bravery in his presence on the wild water when driving the ships over the rapids. Then I was made head of the marines. Then His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – … His Majesty raged like a leopard. His Majesty shot and his first arrow lodged in that enemy's chest. Then these [enemies fled], pathetic in the face of his royal serpent. Carnage was wreaked among them; their dependants were carried off as living captives. His Majesty then returned downstream, all foreign lands in his grasp (and) that cowardly Nubian bowman suspended upside down at the prow of His Majesty's flagship, until they landed at Karnak.

After this (His Majesty) proceeded to Lebanon to vent his anger[6] throughout (those) foreign lands. When His Majesty arrived at Mittani,[7] His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – found that enemy marshalling troops. Then His Majesty made a great slaughter among them. Countless were the living captives that His Majesty brought back from his victories. I was at the head of our expeditionary force and His Majesty saw my bravery. I brought back a chariot, its horse and its

rider as a living captive, to present to His Majesty. I was rewarded with gold once again.

I have grown old; I have attained an old age, praised as in earlier times and beloved [of my lord]. I am at rest in the tomb which I made myself.

NOTES

1. An epithet, also translated ‘justified’, that was usually applied to a deceased person or the owner of a tomb, signifying his or her justification before the divine tribunal.
2. Epithet applied to the king and, by extension, to the royal palace. In New Kingdom and later texts, almost every reference to the sovereign was followed by the epithet ‘life, prosperity, health’, much as Islamic texts invariably follow each mention of the Prophet Muhammad with the phrase ‘peace be upon him’.
3. Cutting off the hands of slain enemies was a reliable way of counting enemy fatalities.
4. A *setjat* (often translated by the Greek term *aroura*) was the basic area of land measurement, equal to 10,000 square cubits (2,746m^2 or 0.275 hectares).
5. i.e. the Nubian foe’s.
6. The ancient Egyptian idiom translates literally as ‘wash his heart’.
7. Kingdom in northern Mesopotamia; the ancient Egyptian term Naharin means ‘two rivers’, referring to the Tigris and Euphrates.

4

Bak

*One of the most distinctive private monuments from the late Eighteenth Dynasty reign of Akhenaten (*c. *1353–1336 BC) is an unprovenanced red quartzite stela (now in Berlin) carved for the chief sculptor Bak and his wife Taheri. Unusually, the figures of the couple are not carved in relief but are truly three-dimensional, protruding from the surrounding inscriptions. Bak is shown with all the attributes of a successful courtier – corpulent, wearing an elaborate pleated garment – while his wife is shown in equally idealized form, slim and nubile, wearing a figure-hugging sheath dress, with one arm around her husband's shoulder. Both representations bear elements of the radically distinctive 'Amarna style' promulgated by Akhenaten from early in his reign. There is every likelihood that Bak himself carved his stela, which is an outstanding example of the sculptor's craft.*

The inscriptions – in a horizontal line along the top of the stela, a vertical line down each side and four horizontal lines along the bottom – comprise the usual formulae requesting offerings for the kas *(spirits) of the couple. Instead of the orthodox gods, the prayers are addressed to 'the living Orb' (Aten), whom Akhenaten promoted as the sole official god of his new religion (see Text 3.4). What lends the text particular interest is Bak's reference to having been instructed by the king himself, as 'His Majesty's disciple'. This provides one of the clearest indications that the revolutionary art style (and religion) characteristic of Akhenaten's reign were the king's own initiatives and formed central elements of his wider 'Teaching'.*

Right side

An offering which the king gives (to) the living Orb who lights up the earth with his beauty, that he may give a good life endowed with favours, gladness and [a

good old age], for the spirit[1] of His Majesty's disciple, the chief sculptor of the Lord of the Two Lands (who is) praised by the Perfect God,[2] Bak, true of voice.

Left side

An offering which the king gives (to) the living Horus-of-the-two-horizons, the living Orb who lights up the Two Riverbanks,[3] that he may allow receipt of offering-loaves that come from the (royal) Presence upon the offering-table of the living Orb, for the spirit of the chief sculptor Bak and his sister,[4] the housewife Taheri.

Lower section

Smelling incense and receiving oil, for the spirit of His Majesty's disciple, the chief sculptor Bak, true of voice.

Breathing wafts of fresh myrrh, for the spirit of the chief of works of the Lord of the Two Lands, Bak, true of voice.

Your soul[5] going forth and your corpse being alive (again) to stride among the immortals, for the spirit of His Majesty's disciple, the chief sculptor Bak, true of voice.

Pouring wine and milk and receiving offering-loaves that come from the Presence, for the spirit of the housewife Taheri.

NOTES

1. The Egyptian term *ka* denoted the life-force.
2. An epithet of the king.
3. A term for Egypt.
4. An affectionate term for any close female relative, here signifying 'wife'.
5. The Egyptian term *ba* denoted the aspect of an individual that made him or her unique; after a person's death, it was thought to journey from the tomb and unite with the *ka* to become a transfigured spirit (*akh*).

5

Montuemhat

The mayor of Thebes, Montuemhat, is one of the best-attested personalities from the Late Period of Egyptian history, more specifically the transition between the Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty and the Saite Twenty-sixth Dynasty (the middle decades of the seventh century BC). His large, sumptuously decorated tomb in western Thebes has recently undergone a major reinvestigation and restoration programme, while a large number of surviving statues of great artistic quality testify to Montuemhat's importance in his home city of Thebes and in the wider region of Upper Egypt.

Many of Montuemhat's inscriptions comprise little more than hymns, prayers and stock phrases boasting of his achievements in general terms. Among the monuments that give more specific details of his long career, a seated statue from Thebes, now in the collections of the Berlin Museum, is one of the more illuminating. Carved from grey granite and measuring some 50cm high, the statue is based on Middle Kingdom prototypes and shows Montuemhat seated with his arms folded, covered by a long robe. The stone block which serves as a chair is inscribed on all four faces; columns of text also adorn the centre of the robe and the back plinth.

The inscription focuses on Montuemhat's restoration of Theban monuments following the Assyrian invasion and sack of Thebes in 663 BC and on his governorship of Upper Egypt. Indeed, after the retreat and forced exile of the last Kushite king, Tanutamun (664–657 BC), the Nile Valley south of Hermopolis was virtually Montuemhat's personal fiefdom until the rise to power of the Saite Dynasty under its vigorous new ruler Psamtek I (664–610 BC). Despite the fact that Montuemhat was related by marriage to the Kushite royal family, and had served them loyally, he remained a power broker for the new dynasty. One of Montuemhat's last recorded acts as fourth prophet of Amun (a relatively minor office in the priesthood of Karnak, which belies the true extent of his political power), in 656 BC, was to witness the adoption of Psamtek I's daughter Nitiqret

as future God's Wife of Amun, signalling the consolidation of Saite rule over Thebes and Upper Egypt (see Text 8.8).

On the robe

May all that comes forth upon the altar of Amun-Ra, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, and his ennead[1] be for the spirit of the member of the elite and high official, the fourth prophet of Amun, mayor of the city and governor of Upper Egypt, Montuemhat.

On the right-hand side of the front, continuing on the right side of the seat and on the back

The member of the elite and high official, fourth prophet of Amun and mayor of the city, Montuemhat, he says:

O all priests and God's Fathers who enter to officiate[2] in this place,
Amun the Great will honour you;
He will make you endure through your children
If you pronounce my name every day
During the rites for the city god that are performed in this place.
For I am a dignitary for whom one should act,
A true nobleman, beloved of his lord.

I renewed the temple of Mut the Great, lady of Isheru,[3]
So that it is more beautiful than it was before.
I embellished her barque with electrum
And all its images with genuine precious stones.
I renewed the barque of Khonsu the Child
And the barque of Bastet who resides in Thebes
To satisfy Her Majesty's[4] desire.
I renewed the three barques of the Khonsu triad,
The barque of Khonsu who reckons a lifetime,
And the barque of Amun, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands and of the rising.[5]
I reinstalled the divine boat of Osiris in Abydos[6]
After I had found it fallen into ruin.
My mind did not rest, my arms did not slacken
Until I had renewed what I found ruined.

Do what is loved by Amun, lord of heaven!
Speak the name of the high official and overseer of the temple
Montuemhat in his temple!

On the left-hand side of the front, continuing on the left side of the seat

The member of the elite and high official, fourth prophet of Amun and governor of the whole of Upper Egypt, Montuemhat, he says:

I have acted for you by performing favours
So that you may know my virtue.
I was governor of the province of Thebes,
And the whole of Upper Egypt was under my command
From Elephantine in the south
To Hermopolis in the north.
I lavished attention on Upper Egypt,
And my love on Lower Egypt,
So that the people prayed to see me
Like Ra when he shows himself:
So great was my beneficence,
So exalted was my excellence!

On the back

O city god of the member of the elite and high official, fourth prophet of Amun, mayor of the city and governor of Upper Egypt, Montuemhat: place yourself behind him, while his spirit is before him, for he is a Heliopolitan![7]

NOTES

1. Group of nine deities.
2. Literally, ‘uncover the face’, referring to the ritual undressing (and re-clothing) of the divine image in a temple.
3. An enclosure dedicated to Mut, located to the south of Karnak Temple.
4. i.e. the goddess Bastet’s.
5. The precise meaning of the Egyptian word *arar* is unknown, but seems to be linked with the rising of the Nile inundation.
6. cf. Text 1.2.
7. Heliopolis was the cult centre of the sun-god Ra, and one of the holiest places in Egypt; to be a ‘Heliopolitan’ was therefore to be blessed.

6

Wedjahorresnet

Among the collections of the Vatican Museum is a headless, naophorous statue of green basalt, of a type common in the Late Period of pharaonic history (the first millennium BC). The statue was dedicated by a high official named Wedjahorresnet, whose tumultuous career spanned the Persian invasion and subsequent occupation of Egypt in the early years of the fifth century BC. Reflecting the hybrid culture of the period, the statue shows Wedjahorresnet wearing a long, flowing, Persian-style robe, which, together with the sides of the naos, conveniently serves as the canvas for a lengthy autobiographical text.

The unique interest of the inscription lies in its account of the invasion of Egypt by the Persian Great King Cambyses (in 525 BC), the absorption of Egypt into an expanding Persian empire and the subsequent accommodations made by both sides – Egyptian and Persian – to reach a cultural and political compromise.

Wedjahorresnet was a native of Sais (ancient Sau, modern Sa el-Hagar), home city and power base of the Twenty-sixth ('Saite') Dynasty. He attained high military office, serving as admiral of the navy under the last Saite kings, Ahmose II (570–526 BC) and Psamtek III (526–525 BC). In this capacity, Wedjahorresnet must have fought against the invading Persian forces; indeed, he describes the invasion as a 'great calamity that befell the entire land'. Yet he quickly changed sides and collaborated with the conquerors, one of a number of high-ranking officials to do so. His motives – at least as explained in his autobiographical inscription – were not entirely selfish, however. He seems to have been concerned to win round the Persians, which he did using a combination of loyalty and persuasion. In so doing, he transformed the Persian kings into model Egyptian pharaohs and ensured the maintenance of Egypt's traditional cults. Under the reign of Cambyses' successor, Darius I (522–486 BC), Wedjahorresnet was summoned to the Persian court at distant Susa, but negotiated his return to Egypt to oversee the restoration of its temples, especially those of his home city,

Sais. There, he paid particular attention to the House of Life (temple scriptorium), since this was the institution which preserved and transmitted Egyptian religious and cultural traditions from one generation to another. Through his willing collaboration with Egypt's foreign masters, Wedjahorresnet contributed not only to the immediate survival of his local temple, but also to the long-term survival of Egyptian identity.

For the Persians' part, they were clearly happy to retain the services of Egyptian officials who were willing to work with the new regime (although Wedjahorresnet had to relinquish his military office and served instead as chief doctor); and it suited their political purposes to respect Egypt's ancient traditions and thus win acceptance as legitimate pharaohs.

Wedjahorresnet's statue combined the functions of a funerary stela and a votive statue. Hence the inscriptions feature the traditional offering formula to guarantee provisions for the afterlife, as well as inscriptions recounting the owner's good deeds. It was set up in the main temple at Sais, dedicated to the city's patron deity, the goddess Neith. By performing (or claiming to have performed) acts beneficial to the goddess and her fellow deities, Wedjahorresnet thus hoped for her divine assistance in the afterlife.

On the façade of the naos

An offering which the king gives to Osiris-Hemag: a thousand bread, beer, oxen and fowl, everything good and pure for the spirit of the reverend before the gods of Neith-province, the chief doctor, Wedjahorresnet.

An offering which the king gives to Osiris, foremost of the Royal Mansion:[1] offerings of bread, beer, oxen, fowl, alabaster and clothing, incense and oil, everything good for the spirit of the reverend before all the gods, the chief doctor, Wedjahorresnet.

O Osiris, lord of eternity, the chief doctor Wedjahorresnet has placed his arms behind you as your protection: may your spirit command that everything effective is done for him just as he has created protection behind your shrine for ever.

Under the right arm

The reverend before Neith the Great, mother of god, and the gods of Sais, the member of the elite and high official, royal seal-bearer, unique friend and true intimate of the king whom he loves, the scribe and inspector of scribes in the tribunal, the overseer of scribes of the great outer hall, comptroller of the palace,

admiral of the royal navy under the Dual King Khenemibra,[2] admiral of the royal navy under the Dual King Ankhkara,[3] Wedjahorresnet, son of the controller of the mansions, chief-of-Pe-priest, *renep*-priest, priest of the Horus-eye,[4] priest of Neith who presides over Neith-province, Peftjawyaaneith.[5] He says:

The Great King[6] of every foreign land, Cambyses, came to Egypt, the foreigners of every foreign land with him. He conquered this land in its entirety; and they settled themselves in it. When he became Great Ruler of Egypt as well as Great King of every foreign land, His Majesty entrusted to me the office of chief doctor, having caused me to be beside him as his unique friend and comptroller of the palace when I had made his titulary – being his name 'The Dual King Mesutira'.

I caused His Majesty to understand the greatness of Sais – the seat of Neith the Great, the mother who bore Ra and inaugurated birth when birth did not exist – together with the greatness of the temple of Neith – heaven in all its conditions – and the greatness of the mansions of Neith and all the gods and goddesses therein; and the greatness of the Royal Mansion – the palace of the sovereign and lord of heaven – and the greatness of the Resnet- and Mehnet-sanctuaries,[7] the House of Ra and the House of Atum: the mysteries of all the gods.

Under the left arm

The reverend before his city god and all the gods, the member of the elite and high official, royal seal-bearer, unique friend and true intimate of the king whom he loves, chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, born of Atumirdis.[8] He says:

I petitioned the Majesty of the Dual King Cambyses concerning all the foreigners who had settled in the temple of Neith, to have them expelled from it and thus restore the temple of Neith to its former effectiveness. His Majesty duly commanded that all the foreigners who had settled in the temple of Neith be expelled, that all their houses be demolished – against all their opposition – which were in this temple. When they had carried their own belongings outside the wall of this temple, His Majesty commanded that the temple of Neith be purified and all its personnel restored to it … and the duty-priests of the temple. His Majesty commanded that offerings be given to Neith the Great, the mother of god, and the great gods who are in Sais, as was the case previously. His Majesty commanded that all their festivals and all their celebrations be reinstated as was the case previously. His Majesty did this because I had caused His

Majesty to appreciate the greatness of Sais. For it is the city of all the gods who shall remain upon their thrones there for ever.

On the left side of the naos base

The reverend before the gods of Sais, the chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, he says:

The Dual King Cambyses came to Sais. His Majesty proceeded in person to the temple of Neith and kissed the ground[9] before her very great majesty as every king had done (before). He made a great offering of every good thing to Neith the Great, mother of god, and the great gods who are in Sais, as every excellent king had done (before). His Majesty did this because I had caused His Majesty to appreciate the greatness of Her Majesty[10] – for she is the mother of Ra himself.

On the right side of the naos base

The reverend before Osiris-Hemag, the chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, he says:

His Majesty did everything beneficial in the temple of Neith and established the offering of a libation for the lord of everlastingness inside the temple of Neith, as every king had done (before). His Majesty did this because I had caused His Majesty to appreciate how everything beneficial had been done in this temple by every (previous) king, because of the greatness of this temple – for it is the seat of all the gods who endure for ever.

On the left-hand wall of the naos, and on the robe in front of the right arm

The reverend before the gods of Neith-province, the chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, he says:

I re-established the offerings of Neith the Great, mother of god, as His Majesty had commanded, for eternity. I carried out pious works for Neith, lady of Sais, comprising every good thing – as an excellent servant does for his master. For I am a man of good (repute) in his city. I rescued its people from the great calamity that befell the entire land, the like of which had never happened in this land. I protected the weak against the powerful, I rescued the fearful (man) when he got into trouble: I did everything beneficial to them when it was needed.[11]

On the right-hand wall of the naos, and on the robe in front of the left arm

The reverend before his city god, the chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, he says:

I am one revered by his father, praised by his mother, loved by his brothers. I established for them priestly offices and I gave them arable land as His Majesty had commanded, for eternity. I made a tomb for the tombless, I nurtured all their children, I established all their households: I did everything beneficial to them as a father does for his son, while calamity befell this province, while a great calamity befell the entire land.

On the back

The member of the elite and high official, royal seal-bearer and unique friend, *ankh-im-sen*[12] and priest, the chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, born of Atumirdis, he says:

The Majesty of the Dual King Darius, who lives for ever, commanded me to return to Egypt while His Majesty was in Elam,[13] when he was Great King of every foreign land and Great Ruler of Egypt, in order to re-establish the bureau of the House of Life[14] after the ruin. Foreigners carried me from foreign land to foreign land and conveyed me to Egypt as the Lord of the Two Lands had commanded. I acted as His Majesty had commanded: I refounded them with all their students – sons of men, with no sons of the wretched among them. I placed them under the direction of the savants … all their works. His Majesty commanded that they be given every good thing in order that they might perform all their tasks. I equipped them with every necessity and (satisfied) all their requirements, as it is written that it was (done) previously. His Majesty did this because he knew the effectiveness of these skills for curing the sick and for causing the names of all the gods to endure – their temples, their offerings and the celebration of their festivals – for ever.

On the pedestal, right side

The chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, he says: I am one revered by all his masters. While I lived … they gave me golden insignia and did everything beneficial for me.

On the pedestal, left side

It is the reverend before Neith who shall say: O great gods who are in Sais, remember all the beneficial things done by the chief doctor Wedjahorresnet, so that you may do everything beneficial to him and may establish his good name in this land for ever.

NOTES

1. Literally, ‘the Mansion of the Bee’, referring to the symbol of the monarch as King of Lower Egypt.
2. Ahmose II/Amasis.
3. Psamtek III.
4. Three priestly titles of obscure meaning.
5. Wedjahorresnet’s father.
6. The title borne by the Persian rulers.
7. Two sanctuaries in the sacred precinct at Sais.
8. Wedjahorresnet’s mother.
9. The action of touching the forehead to the ground was a sign of respect (compare the tradition of the Pope kissing the ground on arrival in another country).
10. i.e. Neith.
11. Literally, ‘when it was time to act for them’.
12. Literally, ‘living among them’ – a title of unknown significance.
13. A province of the Persian empire in the south-west of modern Iran; the ancient royal city of Susa was the capital of Elam.
14. The temple scriptorium.

7

Padiusir

On the west bank of the Nile in northern Middle Egypt lies the site of Tuna el-Gebel, the necropolis that served the city of Hermopolis (ancient Khmun, modern el-Ashmunein) throughout the pharaonic period. The most important surviving monument in the cemetery is the so-called tomb of Petosiris, discovered in 1919. The tomb, which takes the form of a small temple, was built for a family whose members held the office of high priest of Thoth at Hermopolis over five generations, during the last third of the fourth century BC. Most prominent among them, and the man after whom the tomb is named, was Padiusir (usually rendered in the Greek version as Petosiris).

Padiusir held office during a momentous time in ancient Egyptian history, the 330s BC, which witnessed the Second Persian Domination of Egypt, a series of rebellions against Persian rule and finally the expulsion of the Persians and the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great. Padiusir's long biographical inscription, besides the usual self-laudatory passages, contains important references to these historical events and their impact upon the functioning of the religious cults at Hermopolis. Other inscriptions in the tomb include extracts from the traditional afterlife texts – the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead (cf. Texts 7.1 and 7.3) – as well as reflections on personal morality and philosophy which advocate a particular 'way of life' or 'way of god'.

The final construction and decoration of Padiusir's tomb was completed by his son and grandson in a hybrid Graeco-Egyptian style, showing that the culture of Egypt's new Macedonian conquerors was readily absorbed by its old-established families. The text translated below is inscribed in part of the family tomb dedicated to Padiusir's father – hence its opening phrase identifying Padiusir as 'His beloved younger son'.

His beloved younger son, owner of all his property, high priest of Thoth,[1] controller of the (holy) seats; the high priest who beholds the god in his shrine,

who carries his lord[2] and follows his lord, who enters into the sanctuary, who carries out his duties as one along with the chief priests; priest of the ogdoad,[3] overseer of the priests of Sekhmet, high priest of the third and fourth watches;[4] the royal scribe who counts all the property in the temple of Hermopolis; the second prophet of Khnum-Ra, lord of Herwer, and of Hathor, lady of Nefrusi;[5] the leader of the second watch of the temple of Herwer and Nefrusi; priest of Amun-Ra and the gods of those places; the revered Padiusir, called Ankhefenkhons,[6] born of the lady of the house Nefer-renpet, true of voice; he says:

O every priest, every pure-priest, every scholar who enters this necropolis and sees this tomb, praise god for him who acts (for me), for them who act (for me)![7] For I was one revered by his father, praised by his mother, well disposed towards his brothers. I built this tomb in this necropolis among the great souls who are there, so that the name of my father and my elder brother might be spoken. For a man is restored to life when his name is spoken.

The West[8] is the abode of the blameless: praise god for the man who has reached it! No man will attain it unless he is committed to doing Right. There, the needy is not distinguished from the nobleman – (but) only the one who is found blameless when he is weighed on the scales in the presence of the lord of eternity. No one escapes the reckoning. Thoth the baboon is in charge of the scales and will reckon every man according to his deeds upon earth.[9]

I was loyal to[10] the lord of Hermopolis from the moment of my birth. All his plans were in my head.[11] He chose me to run his temple because he knew that I feared him in my heart. I spent seven years as controller for this god, running his endowment without fault being found, while the ruler of foreign lands was protector of Egypt[12] and nothing was in its former place – because fighting had broken out in the interior, the south being in rage and the north in dispute.[13] The people went about looking over their shoulders.[14] No temple had any staff because the priests had fled, not knowing what was happening.

After I became controller for Thoth, lord of Hermopolis, I restored the temple of Thoth to its former state. I caused everything to be as before, every priest in his (proper) time. I promoted his pure-priests and advanced the roster-priests of his temple. I detailed all of his servants and gave orders to his staff. I did not reduce the offerings in his temple but (rather) filled his granaries with barley and emmer and his treasury with all good things. I increased what had been there before so that every man praised god for me. I presented gold, silver and genuine precious stones so that I gladdened the hearts of the priests and all who worked

in the House of Gold and I rejoiced in it. I caused to rise again what was found ruined. I restored what had decayed long ago and was no longer in place.

I stretched the cord and released the line[15] to found the temple of Ra in the great garden – built in fine white stone from Tura[16] and finished with every kind of work. Its doors are of cedar, banded with Levantine copper. I caused Ra to be at peace, as nursling in the Isle of Fire.[17]

I built the House of the Goddesses inside the estate of Hermopolis, because I found that their house was decrepit. They are at peace in the temple of Thoth, lord of Hermopolis. 'Festival-chapel of the goddesses', people call it; it faces east. I built the House of Nehemetawy the creator and likewise the House of Hathor, lady of the southern sycomore-fig, Nehemetawy's mother. Likewise I built them in fine white stone from Tura, finished with every kind of work. I caused these goddesses to be at peace there.

I put a boundary around the great garden lest it be trampled by the hoi polloi, for it is the birthplace of every god who came into being in the beginning.[18] This place – wretches had neglected it and walked all over it. The produce of its trees had been eaten, its plants taken away to the homes of the intruders. The whole land was incensed by it and no good came to Egypt because of it, for half the egg is buried in it.[19] I made solid work of the wall of the estate of Hermopolis, to gladden the heart of the lady Nehemetawy when she sees this work every day.

Now when I was in front of this goddess – Heqet, lady of Herwer – at her beautiful festival in the fourth month of the harvest season, when I was controller of Thoth, she went[20] to a place which was in the north of this town, to the 'House of Heqet', as everyone calls it,[21] which had been in ruins since time immemorial. The water had eroded it every year, until its foundations were no longer visible. It was called the House of Heqet, although there was no brick or stone there! Then this goddess stopped there. I summoned the scribe of this goddess's temple and I gave him countless silver to make a monument there from that day. I built a great barrier around it so that the water would no longer erode it. I was diligent in consulting the scholars in order to institute the (proper) rites of this goddess and to satisfy her until she knew it was all done.

My lord Thoth distinguished [me] above all (my) peers, as a reward for enriching him with all good things – with silver and gold, with offerings and redistribution from the granaries, with fields, with cattle, with vineyards, with orchards of every kind of fruit-tree, with boats on the water, with all good things from the Treasury – so that I was honoured in the presence of the ruler of Egypt and loved by his courtiers. May this also be given to me as a reward: a long lifetime in happiness, a good burial after old age, my corpse interred in this tomb beside my father and my elder brother and being honoured by the lord of

Hermopolis and all the gods of Hare-province – so that my house is maintained by my children, son succeeding son. May he who comes after say, ‘A follower of his god unto death!’[22]

NOTES

1. Literally, ‘Great of the Five’, the title of unknown origin held by the high priest of Thoth at Hermopolis.
2. i.e. carries the sacred image of the god in procession.
3. A group of eight primeval deities worshipped at Hermopolis.
4. The Egyptian word *sa*, often translated by the Greek term *phyle*, means a ‘watch’: a group of priests who served for a specific period of time as part of a roster system.
5. Herwer and Nefrusi were important towns in the same province as Hermopolis.
6. It was not uncommon for an Egyptian to have a nickname in addition to his/her given name.
7. i.e. reciting the offering formula and prayers for the deceased.
8. i.e. the land of the dead.
9. This paragraph alludes to the ceremony of the weighing of the heart, a key tenet of ancient Egyptian afterlife beliefs, in which the heart of the deceased was weighed on scales against the feather of truth, the outcome of the reckoning determining the eternal fate of the deceased.
10. The Egyptian metaphor translates literally as ‘I was upon the water of’.
11. Literally, ‘heart’.
12. One of the Persian rulers of the Thirty-first Dynasty (or Second Persian Domination).
13. This crucial sentence refers to rebellions against Persian rule in the 330s BC. The different terms used to describe the unrest in the south and north of the country may be telling: the south, traditional heartland of Egypt, was ‘in rage’ against its Persian rulers, while the north, which had always been more cosmopolitan and accommodating to foreign rulers, was merely ‘in dispute’ (an alternative translation is ‘petitioning’).
14. Literally, ‘with heads turned back’.
15. Two parts of the temple foundation ceremony, usually the prerogative of the king, but here undertaken by Padiusir.
16. Quarries on the east bank of the Nile a few miles south of Cairo, source of the finest limestone throughout the pharaonic period.

17. A region of the eastern sky where, according to Egyptian religion, the sun-god Ra was born.
18. This expresses the core belief that every Egyptian temple was symbolically the place of creation.
19. A reference to the belief that the egg from which the sun-god was born was buried at Hermopolis.
20. A procession of the goddess's cult statue.
21. Literally, 'as it is called from mouth to mouth'.
22. Literally, 'unto a state of reverence'.



Part Two

BATTLE NARRATIVES



Even before the invention of writing, ancient Egyptian rulers were keen to record their military victories for posterity. An incised tableau, carved into a rock alongside a desert route behind Thebes, seems to record the earliest known historical event: a battle between two competing rulers in the second half of the fourth millennium BC, part of the long process of political and territorial consolidation that led to the foundation of the Egyptian state. The monument that signals the moment of foundation, the Narmer Palette, likewise shows a scene of military victory, this time with the addition of brief hieroglyphic labels to identify the main actors. Egyptian kings were quick to realize the value of writing for propaganda purposes, so the battle narrative – whether long or short, whether recording a civil war (Texts 2.1 and 2.3) or a foreign campaign (Text 2.2) – became firmly established as a major genre of Egyptian writing from the earliest times.

As pieces of official propaganda par excellence, battle narratives did not set out to be impartial or objective factual accounts, nor should they be treated as such. If they do record details of historical events, this is incidental to their main purpose, which was to magnify the king and his achievements, at the same time belittling his foes (and often his advisers too). The medium in which battle narratives were typically recorded – carved in stone, for posterity – and the context in which they were set up – in temples – are further indications of their aims. Lodging a battle narrative in a sacred space, whether on a stone stela (Texts 2.1 and 2.3) or inscribed on the walls of the temple itself (Text 2.2), gave added permanence and validity to the inscription and dedicated the king's victories to his divine patron. The texts thus reinforced the official ideology that the king owed his primary allegiance to, and derived his authority from, the gods, who, in return for royal benefactions to their temples, granted the king power and dominion over his subjects at home and abroad.

The three texts translated here span a period of over 800 years, from the Kamose stela (composed around 1540 BC) via Thutmose III's account of the Battle of Megiddo (*c*. 1458 BC) to the Piankhi stela (728 BC). Yet all three show

remarkable similarities, emphasizing the essential conservatism of ancient Egyptian royal ideology and political authority. A popular theme is the reticence or downright cowardice of the king's advisers, contrasted with the resolute action and fearlessness of the king. This is woven into the account of Thutmose III's choice of route before the Battle of Megiddo and Piankhi's exasperation at his troops' failure to press home their military advantage. In the account of Kamose's battles against the Hyksos, it is the rival king Apepi, rather than any of Kamose's supporters, who is cast in the role of coward and traitor, probably because it was important to demonstrate a united Theban front in the context of a bitter and protracted civil war. Piankhi's invasion of Egypt, by contrast, although in effect part of a long-running civil war, is presented as the conquest and subjugation of foreign territory – which, in a sense, it was, since Piankhi came from Nubia and left Egypt soon after his ultimate victory.

A second shared characteristic is the glorification of total war and the utter subjugation of the defeated enemy. Kamose boasts of having left enemy territory 'desolate and depopulated', reducing its stores to 'smouldering mounds'. Thutmose III's account speaks of enemy casualties lying 'prostrate like fish in the corner of a net' and of the defeated rulers coming 'on their bellies to kiss the ground before the might of His Majesty'. Only Piankhi shows magnanimity in victory, emphasizing his righteousness and religious purity in contrast to his enemies' treachery and impiousness. All three accounts also show a fondness for lists of tribute, reflecting both the Egyptians' bureaucratic mindset and their delight in exotic produce. Indeed, the capture of booty and the extraction of tribute seem to have been at least as important battle objectives as seizing or holding territory.

As for the narratives' qualities as written compositions, their detail and vividness make them some of the most fascinating and compelling of ancient Egyptian writings. The Kamose stela records verbatim the war of words between leaders that accompanied military action. The account of the Battle of Megiddo allows us, for the first time in history, to reconstruct the precise progress of a military engagement. The comprehensive scope and acute observation of the Piankhi stela constitute our most important source for the history and politics of the Third Intermediate Period. All three texts remind us that ancient Egypt, like every state in human history, was as much a product of military aggression as of cultural assertion.

1

Kamose Stela

*The large limestone stela bearing Kamose's battle narrative was discovered in the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak Temple in July 1954. The artefact itself has a long and interesting history: before being inscribed in the reign of Kamose (*c. *1541–1539 BC), it had formed part of a pillar supporting the roof of a chapel of Senusret I (*c. *1918–1875 BC); long after Kamose's reign, it was reused again as part of the foundation of a statue of Ramesses IV (*c. *1156–1150 BC*).

Underneath a sun disc with outstretched wings, the inscription is carved in thirty-eight horizontal lines of hieroglyphs. Traces of colour are still visible – the hieroglyphs were coloured blue, the dividing lines red. The execution of the individual signs is not of the highest quality, perhaps indicating the impoverishment of the royal workshops at the end of the Second Intermediate Period. The language, too, is obscure in places. None the less, the inscription is of great historical interest and importance, since it gives an account of the fight against the Hyksos waged by Kamose during the wars of liberation and reunification that ushered in the New Kingdom. The Theban fightback had begun under Kamose's predecessor Seqenenra Taa II and would not be concluded until the reign of his successor Ahmose. Kamose's brief time on the throne was thus dominated by military action. Though clearly giving an upbeat Theban perspective on events, the inscription on this stela remains our primary source for a number of important details of the campaign.

*The account starts with a war of words against the Hyksos ruler Apepi (*c. *1570–1530 BC). It goes on to relate Kamose's marshalling of a fleet, his attack on the Hyksos capital at Avaris, the capture of a large quantity of booty (Avaris was a major centre for trade with the Near East) and the punishment meted out by Kamose's forces to Apepi's allies. One of the most important sections recounts the interception of a message from Apepi to the ruler of Kush (a kingdom in Nubia, south of the Second Nile Cataract), in which Apepi suggests that the two rulers form an alliance to conquer Egypt and divide it between them. This seems*

to corroborate the evidence of other contemporary accounts, notably inscriptions in the tombs at Elkab (see Text 1.3). The end of the inscription relates Kamose's triumphal return to Thebes – which, given that the war still had several years left to run, may have been rather more muted than the text suggests.

A cowardly report (reaches me) from inside your town: you have been pushed back at your army's side. Your mouth is ungenerous in making me a (mere) 'chief' while you are a 'ruler', thus claiming for yourself what is stolen (and which will be) your downfall. Your rear flank will witness misfortune, since my army is after you. The women of Avaris shall not conceive, for they shall not be receptive in their wombs once my army's battle-cry is heard!

I was moored up at Per-djed-ken with a glad heart, while a bad time was being had by Apepi, the Chief of Lebanon, weak-armed, who plans brave things that never happen to him. When I reached the appointed time for going upstream, I crossed over to them and addressed them, (for) I had lined up the fleet one behind another, prow to steering-oar, with the members of my elite corps darting across the river like a falcon. My golden ship was in front and was itself like a falcon in the vanguard.[1]

I had a well-armed guard-ship monitor the desert edge, the (other) boats following it as if it were a bird of prey, plucking up the seed of Avaris. I caught sight of women on top of his citadel, looking out from the windows towards the riverbank. Their bodies froze when they saw me, as they peeped out from the battlements like baby mice inside their holes, saying, 'It is an attack!'

Behold, I am come. I have succeeded. I will not leave you alone; I will not let you walk the earth without my bearing down upon you. You are undone, cowardly Asiatic! I shall drink wine from your vineyard, which the Asiatics I captured will press for me. I have destroyed your dwelling-places and cut down your trees; I have forced your women into the ships and taken away the chariots.

I did not spare (a single) plank belonging to the 300 store-ships of fresh cedar that were filled with gold, lapis lazuli, silver, turquoise, innumerable bronze axes, not to mention moringa oil, incense, fat, honey, willow wood, boxwood, *sepeny* wood[2] – all their precious timber, all the best produce of Lebanon. I carried it all away; I did not leave one bit of Avaris (in a state) other than completely emptied.

Benighted Asiatic, you are undone! Cowardly Asiatic, who said 'I am a master without equal as far as Hermopolis; (even) Gebelein brings tribute to Avaris-between-the-two-rivers.' I have left them desolate and depopulated. I razed their towns; I burned their stores, leaving them smouldering mounds for

ever: because of the damage they did in this part of Egypt by making it serve the Asiatics and forsaking Egypt, their mistress.

I captured his message beyond the oasis, on its way south to Kush, in a written document. I found this upon it, in writing:

> From the hand of the ruler of Avaris. Aauserra, the son of Ra Apepi, greets the son of the ruler of Kush. Why do you ascend as ruler without letting me know?[3] Have you noticed what Egypt has done against me? The ruler who is there, Kamose the valiant, given life, penetrates my territory even though I have not attacked him as he has you. He chooses these two lands in order to afflict them, my land and yours, and he has ravaged them. Come northward, do not flinch. Look, he is here in my grasp. There is no one who will stand up to you in Egypt. Look, I will not give him passage until you arrive. Then we shall divide up the towns of this Egypt and Upper Nubia will be joyful.

(I), Wadjkheperra the valiant, given life, who is in control of events, I have placed the hill-country and the best land in my possession and the rivers likewise. Nobody managed to overthrow me, because I was not slack with my armed forces. The face of the Lower Egyptian did not turn away (from me). He started to fear as I was going downstream, before we had even fought. Before I had even reached him, he saw my fire-blast and sent word to Kush to seek its protection. But I captured it on the way and prevented it reaching (its destination). Then I had it seized and returned to him, leaving it over on the east, at Aphroditopolis. My strength reached into his very heart and his body was weak when his messenger recounted to him what I had done to Input-province, which used to be in his possession. I despatched a brave troop which went overland to ravage Bahariya while I remained in Saka to prevent any opponent coming behind me. I sailed upstream with a stout heart and full of joy, destroying every enemy en route.

What a perfect journey south by the ruler – life, prosperity, health – with his troops in front of him! They suffered no loss, no man (had to) inquire after his companion, their hearts did not mourn. I moved slowly towards the vicinity of Thebes, during the inundation season. Every face shone, there was an abundance of fish and fowl in the land, excitement grew on the riverbank and Thebes was in festival. Wives and husbands came to behold me; every woman hugged her companion; there was not a sad face (among them). Incense (was burned) for Amun in the sanctuary – the place where it is said ‘Receive good things!’ – in return for which he gave the scimitar to the son of Amun – life, prosperity, health – the king who endures, Wadjkheperra, the son of Ra, Kamose the valiant, given life, who subdued the south and repelled the north, who seized the land in valour, who is given life, stability and dominion and whose heart is glad along with his spirit, like Ra for ever and ever.

A royal command to the member of the elite, the high official, master of secrets of the King’s House, chief of the entire land, royal seal-bearer, instructor of the Two Lands, chief overseer of courtiers, overseer of seal-bearers, the great Neshi: ‘Let everything My Majesty has done in valour be placed on a stela, set up in its (proper) place in Karnak in the district of Thebes for ever and ever.’ Then he said before His Majesty, ‘I shall do all that is commanded, being in the king’s favour.’

NOTES

1. The imagery recalls the king’s close association with the falcon-god Horus.
2. Unidentified variety of wood.
3. The new king of Kush had evidently come to power only recently.

2

The Battle of Megiddo

The account of the Battle of Megiddo forms part of a larger set of royal annals inscribed in the reign of Thutmose III on the walls of Karnak Temple. The inscriptions describe a series of military campaigns against Syria-Palestine, launched under the king's personal command to put down a long-running rebellion of city-states and re-establish Egyptian political and economic hegemony in the Levant.

*The campaign that culminated in the Battle of Megiddo (*c. *1458 BC) took place in the twenty-second and twenty-third years of the king's reign. The setting for the decisive battle was the walled city of Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley, which occupied a commanding location that controlled the main trade route between Egypt and the Levant and was fought over so often that it gave its name to the biblical Armageddon.*

On the occasion described in this account, the forces of Thutmose III faced an alliance led by the Prince of Kadesh, probably backed by the Kingdom of Mittani. The alliance was making its final stand at Megiddo, so the capture of the city was of pivotal strategic importance: as the text puts it, 'the capture of Megiddo is the capture of a thousand towns'.

The Egyptian account is remarkable as the earliest detailed narrative of a battle in history, allowing the various troop movements to be reconstructed with great accuracy. It should not, however, be taken as an unbiased account of historical fact. Typically bombastic in tone, the text is designed above all to extol the wisdom and bravery of the king in contrast to the cowardice of his followers (a familiar New Kingdom genre known by the German term Königsnovelle*). At a crucial moment before the battle, Thutmose III ignores the advice of his war council and chooses to attack Megiddo by the most direct route, which involves marching his army through a narrow pass. The strategy works and the Egyptians take their enemy by surprise. But in the heat of battle, the king's troops fail him a second time, resorting to looting instead of pressing home their advantage. The*

result is a seven-month siege of Megiddo, after which the city finally surrenders. The closing lines of the inscription are taken up with an exhaustive list of the spoils of war.

The text is thus as much a paean of praise for the monarch and an enumeration of captured booty (which the king dedicated on his return to the god Amun-Ra of Karnak), as a battle narrative.

The Horus 'Strong bull risen in Thebes', the Two Ladies 'Enduring in kingship like Ra in heaven', the Golden Horus 'powerful of strength, holy of appearances', the Dual King, Lord of the Two Lands Menkheperra, the son of Ra Thutmose, beautiful of form, given life for ever:

His Majesty commanded that his victories, which his father Amun had given to him, be set down upon a stela in the temple which His Majesty made for his father Amun, in order to record each campaign by name together with the plunder which His Majesty brought back from it and the revenues of all foreign lands which his father Ra has given to him.

Year 22, fourth month of the growing season, day 25: His Majesty passed the fortress of Tjaru on the first campaign of victory, to repel those who were attacking the borders of Egypt, in valour, in victory, in power (and) in justification. Now for a long period of years they had ruled this land which was plundered, every man enslaved before those chiefs who were in Avaris.[1] For it happened in the time of others (that) the garrison was there in the town of Sharuhen while from Yeredj to the ends of the earth had fallen into rebellion against His Majesty.

Year 23, first month of the harvest season, day 4, the day of the festival of the king's coronation: to the town of 'Seized by the Ruler', Gaza being its name in Syrian.

Year 23, first month of the harvest season, day 5: departing from this place in valour, in victory, in strength (and) in justification, to overthrow that cowardly enemy (and) to widen the borders of Egypt, just as his father Amun-Ra, mighty and victorious, had commanded that he should conquer.

Year 23, first month of the harvest season, day 16: to the town of Yehem. His Majesty ordered a council (of war) with his victorious army, saying, 'That cowardly enemy of Kadesh has come and entered Megiddo. He is there at this

very moment, having gathered to himself the chiefs of all the foreign lands that used to be loyal to Egypt, together with those (lands) as far as Mittani, […], Syria, Kedu, their horses, their armies and their people. And he is saying, reportedly, "I stand ready to fight against His Majesty here in Megiddo." Tell me what is in your mind.'

They said in front of His Majesty, 'How will it be, to go on this path which narrows? For it is reported that there are enemies there, waiting outside, and that they are growing numerous. Will horse not follow horse, armies and people likewise? Will our vanguard not be fighting among them while our rear is still here in Aruna, unable to fight? There are two (other) paths here. One of the paths, look, it is effective for our lord, for it leads to Taanach. The other, look, it is on the north side of Djefti (so that) we would come out to the north of Megiddo. Let our victorious lord proceed on whichever of them is (more) effective for his plan. But do not make us go on that difficult path!'

Then messages were brought from that cowardly enemy, repeating the reported state of affairs that they had said before. What was said (by the king) in the Majesty of the Palace – life, prosperity, health: 'As Ra lives for me and loves me, as my father Amun favours me, as my nose may be rejuvenated in life and dominion, My Majesty shall proceed on this Aruna path! Let those of you who wish go on those paths you spoke of; and let those of you who wish come in My Majesty's following. They will say, those enemies who are the abomination of Ra, "Has His Majesty gone forth upon the other path because he is afraid of us?" For so they will say.'

They said in front of His Majesty, 'May your father Amun, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, who presides over Karnak, act according to your will! Behold, we will be in Your Majesty's following wherever Your Majesty goes, for a servant will always be behind his master.'

Then His Majesty commanded that the whole army be addressed thus: 'Your victorious lord will guard your steps on that path which narrows.' Then His Majesty made an oath, saying, 'I will not let my victorious army go in front of My Majesty in this situation'; for His Majesty had resolved to proceed himself at the head of his army. Then every man was given his marching orders, horse following horse, with His Majesty at the head of his army.

Year 23, first month of the harvest season, day 19: waking up in the tent of life, prosperity, health, at the town of Aruna. An expedition northward by My Majesty with my father Amun-Ra, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, opening the way before me, Ra-Horakhty steeling the heart of my victorious army, my

father Amun strengthening My Majesty's sword-arm and Horus casting protection over My Majesty.

Emergence by His Majesty at the head of his army, deployed in multiple units. He did not find a single enemy. Their (the Egyptian army's) southern wing was at Taanach, their northern wing at the southern bend of the Qina Valley. Then His Majesty called out upon this path … 'They are fallen! That cowardly enemy … Amun … Give praise to him! Pay honour to the might of His Majesty on account of the greatness of his sword-arm before all the gods! For he protects the rear of His Majesty's army in Aruna!' While the rear of His Majesty's victorious army was at the town of Aruna, the vanguard had come out into the Qina Valley; and they filled the entrance of this valley.

Then they said in front of His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – 'Look, His Majesty has emerged with his victorious army and they have filled the valley. May our victorious lord listen to us this time. May our lord protect for us the rear of his army with all its people. When the rear of the army has emerged, then we will fight these foreigners, for then we will not be worrying about the rear of the army.'

His Majesty made fast in the open and he sat down there to watch over the rear of his victorious army. When the last of the lead troops had emerged onto this path, morning turned to afternoon.[2] His Majesty arrived at the south of Megiddo, on the bank of the Qina brook, as the seventh hour of the day had elapsed.[3] Then camp was pitched there for His Majesty and the whole army was told, 'Prepare yourselves, sharpen your weapons, for battle is about to be joined with that cowardly enemy at daybreak. For …'

Resting in the camp of life, prosperity, health; dealing with official business; distributing rations to the troops; posting the watch of the army; telling them 'Be steadfast, be steadfast! Be vigilant, be vigilant!' Awakening in the tent of life, prosperity, health. His Majesty was told, 'The terrain is secure, the troops to the south and the north likewise.'

Year 23, first month of the harvest season, day 21, the festival of the new moon precisely: appearance of the king at daybreak. The order was given to the whole army to march … His Majesty set out in a chariot of electrum, equipped in the splendour of his weaponry like a strong-armed Horus, lord of action, like Montu the Theban, his father Amun strengthening his arms. The southern wing of His Majesty's army was at a hill south of the Qina (brook), the northern wing to the north-west of Megiddo and His Majesty was at their centre, Amun protecting his body against opponents and the might of Seth (being) his body's strength.

Then His Majesty prevailed at the head of his army. When they (the enemy) saw His Majesty prevailing over them, they fled in panic towards Megiddo with faces of fear, abandoning their horses (and) their chariots of gold and silver. By pulling on sheets, they were hoisted up into the town – for the people had closed the town on them and they (had to) lower sheets to hoist them up into the town.

Now if His Majesty's army had not set its heart to plundering the possessions of the enemy, they would have captured Megiddo at that moment, (as) the cowardly enemy of Kadesh and the cowardly enemy of this town were dragged, scrambling, to bring them inside their town; fear of His Majesty had entered their bodies and their arms were weak, as his serpent prevailed against them.[4]

Then their horses and chariots of gold and silver were plundered, being ready for the taking. Their casualties lay prostrate like fish in the corner of a net, while His Majesty's victorious army counted their belongings. Also taken as plunder was that wretched enemy's tent, which was worked with silver …

Then the whole army gave a shout of praise to Amun [for the victory] he had granted to his son [that day. They gave thanks] to His Majesty, extolling his victory. Then they presented the plunder they had brought, consisting of (severed) hands, living captives, horses, chariots of gold and silver and plain ones …

[Then His Majesty issued] a command to his army, saying, 'Finish the job well, finish (it) well, my victorious army! Behold all foreign lands are placed in this town today according to Ra's command, so that every chief of every [northern] land is shut up inside it and the capture of Megiddo is the capture of a thousand towns! Finish the job thoroughly, finish it thoroughly!' …

Then [orders were given to] the troop[-commanders] to provision [their troops and to let] every [man know] his place. They measured the town, encircled it with a ditch and surrounded it with (a palisade of) green timber (hewn) from all their orchards. His Majesty himself was upon the watchtower to the east of the town, [keeping watch over it night and day] … [surrounded] with a thick wall … [measuring …] in thickness. It was named 'Menkheperra encircles the Asiatics'. Guards were stationed at His Majesty's camp and they were told, 'Be steadfast, be steadfast! Be vigilant, be vigilant!' His Majesty … [Not a single one] of them (the enemy) [was allowed to come out] beyond this wall, except to surrender at the gate of their fortress.

Now everything that His Majesty did to this town, to that wretched enemy and his wretched army, was recorded with details of the day, the name, the name of the (army) unit and the name of the troop-commanders … [recorded in writing in this inscription. They are] recorded on a roll of vellum in the temple of Amun to this day.

Now the chiefs of this foreign land came on their bellies to kiss the ground before the might of His Majesty, to beg breath for their nostrils, on account of the greatness of his sword-arm and the extent of Amun's power over every foreign land … all the chiefs captured by the might of His Majesty, carrying their tribute of silver, gold, lapis lazuli and turquoise and bearing grain, wine, cattle and sheep for His Majesty's army. One group of them carried tribute (back to Egypt) on the journey south. Then His Majesty appointed new chiefs for every town …

Tally of the booty brought back by His Majesty's army from the town of Megiddo:

living captives – 340
(severed) hands – 83
horses – 2,041
foals – 191
stallions – 6
colts – …

chariot worked in gold, with a pole of gold, from that enemy – 1
beautiful chariot worked in gold from the chief of [Megiddo] – 1
[chariots from the allied chiefs – 30]
chariots from his wretched army – 892
total – 924
fine bronze mail-shirt from that enemy – 1
fine bronze mail-shirt from the chief of Megiddo [– 1]
leather mail-shirts from his wretched army – 20

bows – 502
cedar-wood poles, worked with silver, from that enemy's tent – 7

And [His Majesty's] army seized [livestock from this town] …

… – 387
cattle – 1,929
goats – 2,000
sheep – 20,500

Tally of what was brought back afterwards by the king from the property of that enemy in Yanoam, Inuges and Herenkeru, together with the property of the

towns which had been loyal to him, brought back by the might of His Majesty:

womenfolk of that enemy together with the chiefs who were with him – [474]
their [*maryannu*][5] – 38
children of that enemy together with the chiefs who were with him – 87
their *maryannu* – 5
male and female slaves and their children – 1,796
the pardoned who deserted that enemy out of hunger – 103 men
total – 2,503

And:

bowls of precious stones and gold and various dishes – …
a large jar of Syrian workmanship
vases, dishes, plates, various drinking vessels, large cauldrons and knives – …
making 1,784 *deben*[6] (in weight)

gold discs of skilled craftsmanship, together with many silver discs
(making) 966 *deben* and 1 *kite*[7] (in weight)

a statue of hammered silver …
[a statue of that enemy] with a gold head
walking sticks with human faces – 3
carrying-chairs of that enemy (in) ivory, ebony and boxwood, worked with gold – 6
their footstools – 6
large tables of ivory and boxwood – 6
a bed in the form of a *kerker*[8] from that enemy (in) boxwood worked with gold and every precious stone, gilded throughout
a gilded ebony statue of that enemy, its head of lapis lazuli
… this town
vessels of bronze
a quantity of clothing from that enemy

Now the fields were made into plots and assigned to agents of the palace – life, prosperity, health – to reap their harvests. Tally of the harvest brought to His Majesty from the plots of Megiddo:

sacks of wheat – 207,300 [+ x]
and what was cut as forage for His Majesty's army

NOTES

1. A reference to the Hyksos rulers who preceded the Eighteenth Dynasty.
2. Literally, 'the shadow turned'.
3. i.e. at one o'clock in the afternoon.
4. A reference to the uraeus, worn on the king's brow, that was believed to spit fire at his enemies.
5. West Semitic word referring to elite warriors.
6. The *deben* was the principal unit of weight in ancient Egypt, equal to 93.3 grammes.
7. The *kite* was one-tenth of a *deben*, i.e. 9.33 grammes.
8. An unknown term.

3

Piankhi Stela

In the three centuries following the collapse of the New Kingdom, Egypt fragmented to an unprecedented degree. By 730 BC, Upper Egypt south of Thebes was controlled by Piankhi (747–716 BC), a Kushite pharaoh from Napata in far-off southern Nubia. To the north of Thebes, there were rival rulers at Hermopolis/el-Ashmunein (King Nimlot) and Herakleopolis (King Peftjauawybast), the latter at least nominally loyal to Piankhi. In Lower Egypt, there was a king at Bubastis (Osorkon IV) and another at Leontopolis (Iuput II), while other towns were governed by a bewildering array of Chiefs of the Ma (the name of a prominent Libyan tribe that had infiltrated the Delta in the late New Kingdom and succeeding centuries), hereditary princes and mayors. Piankhi, who regarded himself as the sole legitimate pharaoh, lumped them all together, somewhat contemptuously, as 'every feather-wearing chief of Lower Egypt'.

This fractured state of affairs seems to have been tolerated until 728 BC, when one of the Great Chiefs of the Ma, Tefnakht of Sais, who already ruled the entire western side of the Delta, threatened to upset the status quo by extending his writ southwards, forging an alliance with King Nimlot and besieging Peftjauawybast at Herakleopolis. Piankhi first decided to send reinforcements to Egypt, but when they failed to stop the insurrection, he decided to invade Egypt himself. Motivated by his piety to the god Amun, Piankhi's invasion was as much a crusade as a land grab. He regarded the rebels as having strayed from 'the way of life' and was determined to restore the divinely ordained balance of power, enriching the endowment of Amun at Karnak with captured booty in the process.

In the sequence of hostilities that followed, Piankhi besieged Hermopolis and took the surrender of Nimlot; rescued Peftjauawybast and received his homage; captured a series of fortified towns on the road to Egypt's capital city, Memphis, then stormed it; received the submission of the various Delta rulers (with the notable exception of Tefnakht); put down an opportunistic revolt; and finally

accepted Tefnakht's own surrender, albeit delivered by an envoy. Laden with booty, Piankhi returned home to Nubia in triumph.

The account of his conquest is inscribed in 159 lines of finely cut hieroglyphs on all four sides of a large round-topped stela of grey granite, measuring 1.8m by 1.84m. It was discovered in 1862 in the ruins of the temple of Amun at Napata, where Piankhi had erected it to proclaim his victories for eternity. A badly damaged scene at the top of the stela shows Piankhi before Amun and his divine consort Mut. Behind Piankhi are his defeated rivals: Nimlot leading a horse, accompanied by his wife (a scene described in detail in the inscription); Osorkon IV, Iuput II and Peftjauawybast kissing the ground in submission; and behind Amun and Mut five other named rulers (Prince Pediese and Chiefs of the Ma Patjenfi, Pemai, Akanosh and Djedamuniuefankh) doing likewise.

The text is remarkable for its detail, pace and imagery. It has been described as 'the foremost historical inscription of the Late Period'.[1] *Piankhi emerges, no doubt intentionally, as decisive, a master tactician, magnanimous in victory, extremely fond of horses and, above all, pious.*

Year 21, first month of the inundation season, under the Majesty of the Dual King Piankhi-beloved-of-Amun, who lives for ever.

Piankhi's encomium

An order spoken by My Majesty:

Listen to what I have done, surpassing the ancestors,
I, the king, god's likeness, the living image of Atum,
Who came forth from the womb marked as a ruler,
Feared by his superiors.
His father knew and his mother saw that he would be ruler, even in the egg!
The Perfect God, beloved of the gods, son of Ra, who acts with deeds,
Piankhi-beloved-of-Amun!

The report of Tefnakht's advance

One came to say to His Majesty, 'Now the chief of the west, the lord mayor of Netjer, Tefnakht, is in Harpoon-province, in Mountain-bull-province, in Hapy, in […], in Ain, in Per-nub, in White-walls-province. He has seized the whole of the west from the far north to Itj-tawy and is sailing upstream with a vast army, the

Two Lands united behind him. The mayors and rulers of estates are like dogs at his heels!

'No fortress has closed (its gates) in the provinces of Upper Egypt, Meidum, Lahun, Crocodilopolis, Oxyrhynchus or Tjeknesh. All the towns of the west have thrown open their gates for fear of him. When he turned to the provinces of the east, they opened up to him likewise: Hut-benu, Tawedjay, Hut-nesut, Aphroditopolis. Look, now he is besieging Herakleopolis. He has encircled it like a snake, not letting anyone leave or enter, and attacks every day. He has measured its entire circumference. Every mayor knows his (section of) wall and he has made every man – namely the mayors and rulers of estates – guard his portion.'

And His Majesty listened to it with swagger, laughing, (even) joyful.

Piankhi enjoins his allies to battle

Now the chiefs, mayors and army commanders who were in their towns wrote daily to His Majesty, saying, 'Have you been silent, forgetting the south, the loyal provinces, while Tefnakht seizes (all) before him and encounters no resistance? Nimlot, the mayor of Herwer, has demolished the fortifications of Nefrusi, thus surrendering his own town for fear of him who would seize it for himself to besiege a further town. Look, he (Nimlot) has gone to fall at his (Tefnakht's) feet, having repudiated loyalty to His Majesty. He (Nimlot) (now) stands alongside him like one of [his own men in] Waseb-province. He (Tefnakht) gives him (Nimlot) rewards to his heart's content, from everything he (Tefnakht) has plundered.'

Then His Majesty wrote to the mayors and army commanders who were in Egypt – the commander Pwarem and the commander Lemersekny and every commander of His Majesty who was in Egypt – 'Go to war, join the battle! Surround [the enemy], conquer the people, their cattle, their ships on the river! Do not let the farmers go forth to the fields, do not let the ploughmen plough! Put a stranglehold around Hare-province. Fight against it every day!' And they did so.

Piankhi sends an army to Egypt

Then His Majesty sent an army to Egypt, commanding them strictly and twice over, 'Do not [attack] at night, like a stratagem at draughts: fight in plain sight! Challenge him to battle from afar. If he says, "I wait for the infantry and chariotry from another town", then sit still until his army comes. Fight when *he*

says. Moreover, if he has reinforcements in another town, wait for them. Those mayors whom he brings to assist him and his trusty Libyan troops, challenge them to battle in advance, saying, “Though we do not know what you are called, muster the troops, harness the top steeds from your stable, form (your) battalions and know that Amun the god commands us!”[2]

‘When you reach the heart of Thebes, in front of Karnak, enter the water, purify yourselves in the river and put on clean linen. Rest the bow, loosen the drawstring. Do not boast of being mighty, for the soldier who is ignorant of him has no might. He makes the coward brave so that the multitude flees from the few and a single one conquers a thousand men. Sprinkle yourselves with (holy) water from his altars, prostrate yourselves before his feet! Say to him,

“Show us the way,
That we may fight in the shadow of your sword-arm!
The troop you command, when it attacks,
May the multitude tremble before it!” ’

Then they prostrated themselves in His Majesty’s presence, (saying):

‘It is your name that makes us strong;
Your counsel brings your army home.
Your bread is in our bellies on every march;
Your beer quenches our thirst.
It is your bravery that gives us strength;
There is dread when your name is recalled.
No army succeeds with a weak commander;
And who is your equal?
You are the mighty king who acts,
The commander of the arts of war!’

They travelled north until they reached Thebes, (where) they acted in accordance with everything His Majesty had said. As they travelled north by river, they encountered a multitude of ships faring south with soldiers and sailors – all the fighting troops of Lower Egypt – equipped with offensive weapons to fight against His Majesty’s army. Then a great slaughter was made among them, (killing) an unknown number. Their troops and ships were captured and taken as living prisoners to the place where His Majesty was.

The battle for Herakleopolis and the flight of King Nimlot

They proceeded towards Herakleopolis to join the battle. List of the mayors and kings of Lower Egypt: King Nimlot and King Iuput; the Chief of the Ma, Shoshenq of Busiris; the Great Chief of the Ma Djedamuniuefankh of Mendes and his eldest son, who is army commander of Perdjehutyweprehwy; the army of the member of the elite, Bakennefy and his eldest son, the Chief of the Ma Nesnaisu of Hesbu-province; every feather-wearing chief of Lower Egypt; and King Osorkon who is in Bubastis and the district of Ranefer. All the mayors and rulers of estates in the west, the east and the islands in between[3] were united in loyalty at the feet of the great chief of the west and ruler of the estates of Lower Egypt, the priest of Neith, lady of Sais, and *sem*-priest[4] of Ptah, Tefnakht.

They went forth against them and made a great slaughter among them – more than anything. Their river-borne ships were captured. The survivors crossed over and landed on the west near Per-peg. At dawn the next day, His Majesty's army crossed over to them. Army engaged army. They killed many of them (the enemy) and countless horses. The remainder were overcome with terror and fled to Lower Egypt from such a harsh and painful blow. List of the slaughter made among them: […] men.

King Nimlot fled upstream, to the south, when he was told, 'Hermopolis faces an onslaught from His Majesty's army; its people and its livestock are (about to be) captured.' And he went to Wenu[5] while His Majesty's army was on the river and on the banks of Hare-province. When they heard this, they encircled the Hare-province on all four sides. No one was allowed in or out.

Piankhi's reaction

They sent reports to the Majesty of the Dual King Piankhi-beloved-of-Amun, given life, about every attack they made, about every victory for His Majesty.

Then His Majesty raged like a panther: 'Have they left (even) a remnant of the army of Lower Egypt, letting some of them escape to recount the campaign, instead of killing them until the very last of them has perished? I swear, as Ra loves me, as my father Amun favours me, I will go north myself! I will tear down (the enemy's) works; I shall make him abandon fighting for ever! After the New Year rites have been performed and I have offered to my father Amun at his beautiful festival, when he makes his glorious New Year's appearance, he shall command me, to his satisfaction, to see Amun at his beautiful Festival of the Sanctuary.[6] I shall convey him in his divine barque at Luxor,[7] at his beautiful festival of the Night of the Sanctuary and the festival of Abiding in Thebes, which Ra created for him in the beginning. I will convey him to his House, to rest upon his throne, on the day of bringing in the god, the second day of the

third month of the inundation season. And I will make Lower Egypt taste the taste of my deeds!'

Then the army that was there in Egypt heard His Majesty's raging against them. They fought against Oxyrhynchus in Waseb-province and they captured it like a cloudburst. They wrote to His Majesty, but his heart was not appeased by it. Then they fought against the fortress 'Crag, great of victories', which they found full of troops of every kind from Lower Egypt. A siege-tower was erected against it and its walls were demolished. A great slaughter was made among them – without number, including a son of the Chief of the Ma Tefnakht. Then they wrote of it to His Majesty, but his heart was not appeased by it. Then they fought against Hut-benu. Its interior was breached and His Majesty's troops entered it. Then they wrote of it to His Majesty. But his heart was not appeased by it.

Piankhi invades Egypt and captures Hermopolis

First month of the inundation season, day 9: His Majesty came north to Thebes and celebrated the festival of Amun at the Festival of the Sanctuary. His Majesty travelled downstream to the harbour of Hare-province. His Majesty came out of the ship's cabin, the horses were harnessed and the chariot was mounted, so that His Majesty's glory reached even unto the Asiatics and every heart [trembled] before him.

Then His Majesty went forth to vent his anger at his army, raging against it like a panther: 'Are you remaining at battle while delaying my orders? It is the year for finishing the task, for spreading fear of me in Lower Egypt and for giving them a harsh and painful beating!'

He made camp to the south-west of Hermopolis. It was besieged every day. An embankment was made, ringing the ramparts. A wooden construction was erected to lift up the archers as they shot and the slingers as they hurled stones, killing people inside every day. After a few days, Wenu began to exude a foul odour, for lack of air to breathe. Then Wenu prostrated itself, making supplication before the monarch. Messengers went to and fro carrying everything fine to behold – gold, every (kind of) precious stone, chests of clothing, the crown from his (Nimlot's) head, the serpent that proclaimed his majesty – without ceasing for many days, as supplication to the crown.

Then his wife was sent – the king's wife and king's daughter, Nestjenet – to make supplication to the king's wives, king's concubines, king's daughters and king's sisters. She prostrated herself in the women's quarters before the royal women: 'Come to me, king's wives, king's daughters and king's sisters, that you

may appease Horus, master of the palace, great of power, exalted in justification![8] Grant …

… (lines 35–50 are lost; they would have recorded the intercession of the royal women, Piankhi's acceptance of the surrender of Hermopolis and Nimlot's appearance before Piankhi) …

[Piankhi said to Nimlot:] 'Who guides you, who guides you? I say, who guides you, who guides you? You have [strayed from] the way of life! Did heaven rain down arrows? I was [content] that Southerners bowed down and Northerners [said], "Put us in your shadow!" Did it alienate when the king … bearing gifts? The will is a steering-oar: it capsizes its owner if the wrath of god dictates; it sees heat as coolness … He who is seen with his father has not yet grown old. Your provinces are full of children.'[9]

He (Nimlot) prostrated himself in the presence of His Majesty, saying, '… Horus, lord of the palace! It is your power that has done this! I am (but) one of the king's servants, who pays taxes to the Treasury … their taxes. I have done more for you than they.'

Then he presented silver, gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise, copper and all (kinds of) precious stones; and the Treasury was filled with this tribute. He brought a horse in his right hand and in his left a sistrum of gold and lapis lazuli.[10]

Then His Majesty appeared from his palace and went forth to the House of Thoth, lord of Hermopolis. He slaughtered oxen, short-horned cattle and geese for his father Thoth, lord of Hermopolis, and the ogdoad in the House of the Ogdoad. And the troops of Hare-province shouted and sang, exclaiming, 'How good is Horus who is at peace in his city! The son of Ra, Piankhi: you make for us a jubilee as you protect Hare-province!'

His Majesty proceeded to the house of King Nimlot. He went through all the rooms of the palace, his treasury and his storehouses. He (Nimlot) presented to him the king's wives and king's daughters and they paid honour to His Majesty as women do. But His Majesty did not pay them any attention. (Instead) His Majesty went off to the horses' stables and the foals' quarters where he saw that [the horses] were hungry. He said, 'I swear, as Ra loves me, as my nose is rejuvenated in life, it is more painful to me that my horses should be hungry than every evil deed you have done in your recklessness! I will teach you to respect your fellows! Do you not know that god's shadow is above me and does not let (any) venture of mine fail? Would that another had done it for me, (then) I would not have to be angry with him about it! I was fashioned in the womb, created in

the divine egg. The god's seed is in me. By his spirit, I do nothing in ignorance of him. It is he who commands me to act!'

Then his (Nimlot's) property was assigned to the Treasury, his granary to the endowment of Amun in Karnak.

King Peftjauawybast pays homage

The ruler of Herakleopolis, Peftjauawybast, came bearing tribute for Pharaoh: gold, silver, every (kind of) precious stone and horses, the best of the stable. He prostrated himself in the presence of His Majesty and said:

'Hail to you, Horus, mighty king,
The bull who attacks bulls!
The underworld took me away
And I foundered in darkness.
Show me the brightness of your face!
I found no friend on the day of pain,
Who would stand up on the day of battle,
Except you, O mighty king!
You stripped away the darkness from me.
I will serve (you), together with my property
Which Herakleopolis (now) remits to your household;
For you are the image of Horakhty,
High above the Indestructibles.[11]
As he is, so you are king!
As he is indestructible, so are you:
The Dual King Piankhi, who lives for ever!'

Lahun, Meidum and Itj-tawy surrender

His Majesty fared downstream to the entrance of the canal beside Lahun, where he found Per-sekhem-kheperra with its defences raised, its gate closed, filled with all the fighters from Lower Egypt. Then His Majesty sent (word) to them, saying, 'O you who live in death, O you who live in death, despicable peasants who live in death! If the moment passes and you do not open up (your gates), look, you will be counted (among) the fallen by means of the king's judgement. Do not turn away from the gates of a better life for yourselves and finish this day on the executioner's block! Do not love death and hate life! … before the entire land.'

Then they sent (word) to His Majesty, saying:

‘Behold, god’s shadow is above you.
The son of Nut gave you his arms.
The plan you conceive happens immediately
Like the word of god.
Truly you are born of god,
For we see it by your deeds!
Behold, your city and its gates
…
May those who would enter, enter,
And those who would leave, leave.
May His Majesty do as he desires!’

Then they came out with a son of the Chief of the Ma Tefnakht. His Majesty’s troops entered (the town), but he did not kill a single one of all the people he found … and the seal-bearers, in order to lock away its possessions. Its treasuries were allotted to the Treasury, its granaries to the endowment of his father Amun-Ra, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands.

His Majesty travelled north, where he found Meidum – the house of Sokar, lord of Sehedj – barricaded and unapproachable. It had resolved to fight … fear of His Majesty had sealed their mouths. Then His Majesty sent (word) to them, saying, ‘Look, two paths are before you: choose as you wish. Open up, you live. Close, you die. My Majesty will not bypass a closed town!’ Then they opened up immediately and His Majesty entered the town. He made an offering [to] Menhy, foremost of Sehedj. Its treasury was allotted to the Treasury, its granaries to the endowment of Amun in Karnak.

His Majesty fared downstream to Itj-tawy, where he found the fortifications sealed and the ramparts filled with brave troops from Lower Egypt. Then they opened the gates and prostrated themselves [before His Majesty, saying to] His Majesty:

‘Your father decreed for you his inheritance:
Yours are the Two Lands,
Yours is everything in it,
Yours is everything upon earth!’

His Majesty went forth to make a great offering to the gods of this town, consisting of oxen, short-horned cattle, fowl, everything good and pure. Then its

treasury was allotted to the Treasury, its granaries to the endowment of [his father Amun].

The capture of Memphis

[His Majesty proceeded to] White-walls-province. Then he sent (word) to them, saying, ‘Do not shut (your gates), do not fight, O residence of Shu since the beginning! May he who would enter, enter; may he who would leave, leave. Those who go will not be hindered. I will offer an oblation to Ptah, to the gods of White-walls. I will offer to Sokar in Shetyt. I will see South-of-his-wall. And I will sail downstream in satisfaction! … The inhabitants of White-walls will be safe and sound; no one will cry for (their) children. Look at the southern provinces: no one was slain there except the rebels who insulted god; the disaffected were executed.’

(But) they shut their fortress and sent forth troops against a few of His Majesty’s troops, composed of the craftsmen, builders and sailors [who had entered] the harbour of White-walls.

That chief of Sais (i.e. Tefnakht) reached White-walls (under cover of) darkness to command his infantry, his marines, all the best of his army – eight thousand people – commanding them very firmly, ‘Look, Memphis is filled with troops from the best of Lower Egypt, (and with) barley, emmer and all (kinds of) crops, so that the granaries are overflowing; (and with) every weapon of [war]. A rampart [surrounds it]. A great defence has been built, a work of skilled craftsmanship. The river surrounds (it on) the east, so there is no fighting to be had there. The stables here are filled with oxen. The treasury is furnished with everything: silver, gold, copper, clothing, incense, honey and oil. I shall go and give gifts to the chiefs of Lower Egypt. I shall reopen their provinces for them and I shall become … [in a few days] I shall return.’ Then he mounted a horse, not trusting his chariot, and he went north in fear of His Majesty.

At dawn the following day, His Majesty reached White-walls. When he had moored on its north side, he found the water risen up to the walls and ships moored up at the [fortress] of Memphis. And His Majesty saw it was strong, the walls raised with new construction and the defences strongly established. There was no way of attacking it. Every man in His Majesty’s army was speaking about some plan of attack. Some said, ‘Let us besiege (it), for look how numerous its troops are!’ Others said, ‘Make a ramp up against it, so that we can raise the ground level up to its defences. Let us build a siege-tower, by erecting ships’ masts and using the sails for the walls. By this means, you could bisect

each of its (the city's) sides with ramps – and a [siege-tower] on its north – to raise the ground level up to its defences so that we can gain access.'

Then His Majesty raged against them like a panther, saying, 'I swear, as Ra loves me, as my father Amun favours me, I believe this has happened according to Amun's command. This is what people are saying, "… and the southern provinces opened up to him from afar, even though Amun had not put (it) in their minds and they did not know what he had commanded. He (Amun) made him (Piankhi) in order to demonstrate his power, to display his majesty." I will seize it like a cloudburst, for [Amun] has commanded me!'

Then he despatched his fleet and his army to attack the harbour of Memphis. They brought him every wherry, every ferryboat, every pleasure craft: all the many boats that were moored at the harbour of Memphis, with the prow rope(s) attached to its buildings, all without a single casualty among His Majesty's troops. His Majesty travelled in person to marshal all the many boats. His Majesty commanded his troops, 'Forward against it! Climb the walls! Enter the buildings on the other side of the river! When one of you breaches the wall, no one will stand in his way, no battalion will repel you! To hesitate is cowardice. We have Upper Egypt in the bag. Now we shall land Lower Egypt! We will install ourselves in the Balance-of-the-Two-Lands!'[12]

Then Memphis was seized in the manner of a cloudburst. Many of its inhabitants were slain or brought as living captives to where His Majesty was.

When dawn broke the next day, His Majesty sent people inside to protect the divine temples for him. An arm (of protection) was raised over the gods' sanctuaries. Offerings were made to the divine council of Hikuptah.[13] Memphis was purified with natron and incense. The priests were reinstalled. His Majesty proceeded to the house of [Ptah] and his purification was carried out in the robing room. Every rite that is performed for a king when he enters a house of god was performed for him. A great oblation was made for his father Ptah-south-of-his-wall, comprising oxen, short-horned cattle, fowl and all good things. Then His Majesty proceeded to his quarters.

Then all the provinces in the region of Memphis heard (about it). Herypedemy, Penynaiuawy, Tower-of-Byu, Village-of-Byt: they opened their gates and fled in flight, whence it is not known. Then came King Iuput and the Chief of the Ma Akanosh and Prince Padiese and all the mayors of Lower Egypt, bearing their tribute, to behold His Majesty's glory. Then the treasuries and granaries of Memphis were allotted to the endowment of Amun, to Ptah and to the sacred ennead which is in Hikuptah.

Piankhi worships at Heliopolis, and King Osorkon pays homage

At dawn the following day, His Majesty proceeded eastwards. An offering was made to Atum in Kheraha, (to) the ennead[14] in the House of the Ennead and the gods there, comprising oxen, short-horned cattle and fowl, that they might give life, prosperity and health to the Dual King Piankhi, who lives for ever.

His Majesty proceeded to Heliopolis, over that hill of Kheraha via the road of Sep which leads to Kheraha. His Majesty proceeded to the camp which is on the west of Tiu-canal. His purification was carried out: he was purified in the Pool of Refreshment,[15] his face was washed in the River of Nun in which Ra (himself) washes his face. He proceeded to the High Sand[16] in Heliopolis. A great oblation was made on the High Sand in Heliopolis before the face of Ra at his rising, comprising white cattle, milk,[17] myrrh, incense and all kinds of sweet-smelling plants.

A procession was made to the House of Ra. The house of god was entered in prayer, the chief lector-priest worshipping god and repelling the king's enemies. The rites of the robing room were performed: putting on the *sedeb*-garment,[18] purifying him with incense and refreshing water, presenting to him the garlands of the Mansion of the Benben,[19] bringing him amulets. The staircase to the great window was climbed to behold Ra in the Mansion of the Benben. The king stood by himself, alone. The bolts were broken, the doors opened, to see his father Ra in the sacred Mansion of the Benben. The morning barque of Ra and the evening barque of Atum were sanctified. The doors were closed, the seals applied, sealing with the king's own seal. The priests were commanded, 'I have inspected the seal. No other king who may arise shall enter!' They prostrated themselves in His Majesty's presence and said, 'Endure and remain for ever, O Horus, beloved of Heliopolis!' The House of Atum was entered to worship the image of his father Atum-Khepri, foremost of Heliopolis.

King Osorkon came to behold His Majesty's glory.

Piankhi receives a general homage

At dawn the following day, His Majesty proceeded to the harbour at the head of his fleet. He crossed over to the harbour of Kemwer-province. His Majesty's camp was pitched to the south of Keheny, on the east of Kemwer-province. Then came all these kings and mayors of Lower Egypt, all the feather-wearing chiefs, all the viziers, chiefs and royal acquaintances from the west, the east and the islands in between, to behold His Majesty's glory.

Prince Padiese prostrated himself in His Majesty's presence, saying, 'Come to Kemwer-province, that you may behold Khentikhety, that Khuyet may protect you, that you may make a burnt offering to Horus in his house, comprising oxen, short-horned cattle and fowl. When you enter my house, my treasury will be opened up to you. I will proffer to you my father's possessions. I will give you gold to the limits of your heart's desire, turquoise heaped up before you and top-quality horses from the finest stable, the foremost of the stud.'

(So) His Majesty proceeded to the House of Horus-Khentikhety. An offering of oxen, short-horned cattle and fowl was made to his father Horus-Khentikhety, lord of Athribis. His Majesty proceeded to the house of Prince Padiese, who made a presentation to him of silver, gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise – a great heap of everything – and clothing of royal linen of every thread-count, beds made up with open-weave linen, myrrh and ointment in jars, and horses – stallions and mares – from the foremost of his stable. He purified himself with a divine oath before all these kings and Great Chiefs of Lower Egypt, 'Anyone who hides his horses or conceals his wealth shall die the death of his father! I say this so that you may talk to your humble servant,[20] knowing all that you know of me. You shall say, "I hid from His Majesty all the possessions of my father's house: gold, silver, precious stones, every (kind of) vessel, armlets, gold bracelets, chokers, collars inlaid with precious stones, bangles for every limb, headbands, earrings, every (kind of) royal ornament, every (kind of) royal washing-vessel in gold and precious stones. But all these I have (now) presented in the king's presence, and thousands of garments of royal linen from the very best of my house. I know you will be satisfied with it! Proceed to the stud and choose what you wish, all the horses you desire!" ' And His Majesty did so.

And these kings and mayors said to His Majesty, 'Let us go to our towns and open up our treasuries so that we may choose according to your heart's desire and bring you the best of our studs, the foremost of our horses!' And His Majesty did so.

List of their names:

King Osorkon in Bubastis and the district of Ranefer
King Iuput in Leontopolis and Taan
Mayor Djedamuniuefankh in Mendes and Granary-of-Ra
His eldest son, the general in Hermopolis Parva, Ankhhor
Mayor Akanosh in Sebennytos, Iseopolis and Diospolis Inferior
Mayor and Chief of the Ma Patjenfi in Per-sopdu and Granary-of-Memphis
Mayor and Chief of the Ma Pemai in Busiris
Mayor and Chief of the Ma Nesnaisu in Hesbu-province

Mayor and Chief of the Ma Nakhthornashenu in Per-gerer
Chief of the Ma Pentaweret
Chief of the Ma Pentbekhent
Priest of Horus, lord of Letopolis, Padihorsematawy
Mayor Herbes in Per-sekhmet-nebetsat and Per-sekhmet-nebetrehesawy
Mayor Djedkhiu in Khentnefer
Mayor Pebes in Kheraha and Per-hapy

– bearing all their good tribute [comprising] gold, silver … beds made up with open-weave linen, myrrh in jars … of fine value, horses …

Tefnakht attacks, then sues for peace

… came to tell His Majesty, '… the wall … He has set fire to the Treasury [and the ships] on the river. He has garrisoned Mesed with troops.' Then His Majesty sent troops to see what was happening there, as he was (now) Prince Padiese's protector. They came back to report to His Majesty, saying, 'We slew every person we found there.' His Majesty gave it as a reward to Prince Padiese.

The Chief of the Ma Tefnakht heard of this and sent a messenger to where His Majesty was, with flattering words, saying, 'Be merciful! I cannot look upon your face in these days of discontent. I cannot stand before your flame. I dread your majesty! For you are the Ombite,[21] foremost of the south; and Montu, the strong bull! Whichever town you turn your face to, you will not find your humble servant there – until I have reached the islands of the Mediterranean Sea![22] For I am afraid of your power because of those fiery words which wound me!

'Is Your Majesty's heart not appeased by these things you have done to me? While I am justly reproached, you have not smitten me as my crime deserved. Weigh (it) in the balance, reckon the weight and multiply it against me threefold! (But) leave the seed so that you may harvest it in due course. Do not cut down the plantation to its roots! Show mercy! Your terror is in my body, fear of you is in my bones!

'I do not sit in the beer-cellar; the harp is not brought for me. I eat the bread of the hungry, I drink the water of the thirsty since that (dreaded) day when you (first) heard my name. Sickness is in my bones. My head is bald, my clothes are in tatters, until Neith is appeased on my account. Long is the course you have pursued against me and your face is still set against me! It has been a year that has purged my spirit and purified your servant of his crime! So let my possessions be received into the Treasury: gold and every (kind of) precious

stone, the foremost of my horses and recompense of every kind. Send me a messenger at the double to drive away the fear in my heart! Let me go to the temple in his presence, to purify myself with a divine oath!'

His Majesty sent the chief lector-priest Padiamunnesuttawy and the army commander Pwarem. He (Tefnakht) presented him with silver, gold, clothing and every (kind of) noble precious stone. He went to the temple and praised god. He purified himself with a divine oath, saying, 'I will not disobey the king's command. I will not cast aside His Majesty's words. I will do no wrong to a mayor without your knowledge. I will act according to the king's words. I will not disobey his commands.' And His Majesty's heart was satisfied with it.

Piankhi receives final submissions and returns to Nubia

His Majesty was informed, 'Crocodilopolis has opened its gates. Metenut-province has prostrated itself. No province remains closed to His Majesty, among (all) the provinces of Upper and Lower Egypt. The west, the east and the islands in between are on their bellies through fear of him and send their tribute to where His Majesty is, like subjects of the palace.'

At dawn the following day, there came the two rulers of the south and the two rulers of Lower Egypt – the serpent-wearers[23] – to kiss the ground before the might of His Majesty. Now the petty-kings and mayors of Lower Egypt who came to behold His Majesty's glory, their legs were like the legs of women. They could not enter the palace, because they were uncircumcised and ate fish, which is an abomination to the palace. But King Nimlot entered the palace, because he was pure and did not eat fish. So three stood there and only one entered the palace.

Then ships were loaded with silver, gold, copper and clothing – everything from Lower Egypt, all the tribute of Syria, all the plants of God's Land.[24] His Majesty fared upstream, his heart joyful, all those around him shouting (for joy). West and east received the knowledge and shouted (in turn) around His Majesty. (This was) their song of jubilation:

'O respected ruler, O respected ruler,
Piankhi, respected ruler!
You return having conquered Lower Egypt.
You turned bulls into women!
Joyful is the mother who bore you,
The man who fathered you!
The Valley-dwellers praise her,

The cow that bore the bull!
You are eternal,
Your strength endures,
O ruler, beloved of Thebes!’

NOTES

1. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. III, p. 66.
2. Piankhi’s point is that, with god on his side, his army will be victorious even if it fights on the enemy’s terms.
3. i.e. the towns built on geziras/turtle-backs above the level of the Delta floodplain.
4. An ancient priestly office, associated with royal ritual.
5. A district of Hermopolis, originally a separate settlement.
6. The most important annual festival of divine kingship, celebrated at Luxor Temple.
7. Literally, ‘the southern sanctuary’, the ancient name for Luxor Temple.
8. Nimlot’s wife begs mercy from Piankhi’s wives, daughters and sisters: a plea for clemency, woman to woman.
9. Piankhi speaks in richly metaphorical and portentous tones.
10. Nimlot’s gifts were well chosen: Piankhi’s fondness for horses was evidently well known, while the sistrum – a rattle used in religious ceremonies, and usually played by women – was used in temple rituals to appease a deity; Piankhi had this scene immortalized at the top of his victory stela.
11. The circumpolar stars, which were believed to be the souls of dead kings.
12. A name for the district around Memphis.
13. The sanctuary of the god Ptah in the heart of Memphis.
14. Group of nine deities, worshipped at Heliopolis.
15. Probably the sacred lake in the temple of Ra at Heliopolis.
16. A mound in the temple of Ra at Heliopolis, worshipped as the original island of creation.
17. The offering of white livestock and white liquid symbolized purification.
18. An unknown garment.
19. A shrine within the temple of Ra at Heliopolis which contained the sacred *benben*-stone, possibly a meteorite, which was worshipped as a sacred symbol of the sun-god.
20. Piankhi is referring to himself.
21. An epithet of Seth, god of confusion.

22. Literally, ‘the Great Green’.
23. i.e. those who claimed kingship.
24. A source of exotic produce to the south of Egypt, perhaps modern coastal Sudan, Eritrea or Arabia.



Part Three

HYMNS



Religion dominates our modern view of ancient Egypt, yet purely religious writings (as opposed to texts inscribed in sacred contexts, on the walls of temples and tombs) are not dominant in the record. The genre of ‘hymn’ is conveniently applied to a variety of ancient Egyptian religious texts composed for a range of settings. Some hymns were undoubtedly written to precede or accompany specific rites (Text 3.1), while others may have served as interludes in longer ceremonies (perhaps Text 3.3). Some hymns had a specific audience in mind and are overtly propagandistic (Text 3.4) while others may have constituted acts of private worship (Text 3.2). Other texts, labelled by modern scholars as hymns, may have been designed primarily as extended captions, written counterparts to the accompanying depictions of ritual on tomb and temple walls.

In ancient Egypt, as in many other ancient and modern cultures, there was no clear division between hymns and prayers. However, all the texts included here as hymns share certain characteristics. All were composed to be read aloud. Their style is explicitly recitational, employing devices such as repetition and metre to hold an audience’s attention. As befits religious writings in general, and hymns in particular, they are often very formulaic, and all feature heightened language and imagery (ranging from the loving to the gruesome), far removed from the vernacular. The language is also rich in metaphor, a particular feature of ancient Egyptian writings.

Two of the hymns selected here praise the king: the Fifth Dynasty Cannibal Hymn expresses the king’s magical power over the gods, while the Twelfth Dynasty Cycle of Hymns to Senusret III celebrates the monarch’s earthly authority. The other two hymns praise the gods: two of Egypt’s chief deities, the sun-god Ra and the mother-goddess Hathor, in the case of the Eleventh Dynasty hymn, and the solar Orb (Aten) in the case of the Great Hymn composed in the Eighteenth Dynasty reign of Akhenaten.

Despite the radical theology of the Great Hymn to the Orb – which dispenses with Egypt’s age-old polytheism in favour of the worship of a single deity – it is

no less a product and expression of court culture and may have been written by the king himself. A royal milieu is characteristic of the other texts, too: the Cannibal Hymn is likely to have been recited at the funeral or interment of the king, the Cycle of Hymns at a royal accession or coronation ceremony, while the Hymns to Ra and Hathor are a private expression of royal devotion to the monarchy's divine protectors.

The four hymns span a period of a thousand years. Although written for different settings and occasions, they thus represent a remarkably enduring tradition of textual composition.

1

The Cannibal Hymn

*The so-called Cannibal Hymn is the best-known of the Pyramid Texts (cf. Text 7.1) and one of the most famous writings from the whole of ancient Egyptian religion. First attested in the pyramid of Unas (*c. *2350–2325 BC), the last king of the Fifth Dynasty, the hymn may already have been very ancient by the time it was written down. Certainly, its imagery strikes the modern reader as primitive. It is possible that it provoked a similar reaction among the ancient Egyptians; for, although the hymn was reused in the funerary monument of King Teti (*c. *2320 BC), it subsequently fell out of the approved canon of royal Pyramid Texts. Several centuries later, it was included in two private pyramids of the Middle Kingdom, by which time it had already been significantly re-edited to become Spell 573 of the Coffin Texts (cf. Text 7.2); some of its phraseology also survived in other Coffin Texts.*

The hymn makes abundant use of metaphor, and its complex imagery and wordplay are resonant of esoteric religious knowledge. These features present major challenges to modern translation and understanding. Composed, in all likelihood, to be recited at a particular point of the royal funeral rites, the hymn is best understood as a mythologization of butchery ritual. The sacrifice of a bull was a key element in many Egyptian religious ceremonies. In the Cannibal Hymn, it is the gods who are butchered, cooked and eaten by the king, so that he may absorb and deploy their powers to assist him in his resurrection and apotheosis after death.

The sky clouds over, the stars are cloaked
The vaults[1] (of heaven) quake, the bones of the earth tremble
The planets[2] are silenced
When they see Unas rise as a soul
As a god who lives on his fathers, who feeds on his mothers.

For Unas is a possessor of cunning, whose own mother knows not his name.[3]

Unas's nobility is in heaven, his power is in the horizon
Like Atum his father, his begetter.
While he fathered him, he is stronger than him.
The spirits of Unas are around him, his female spirits[4] are under his feet;
His gods are above him, his serpents are on his topknot,
Unas's lead serpent is on his brow – the one that sees into the soul, the scorching uraeus;[5]
Unas's neck is in its correct position.
For Unas is the bull of heaven, who rages in his heart and lives on the being of every god,
Who feeds on their organs when they come with their bodies full of magic from the Isle of Fire.[6]

Unas is equipped: he has gathered his spirits.
Unas is risen as a great one, a possessor of acolytes.
He sits with his back to Geb.
Unas: he judges alongside Hidden-is-his-name[7]
On the day of slaughtering the firstborn.
Unas is a possessor of offerings who ties the rope,
Who makes his gifts himself.

For Unas eats people, lives on the gods,
A possessor of tribute who issues commands.
It is the grasper of topknots who is in Kehau[8] who lassoes them for Unas.
It is the rearing serpent who guards them for him, who repels them for him.
It is the willow-worker who binds them for him.
It is Khonsu, the lord-slayer, who cuts their throats for Unas, who cuts out for him what is in their bellies.
He is the messenger who is sent to punish.
It is Shesmu who cuts them up for Unas,
Makes meals from them in his dinner-cauldrons.

For Unas eats their magic, swallows their spirits.
Their great ones are for his morning meal.
Their middle ones are for his dinner,
Their little ones for his night meal.

Their old males and females are for his fuel.
It is the great ones of the northern sky who lay a fire for him,
For the contents of the cauldrons – the legs of their elders.
For those who are in heaven serve Unas.
They scrape out the pots for him with their women's legs.

For he has traversed the two heavens in their entirety,
He has travelled (around) the Two Riverbanks.[9]
For Unas is a great power, a power among powers.
Unas is the hawk, the hawk of hawks.
Whatever he encounters on his way, he eats it whole.
Unas's place is at the forefront of all the nobles who are in the horizon.
Unas is a god, firstborn of the firstborn.
Thousands serve him, hundreds offer to him.
The status of a great power was given to him by Orion, father of the gods.

For Unas has risen again in heaven, he is crowned as lord of the horizon.
He has smashed vertebrae and spines.
He has plucked out the hearts of the gods.
He has eaten the Red (Crown) and swallowed the Green.
Unas feeds on the lungs of the wise
And satisfies himself by living on (their) hearts and their magic.
For Unas, he dislikes licking the coils which are in the Red,[10]
But is content when their magic is in his belly.

The nobility of Unas will not be taken from him,
For he has swallowed the knowledge of every god.
The lifetime of Unas is everlasting, his limit is eternity,
In his privilege[11] of doing as he likes, not doing what he does not like,
Within the limits of the horizon for ever and ever.
Lo, their power is in Unas's belly, their spirits are in the presence of Unas
As food for the gods, roasted for Unas from their bones.
Lo, their soul is in the presence of Unas, their shadows (taken) from their (divine) owners.
For Unas is risen among them who are risen, enduring (among them who are) enduring.
Those who do evil deeds shall not have power in Unas's favourite place among the living in this land for ever and ever.

NOTES

1. Literally, ‘bows’.
2. Literally, ‘wanderers’.
3. In ancient Egyptian belief, to know someone’s name was to have power over them.
4. The Egyptian term *hemsut* denotes the female equivalent of the *ka*.
5. The uraeus, or rearing cobra, was worn as a symbol of royal protection, spitting fire at the king’s enemies.
6. A region of the eastern sky where, according to ancient Egyptian religion, the sun-god Ra was born.
7. i.e. an unnamed god.
8. An unknown location, perhaps mythical.
9. A term for Egypt.
10. An obscure reference to the curly protuberance on the front of the Red Crown, the regalia worn by the monarch as king of Lower Egypt.
11. Literally, ‘nobility’.

2

Hymns to Ra and Hathor

*This pair of hymns is inscribed on a stela of the Eleventh Dynasty king Wahankh Intef II (*c. *2070–2020 BC) from his tomb at Thebes (the stela is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). The hymn to the sun-god Ra, preceded by the customary offering formula, is written in six horizontal lines across the upper part of the stela. The hymn to Hathor, who was believed to reside in the Theban hills, is written in nine vertical columns of hieroglyphs in the lower right-hand corner of the stela. In the lower left-hand corner, Intef II is shown standing, presenting offerings of beer and milk to the two deities.*

The hymn to Ra is addressed to the setting sun, while Hathor is praised as the goddess of the western sky (in addition to her role as goddess of music). Both hymns therefore draw an explicit connection with the West, place of sunset and land of the dead: entirely appropriate for a funerary stela.

More surprising, perhaps, is the lack of any autobiographical information, given Intef II's long reign and his considerable success as a military leader in the civil war against rival northern rulers. There are no battle honours, no paeans of victory, no claims of sovereignty. Instead, Intef chose for his funerary monument two poetic hymns expressing his piety towards his divine parents: the original creator-god Ra and the archetypal mother-goddess Hathor. The verses seem to suggest a deep personal piety, even a human frailty, and a fear of death lying behind the visage of a great war leader.

Hymn to Ra

Will you depart, pray, father Ra, before you commend me?
Will the sky clothe you, pray, before you commend me?
Commend me to night and those who are in it,
So as to find me among those who honour you, O Ra:
Those who worship you at your rising,

Who lament at your setting.
May night enfold me, may darkness shelter me,
According to your command, O Ra.
I am your deputy; you made me a possessor of life to whom no death comes.
Entrust (me) to the evening hours:
May they protect me.
Entrust (me) to early morning:
May it put its protection around me.
I am a nursling in the early morning;
I am a nursling in the evening hours,
Born at night, whose life is made [in darkness],
Who fears the herds with turned-back horns.[1]
(But) the anger of your eye[2] is my protection;
You find me as a reward … [3]

Hymn to Hathor

O assembled elders of the western sky,
O assembled gods of the western sky,
O overlords of the shores of the western sky
Who rejoice at Hathor's coming,
Who love to see her beauty exalted:
I let her know, I say at her side that I rejoice at seeing her!
My hands gesture 'Come to me, come to me'.
My body speaks, my lips repeat: 'Pure sistrum-playing[4] for Hathor,
Sistrum-playing a million times, because you love the sistrum;
A million of sistrum-playing, for your spirit in every place.'
I am the one who makes the worshipper waken the sistrum for Hathor
Every day and at every hour she wishes.
May your heart be content with the sistrum,
May you proceed in perfect satisfaction,
May you rejoice in life and joy
Together with Horus[5] whom you love,
Who eats with you from your offerings,
Who feeds with you from your provisions.
May you count me (in) for it, every day!

The Horus Wahankh, revered before Osiris, the son of Ra, Intef the Great, born of Neferu.

NOTES

1. This reference is obscure; some sort of malign presence seems to be indicated.
2. The hieroglyphs could also be read ‘raising of your eye’. However, the angry eye of Ra was, in Egyptian mythology, a powerful force for defending the king against his enemies, so the translation given here seems fitting.
3. The final signs are missing, making the last sentence difficult to interpret.
4. The sistrum (see Text 2.3, n. 10) was closely associated with Hathor in her role as ‘lady of music’.
5. i.e. the king.

3

Cycle of Hymns to Senusret III

*Hymns were composed to honour not just deities but also the reigning monarch, as this cycle of hymns from the Twelfth Dynasty reign of Senusret III (*c. *1836–1818* BC*) demonstrates. It is preserved in a single copy on papyrus, found in an archive at the pyramid town of Kahun in the Fayum. (The papyrus is now in the collection of University College London.) The manuscript probably dates from the time of the work's composition. Indeed, the layout of the text, with hymns 2–6 arranged in discrete lines, much like modern poetry, suggests that the papyrus may have been the actual libretto used at the oral performance of the hymns, perhaps on the occasion of the king's accession or coronation.*

After a general introduction giving Senusret III's names and titles, the first hymn praises the king for the safety he brings to Egypt: the primary duty of any Egyptian monarch. The second hymn is a song of rejoicing at the king's accession, while the third hymn praises the king for his many qualities. The fourth hymn celebrates the king's accession and looks forward to a glorious reign. The fifth and sixth hymns are very poorly preserved and have been omitted from this translation.

The second, third and fourth hymns employ an anaphoric pattern, with the same group of words beginning each line. The scribe wrote the anaphoric phrase just once, at the beginning of the first line, indenting each subsequent line by the length of the anaphora to indicate that the phrase was meant to be repeated.

The language of the first hymn finds close echoes in the Semna inscription (Text 8.2) commissioned for the same king later in his reign. This suggests that stock phrases were developed by the royal court and approved by the king for use in various official inscriptions throughout his reign.

Introduction

The Horus ‘Divine of forms’, the Two Ladies ‘Divine of births’, the Golden Horus who has come into being, the Dual King Khakaura, the son of Ra Senusret: he has seized the Two Lands[1] with justification.

Hymn 1

Hail to you, Khakaura, our Horus ‘Divine of forms’,
Who protects the land, who extends its borders,
Who suppresses foreign lands with his crown,
Who brings together the Two Lands in his embrace,
[Who subdues foreign] lands with his hands,
Who kills Bowmen[2] without wielding a club,
Who shoots the arrow without drawing the bowstring,
Whose dread strikes down the Tribesmen in their own land,
Whose terror kills the Nine Bows,[3]
Whose slaughter dealt death to thousands of Bowmen
[Who had come] to attack his border,
Who shoots the arrow like Sekhmet
When he overthrows thousands who ignore his power.
His Majesty’s tongue confines Nubia,
His speech scatters the Asiatics.
Unique and powerful god who fights for his border
Without letting his underlings weary themselves,
Who lets the elite rest until daybreak.
His troops in their slumber: his heart protects them.
His commands have established his borders;
His words have pulled together the Two Riverbanks!

Hymn 2

How joyful are the gods: you have augmented their offering-loaves.
are your [people]: you have made their borders.
are your [forefathers]: you have increased their shares.
is Egypt in your might: you have protected the old ways.
is the elite in your counsel: your power has seized wealth [for them].
are the Two Riverbanks in your dread: you have extended their

possessions.

are your levied troops: you have made them flourish.

are your elders:[4] you have made them young.

are the Two Lands in your strength: you have protected their walls.

Refrain: Horus who extends his border, may you live eternally![5]

Hymn 3

How great is the lord for his town:

He is one in a million; (how) little are thousands of other people!

He is a dyke that holds back the river's floodwaters.

He is a cool room that lets every man sleep until daybreak.

He is a rampart with walls of copper from Sinai.

He is a refuge whose grasp never fails.

He is a shelter that rescues the fearful from his enemy.

He is a shade in the inundation season, cool in the summer-time.[6]

He is a warm corner, dry in the winter-time.[7]

He is a mountain that hinders the storm when the sky rages.

He is Sekhmet to his enemies when they encroach on his border.

Hymn 4

He has come to us to seize the land of Upper Egypt, with the double-crown united on his head.

and united the Two Lands; he has joined the Sedge and the Bee.[8]

and ruled the Valley;[9] he has impaled the Desert[10] on his horn.

and protected the Two Lands; he has pacified the Two Riverbanks.

and nourished Egypt; he has driven away its troubles.

and nourished the elite; he has allowed the people to breathe freely.

and trampled the foreign lands; he has smitten the Tribesmen who ignored his terror.

and guarded his border; he has protected the victim of robbery.

and ushered in[11] a state of reverence that his sword-arm maintains[12] for us,

so that we might nurture our children and bury our elders on the mountain.

NOTES

1. Upper and Lower Egypt.
2. A general designation for the semi-nomadic inhabitants of Egypt's desert borderlands.
3. A term denoting the traditional enemies of Egypt.
4. Literally, 'revered ones'.
5. Literally, 'may you repeat eternity'.
6. Literally, 'harvest season'.
7. Literally, 'growing season'.
8. Symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt, respectively, used to write the title 'Dual King' (literally, 'he of the sedge and bee').
9. Literally, 'the black land', referring to the dark alluvial soil of the Nile floodplain.
10. Literally, 'the red land'.
11. Literally, 'his arms having won'.
12. Literally, 'brings'.

4

The Great Hymn to the Orb

*Early in his reign, the Eighteenth Dynasty king Amenhotep IV (*c. *1353–1336 BC) changed his name from Amenhotep (‘Amun is content’) to Akhenaten (‘Effective for Aten’), signalling a profound change of religious emphasis – replacing veneration of the state god of the New Kingdom, Amun, with the worship of the sun’s visible orb, Aten. The relocation of the capital city to a virgin site in Middle Egypt named Akhetaten, ‘Horizon-of-the Orb’ (modern Amarna), and the promulgation of a radical new art style were further elements of Akhenaten’s bold new vision.*

At the core of all the king’s changes was his personal credo. Referred to in contemporary accounts as the ‘Teaching’, it found its fullest expression in a hymn, possibly composed by the king himself. The Great Hymn to the Orb deliberately used the vernacular language of the day rather than the classical forms of earlier generations. Direct and requiring little interpretation, even for a modern readership, it has been called ‘one of the most significant and splendid pieces of poetry to survive from the pre-Homeric world’.[1] *It is certainly a masterpiece.*

The majority of the hymn deploys a series of colourful images to extol the creative power of the Orb and stress its uniqueness. The closing lines emphasize that the only path to salvation lies through Akhenaten and the members of his family, especially his principal wife Nefertiti. Orb-worship, or ‘Atenism’, was thus essentially a private religion of and for the royal family; mere mortals could hope to share in the Orb’s blessings only indirectly, by worshipping the monarch. For all its radicalism, Akhenaten’s bold new religion was still fundamentally autocratic.

The hymn’s rapturous tone and exultant imagery exerted a profound influence on later religious authors, not least the Jewish psalmists. (Scholars have noted the similarity of Psalm 104 to certain passages in the hymn.) Its careful reproduction in the tombs of Akhenaten’s high officials, as a public gesture of

loyalty to the regime, ensured its survival. The fullest version, translated here, is inscribed in large hieroglyphs in thirteen vertical columns in the tomb of Ay, who served as 'fanbearer at the king's right hand, master of the horse of His Majesty, confidant throughout the entire land, the favourite of the Perfect God and God's Father'. Ironically, after the death of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, Ay – first as lieutenant to Tutankhamun, then as king himself – was one of the key figures behind the rejection of Orb-worship and the restoration of orthodox religion.

You shine forth in beauty on the horizon of heaven,
O living Orb, the creator of life!
When you rise on the eastern horizon,
You fill every land with your beauty.
Beautiful, great, dazzling,
High over every land,
Your rays encompass the lands
To the limit of all that you have made.
For you are the sun, you have reached their limits,
You subdue them for your beloved son.
You are distant (yet) your rays are upon the earth.
You are in (every) face (yet) your movements are unseen.

When you set on the western horizon,
The earth is in darkness, in a state of death.
Nights are spent in bedrooms, heads covered;
One eye does not behold the other.
If all their belongings were stolen from under their (very) heads,
They would not know.
Every lion comes out of his den;
Creeping things bite.
Darkness spreads, the earth is silent,
For the one who made (it) has set on his horizon.

The earth is bright when you rise on the horizon,
And shine as Orb of the daytime.
You dispel the darkness
When you send out your rays.
The Two Lands are in festival,
Awake and standing on their feet,
(For) you have raised them up.

Their bodies are cleansed and clothed,
Their arms are (raised) in adoration at your appearing;
The whole earth sets out to work.

All the herds are at peace in their pastures;
Trees and plants grow green;
Birds fly up from their nests,
Their wings in praise of your spirit.
All flocks leap on their feet.
Everything that flies and alights,
They come to life when you rise (for) them.
Ships fare downstream and upstream alike,
(For) every route is open when you appear.
Fish in the river leap in your presence.
Your rays are in the midst of the sea.

(You are) the one who makes foetuses come into being in women,
Who makes (bodily) fluids in people,
Who nourishes the son in his mother's womb
And pacifies him by stopping his tears.
Nurse in the womb,
Who gives breath to bring life to all he has made
When it descends from the womb to breathe
On the day of its birth.
You open its mouth completely
And supply its needs.
When the chick is in the egg,
Chirping (from) within the shell,
You give it breath within
To give it life.
When you have made his due day to break out of the egg,
He comes out of the egg to chirp on his due day
And walks on his two legs when he comes out.

How manifold are your deeds,
Though hidden from sight,
Sole god, apart from whom there is no other!
You created the earth according to your desire, when you were alone:
All people, cattle, and flocks,

All upon earth that walk on legs,
All on high that fly with wings,
The foreign lands of the Levant and Kush,
The land of Egypt.
You put every man in his place;
You supply their needs.
Everyone has his food, and his allotted lifespan.
Their tongues differ in speech, their characters likewise.
Their skins are different, because you made the foreigners distinct.
You create the inundation in the underworld
And you bring it forth as you desire
To let the common people live,
Just as you made them for yourself.
Their Lord of All, who wearies himself for them,
The lord of every land who rises for them,
The Orb of the daytime, great in majesty.
All far-off lands, you make them live (too).
You have placed an inundation in the sky
That it might descend for them[2]
And create waves upon the mountains, like the sea,
To irrigate their fields in their locality.
How effective are your plans, O lord of eternity:
An inundation in heaven which is for the foreigners
And all foreign creatures that walk on legs;
And an inundation which comes from the underworld for Egypt.

Your rays nurse every pasture;
When you rise they live and prosper for you.
You made the seasons to foster everything of your making:
Winter to cool them, heat that they might taste you.
You made the distant heaven to shine in it,
To see all you have made.
Unique, risen in your being as the living Orb,
Manifest, shining, distant (yet) near.
You make millions of beings from yourself, who are one:
Cities, towns, fields, the river’s course.
Every eye observes you directly,
For you are the Orb of the daytime above the earth.
You have journeyed so that every eye might exist.

You create their faces
So that you might not see [your]self [as] your sole creation.

You are in my heart.
There is none other who knows you,
Only your son, Neferkheperura,[3] Ra's only one,
You have informed him of your plans and your might.

Everyone who has passed by since you founded the earth,
You have raised them for your son,
The one who has come from your body,
The Dual King who lives on Truth,[4] the Lord of the Two Lands,
Neferkheperura, Ra's only one,
The son of Ra who lives on Truth, the lord of appearances,
Akhenaten, great in his lifetime;
And the King's Great Wife, whom he loves,
The Lady of the Two Lands,
Nefer neferuaten[5]-Nefertiti, living and youthful for ever and ever.

NOTES

1. John L. Foster, 'The New Religion', in Rita E. Freed, Yvonne J. Markowitz and Sue H. D'Auria (eds), *Pharaohs of the Sun: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, Tutankhamen* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), p. 99.
2. i.e. as rain.
3. The throne-name of Akhenaten.
4. Akhenaten's favoured epithet, 'who lives on Truth', has been much commented upon; it recalls the imagery of the Cannibal Hymn (Text 3.1), suggesting that the king fed on Truth in order to absorb its power.
5. Nefertiti's praenomen means 'beautiful is the beauty of the Orb'.



Part Four

LAMENTATIONS



The Middle Kingdom, rightly regarded as the golden age of ancient Egyptian literature, was also a period of tensions and contradictions. The Twelfth Dynasty was one of the most stable royal lines ever to rule Egypt, and did so with an iron fist; yet it faced internal dissent at the outset and the persistent threat of a Nubian invasion. The kings of the Twelfth Dynasty consciously harked back to their Old Kingdom predecessors, adopting the royal pyramid as a symbol of legitimacy; yet the dynasty was of non-royal origins and came to power in a probable *coup d'état*. Egypt displayed a new-found confidence at home and abroad, nurturing a dazzlingly sophisticated court culture and widening its sphere of influence from the eastern Mediterranean to the Upper Nile; yet the regime relied on surveillance and repression to maintain its grip on power. This extraordinary environment proved especially fertile for the literary imagination.

Keenly aware of the preceding period of political fragmentation and civil war, and of its own vulnerability, the Twelfth Dynasty royal court nurtured a fascination for the darker side of life. Some of its most famous writings deal explicitly with the precariousness of civilization and the dangers of unrest – topics that had hitherto been (and would subsequently return to being) off-limits in official discourse. The texts are generally presented as monologues or dialogues and are reflective and pessimistic in tone. Here, they have been termed 'lamentations', as they lament the vicissitudes of life.

The two selected writings are thought to date from the Twelfth Dynasty, The Words of Khakheperraseneb (Text 4.1), from its latter years, and The Dialogue of a Man and His Soul (Text 4.2) from a few decades earlier. Both are powerfully expressive reflections on inner turmoil: Khakheperraseneb addresses himself to his unresponsive heart, while the anonymous man debates with his soul on the merits of life and death. Both texts thus explore the breakdown between the rational and the emotional – mirroring, by extended metaphor, the eternal struggle between Order and Chaos that lay at the heart of the ancient Egyptians' world-view. When Order was displaced, the world was turned upside down; only once a balance had been restored could creation flourish. In the same

vein, an internal imbalance is presented as the source of personal grief. By exploring and reconciling the antagonism, the texts allow the audience to achieve their own inner peace.

1

The Words of Khakheperraseneb

*An early Eighteenth Dynasty (*c. *1500 BC) writing-board from Thebes, now in the British Museum, preserves what is assumed to be the complete or almost-complete text of The Words of Khakheperraseneb; some lines also survive on an ostracon.*[1] *The date of composition has been placed, through linguistic analysis, in the late Twelfth or possibly early Thirteenth Dynasty (eighteenth century BC); it cannot in any case predate the reign of Senusret II (1842–1837 BC), whose throne-name, Khakheperra, forms part of the protagonist's name.*

Arranged in three paragraphs, the text is a lament addressed to the speaker's unresponsive heart. In ancient Egyptian belief, the heart was the seat of the will and of emotion; a breakdown in communication between a man and his heart was hence the source of great distress. Since the words are put into the mouth of a speaker explicitly associated with the settled period of the Twelfth Dynasty, the torment they convey may have been conceived of as internal and subjective – a product of the man's own heartache – rather than a reflection of external, societal turmoil. Although the Twelfth Dynasty was a period of strong central government, the character of its rule was far from benign; the tension between outward stability and inner conflict is explicitly addressed in this powerful and reflective work.

The narrator begins by lamenting his inability to put his despair into words. Only by doing so will he be able to find relief, yet the right words seem to fail him. The dense wordplay on the word 'speak'/'speech' conveys his frustration. In the second section, the narrator describes the distress he feels in vivid language and in cosmic terms: what has happened is not the fault of the gods, but part of the eternal struggle between Order and Chaos. He cannot comprehend the world's suffering and his heart's unresponsiveness merely compounds his misery. In the third section, he expands on the disconnect between himself and his heart, hoping to gain his heart's sympathy and support. Poetry is thus presented as a means of reconciliation and, indeed, the final words of the text seem to suggest a

hopeful outcome in which the man and his heart will be restored to their proper relationship.

The collection of words, the gathering of phrases, the searching out of utterances with an inquiring mind, made by the priest of Heliopolis, Seni's son Khakheperraseneb, called Ankhu. He says: If only I had unknown utterances and exotic phrases in a new language that does not pass away, free from repetition, without a (single) phrase of tired speech (that has already been) spoken by the ancestors! I will squeeze out what is in my body to strain out all my words. For what has (already) been said can (only) be repeated; what has been said has been said. It is no boast (to say) of the ancestors' words that their descendants find them (still useful). (Yet) no speaker has spoken: let one who will speak, speak and another find what he will say useful!

Nobody has yet spoken (in a way that will be) repeated again afterwards, like they used to in olden days. This is not speaking (merely) what is planned to be spoken: that is searching after ruin, that is Falsehood; nobody will remember his name to others. I have spoken in accordance with what I have (actually) seen. From the first generation to those who come after, they have (all) passed away. If only I knew what others do not, what is not yet repeated, I would say it, my heart would answer me and I would tell it of my pain. I would unload onto it the burden which is on my back, the phrases that afflict me. I would express to it my heartfelt pain and I would then say 'Ah!' from relief.

I am thinking about what has occurred,
the things that have occurred throughout the land.
Changes are happening; it is not like last year.
Each year is more burdensome than another.
The land is in confusion and has become injurious to me.
It has been made …
Order has been ejected, while Chaos is in the council chamber.[2]
The affairs of the gods are confounded, their orders neglected.
The land is in suffering, mourning (is) everywhere,
town and country are in woe, everyone alike is subjected to wrongdoing.
Respect is shunned, the lords of silence are violated.
Morning still comes around every day,
but the face shrinks from what occurs.
I shall give voice to these things.
My limbs are burdened, I suffer in my heart.
It is painful, yet I hide my feelings about it.

Another heart would show respect:
A brave heart amidst suffering is a support for its owner.
If only I had a heart that understood suffering!
Then I would rest on it, burden it with words of misery,
and cast my pain aside onto it.

He says to his heart:
Come, my heart, that I may speak to you,
and you shall answer my phrases;
you shall explain to me what is happening throughout the land,
how the brightest have been cast down.
I am thinking about what has occurred:
misery has installed itself today,
a morning when strangers have not left.
Yet everyone is silent about it;
the entire land is in an extreme state.
Nobody is free from wrongdoing;
everyone alike is doing it.
Hearts are sad.
The commander is in the same position as the commanded,[3]
yet their hearts are content.
One must awaken to it every day;
minds cannot shrug it off.
Yesterday's share of it is just like today's,
for everyone conforms to it out of apathy.
There is no one wise enough to understand;
there is no one angry enough to protest.
One awakens to pain every day.
My suffering is long and heavy.
The poor man has not the strength to defend himself against the more powerful.
Silence towards what is heard is (like) a contagion,
but it is painful to answer the ignorant,
and contradicting an opinion creates enemies.
The mind does not accept the Truth.
There is no patience with the reply to an opinion:
all a man loves is his own words.
Everyone is crooked to the core;
honest speech has been forsaken.

I speak to you, my heart, so that you shall answer me.
A heart which is touched cannot be silent.
Look, the lot of the servant is like the master's,
and many things are burdensome for you!

NOTES

1. Flake of stone or shard of pottery used as a writing surface.
2. The word *maat*, translated here as 'Order', also conveyed the sense of truth and justice; *isfet* ('Chaos') similarly embraced the notions of evil and unrighteousness.
3. To the ancient Egyptian way of thinking, one of the most profound expressions of Chaos was the breakdown or reversal of the rigid social hierarchy.

2

The Dialogue of a Man and His Soul

*This remarkable work is preserved on a papyrus from Thebes dating to the second half of the Twelfth Dynasty. It may have been composed only a few decades earlier (*c. *1850* BC*). At least half a sheet, perhaps more, is missing from the beginning of the manuscript; the remaining text comprises 155 lines out of a probable original 190.*

The poem takes the form of a dialogue between a man contemplating death and his soul. In ancient Egyptian belief, the ba*, translated as 'soul', referred to the aspect of someone's personality that survived death. One of the ironies inherent in the text is that the soul should praise life, while the living man extols death; the man sees death as a blessing, while his soul sees it as painful and irreversible. Both man and soul accept the transitory nature of life and the reality of the afterlife; they differ, not in their beliefs but in their attitudes to death. The text thus explores the contrasting views of death as expressed in the official discourse and in people's more private fears. In its cynicism, its rich imagery and its focus on internal angst and alienation, the work has affinities with The Words of Khakheperraseneb (Text 4.1) and other compositions of the Middle Kingdom.*

At the start of the preserved text, the man, weary of life, urges his soul to stand by him. But his soul interrupts and argues that life should be valued. There follows an intense argument, the man warning the soul of dire consequences should it abandon him and the soul telling two parables to illustrate the wretchedness of death. Where the man has spoken of death as 'a harbour', the soul uses the metaphor of a shipwreck. The man's images of a blessed afterlife are countered with images of despair. In reply, the man recites four litanies to justify his point of view. In the first, a series of hyperbolic images describe how his life 'stinks'; in the second, the state of society in general is cast in wretched terms; in the third, the tone changes from despair to hope, the man presenting death as a release and a relief; and in the fourth, he extols the blessed afterlife

as a consummation devoutly to be wished. The work ends with a final speech from the soul in which the two protagonists are reconciled and they look forward to life and death together.

Through a myriad of literary forms and a wealth of imagery, The Dialogue of a Man and His Soul explores death and attitudes to death in all their contradiction and complexity. It is arguably the masterwork of ancient Egyptian literature.

… several lost and fragmentary lines …

I opened my mouth to my soul to answer what he had said:
'This is too much for me today; my soul does not agree with me.
It is beyond exaggeration: my soul departing is akin to ignoring the problem!
He should stand up for me in this matter, my companion who pushes his life away!
He will not be allowed to thwart me, since he is enmeshed with my (very) body.
He will not escape on the Day of Suffering.
Look, my soul leads me astray, even though I do not listen to him;
Pulls me towards death, even though I have not yet come to it;
Throws me on the fire to burn me up!
What is his suffering …
[That he should turn] his back on his [companion]?
He should be near me on the Day of Suffering,
He should stand on yonder side[1] like one who rejoices:
That is how to proceed and arrive there safely.
O my soul, (who is) foolish to downplay the misery of life,
Who drags me towards death, even though I have not yet come to it!
Make the West[2] pleasant for me! Is this suffering?
Life is a transitory state: trees fall.
Trample on Evil, cast my misery aside!
May Thoth, who appeases the gods, judge me!
May Khonsu, who writes the Truth, defend me!
May Ra, who steers the barque, hear my words!
May the god of the scales[3] defend me in the Judgement Hall![4]
For my need is heavy, (the burden) he has placed on me.
It would be sweet relief if the gods were to rid my body of its difficulties!'

What my soul said to me: ‘Are you not a man?
So, you are alive, but to what end?
You should ponder life, as a possessor of riches!’

I said: ‘I have not passed on yet, but that is not the point!
Indeed, *you* are the one leaping away – (to a place where) you will not be cared for
And (where) every criminal will say, “I will seize you!”
When you die, but your name lives on,
Yonder is a place of alighting, of security for the mind.
The West is a harbour to which the alert are (safely) rowed.
If my soul listens to me, without wrongdoing,
His mind in accordance with mine, he will flourish.
I will make him reach the West, like someone in a pyramid
Whose burial an heir[5] has attended.
I will make an awning for your corpse
That will make another lost soul envious!
I will make an awning that will not be too cold,
That will make another scorched soul envious!
I will drink water at the river’s edge and erect a gazebo
That will make another hungry soul envious!
But if you drag me towards death in this way,
You will find nowhere to alight in the West.
Be patient, my soul, my brother,
Until an heir exists who will make offerings,
Who will attend the tomb on the day of burial
And transport the bier to the necropolis!’

My soul opened his mouth to me, to answer what I had said:
‘If you think about burial, it is heart-breaking, tearful, miserable!
It is taking a man away from his home
And casting him upon the high ground!
You will not go out again and see the sun.
Those who built in granite achieved works – beautiful pyramids, beautiful works –
So that their builders should become gods.
(Yet) their altars have been destroyed
Like the lost (souls) who have perished on the shore for want of an heir,
When the waves have taken their toll

And the sunlight likewise,
To whom (only) the fish at the water's edge speak.
Listen to me! Look, it is good to listen to people!
Be happy and forget all cares!'

The soul's first parable

'A commoner ploughs his plot.
He loads his harvest into a boat
And tows it along, for his feast-day draws near
And he has seen the darkness of a north wind coming on.
He keeps watch in the boat
As the sun sets,
Then gets out with his wife and children;
And they perish by a pool
Encircled at night by crocodiles.
He ends by sitting down and crying out,
"I do not weep for that one who was born,[6]
Although for her there is no leaving the West
To be on earth again;
But I think about her children,
Broken in the egg,
Who saw the face of the Crocodile[7] before they had really lived." '

The soul's second parable

'A commoner asks for (his) meal.
His wife says to him, "Wait until supper!"
He goes outside for a moment's relief.
When he turns back to the house, he is like another (man).
His wife pleads with him, but he does not listen to her;
He is offended and unyielding to the (other members of the) household.'

The man's first litany

I opened my mouth to my soul, to answer what he had said:
'Look, my name stinks,
look, more than the smell of carrion

on summer days when the sky is hot.
Look, my name stinks,
look, (more than) a catch of eels
on a catch-day when the sky is hot.
Look, my name stinks,
look, more than the smell of birds,
more than a covert of reeds full of waterfowl.
Look, my name stinks,
look, more than the smell of fishermen,
more than the creeks of the marshes they have fished.
Look, my name stinks,
look, more than the smell of crocodiles,
more than sitting under a bank full of crocodiles.
Look, my name stinks,
look, more than a married woman
about whom salacious lies are told.
Look, my name stinks,
look, more than a healthy child
about whom it is said, “He belongs to someone who hates him.”
Look, my name stinks,
look, more than a harbour of the sovereign
that utters sedition behind his back.’

The man’s second litany

‘To whom can I talk today?
Brothers are bad;
Today’s friends do not care.
To whom can I talk today?
Minds are greedy;
Every man steals his fellow’s belongings.
(To whom can I talk today?)
Mercy has perished;
Sternness has descended upon everyone.
To whom can I talk today?
There is contentment with badness
While goodness is cast aside everywhere.
To whom can I talk today?

He who should enrage another with his bad deed
Makes everyone laugh with his evil crime.
To whom can I talk today?
Plunder is rife;
Every man robs his fellow.
To whom can I talk today?
The wrongdoer is a friend
While the close brother has become an enemy.
To whom can I talk today?
Yesterday is not remembered;
No one helps him who gave help then.
To whom can I talk today?
Brothers are bad;
One resorts to strangers for honesty.
To whom can I talk today?
Faces are blank;
Every man's face is downcast against his brothers.
To whom can I talk today?
Minds are greedy;
Nobody's heart can be depended upon.
To whom can I talk today?
There are no righteous people;
The land is abandoned to the unrighteous.
To whom can I talk today?
Friends are lacking;
One resorts to a stranger to complain to.
To whom can I talk today?
No one is content;
The person one used to walk with, he is no more.
To whom can I talk today?
I am weighed down with misery
For want of a friend.
To whom can I talk today?
Wrongdoing afflicts the land;
There is no end to it.'

The man's third litany

‘Death is in my sight today
(like) the recovery of a sick man,
like going outside after detention.
Death is in my sight today
like the smell of myrrh,
like sitting under an awning on a breezy day.
Death is in my sight today
like the smell of lotus-blossoms,
like sitting on the shore of drunkenness.
Death is in my sight today
like a well-watered path,
like a man coming home from an expedition.
Death is in my sight today
like the sky’s clearing,
like a man grasping what he did not know before.
Death is in my sight today
like a man’s longing to see home
after spending many years in captivity.’

The man’s fourth litany

‘Surely he who is there[8] will be a living god,
punishing the deed of the wrongdoer.
Surely he who is there will stand in the barque,
distributing choice cuts of meat from it to the temples.
Surely he who is there will be a wise man
who, when he speaks, cannot be prevented from appealing to Ra.’

What my soul said to me:
‘Throw lamentations over the fence,
My partner, my brother!
May you make offerings upon the brazier
And fight for life as you have said.
Love me here (and now), having set aside the West,
but still desire to reach the West
When your body is laid in earth.
I will alight when you are weary,
And we will reach harbour together!’

So it is, from start to finish, as found in writing.[9]

NOTES

1. i.e. in the afterlife.
2. The land of the dead.
3. Isdes was the god of the plumb-bob which ensured the accuracy of the Scales of Judgement.
4. Literally, ‘the sacred chamber’.
5. Literally, ‘a survivor’.
6. i.e. his wife.
7. Khenty is one of several crocodile-gods revered in ancient Egypt.
8. i.e. in the afterlife.
9. The standard colophon written at the end of a copy of a text.



Part Five

LEGAL TEXTS



Much of the surviving documentary evidence for the ancient Egyptian legal system is in the form of contracts: donations to temples and guarantees of income for individuals and their mortuary cults (see Text 8.8). A few records of trials and judgements are preserved on papyri, ostraca and tomb walls, providing insights into the judicial process. A third category of text comprises documents that reveal the workings of the law through its application to decision-making, whether royal (Text 5.1) or private (Text 5.2).

At its most fundamental, ancient Egyptian law was based upon the concept of *maat* – a complex term, variously translated as truth, justice, or order. It was the king's primary duty to uphold *maat*, and all royal decrees and decisions were cast as expressions of created order. In practice this meant that the king's word was not only the law, but also divinely sanctioned and thus unquestionable. None the less, the emphasis on *maat* also meant that Egyptian law stressed equality for all: rich and poor, male and female. Both the texts selected here reflect the underlying concept of *maat*, the Edict of Horemheb (Text 5.1) explicitly in its preamble and in its focus on stamping out abuses of the system by those in positions of authority, the Will of Naunakht implicitly by the fact that it was drawn up by a woman confident of her right to dispose of her property as she wished.

No comprehensive legal code has survived from ancient Egypt, although the Edict of Horemheb suggests that one may have existed. At the very least, records would have been kept of royal decrees and of previous cases and judgements, so that subsequent decisions could be based upon legal precedent. Throughout the pharaonic period, the king was the ultimate judicial authority and could enact laws and issue pardons by decree. In practice, he delegated authority to the vizier, whom anyone with a grievance had the right to petition, even if gaining access must have been difficult in practice.

Courts are attested from the Old Kingdom. Each town had its own court consisting of local councillors, so that there was little difference between administrative and judicial authority. Boundary disputes and matters of land

tenure probably constituted the majority of cases brought before the courts, although ordinary people might pursue recourse to judicial decision in criminal and civil cases, notably divorce and inheritance (Text 5.2). In all cases, court proceedings were recorded by scribes. Committing decisions and important transactions to writing gave them not only legal effect, but also status and permanence.

1

The Edict of Horemheb (extracts)

*After the radicalism of Akhenaten's reign, the last three kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty – Tutankhamun, Ay and Horemheb (*c. *1332–1292 BC) – presided over a counter-revolution designed to restore the country to its former, time-honoured state. Horemheb in particular pursued this orthodox agenda with vigour. Having persuaded his charge, the boy-king Tutankhamun, to restore the temples (see Text 8.7), Horemheb turned his attention to the legal code. He had been responsible under Tutankhamun for 'establishing the laws' of Egypt; now, on becoming king, one of his first acts was to promulgate a series of major legislative reforms, published in the form of an edict.*

The Edict of Horemheb is one of the most extensive surviving examples of pharaonic law-making. It was designed both to counteract abuses of power by agents of the state and to reinforce the security of Horemheb's own regime. While the preamble is couched in the usual lofty phraseology, the detailed measures that follow are wholly pragmatic. They paint a picture of a ruler steeped in military discipline and determined to run Egypt along similar lines.

Five of the clauses set down new penalties for misuse of authority and corruption by agents of the palace. Law-breaking by members of the armed forces is also subject to harsh penalties. Two of the clauses deal with judicial reform – a combination of purging the judiciary (on the grounds of rooting out corruption) and introducing capital punishment for local law officials found guilty of perverting the course of justice. The final measures deal with Horemheb's own personal security: one clause (not translated here) lays down new restrictions on the activities and movements of employees of the royal harem (always a locus for dissent and possible sedition), while the final clause decrees enhanced rewards for members of the king's bodyguard. By such measures, Horemheb succeeded in bringing military discipline to bear on a country weakened by three decades of political upheaval and uncertainty.

The language of the clauses is typically legalistic: precise and somewhat laboured.

Preamble

His Majesty determined to protect every land in its entirety … to drive out chaos and destroy falsehood. His Majesty's plans are an effective refuge which drives away the aggressor … For His Majesty is constantly watchful, seeking what is most effective for Egypt … So he took up the scribal palette and the papyrus roll and committed to writing everything His Majesty said. The king himself declared, as an edict:

Regarding the requisitioning of boats on government service

As for every boat which is taxable with regard to the offering-halls of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – [if anybody comes and] seizes a boat belonging to any member of the army or anybody in this entire land, let the law be applied against him by cutting off his nose and sending him to Tjaru.[1]

Regarding the requisitioning of servants

As for any servant of the storeroom of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – about whom it is heard that he is requisitioning (people) to pick saffron; and whom another comes to report saying, 'My male or female servant was taken away on such and such a day': let the law be applied against him by cutting off his nose and sending him to Tjaru.

Regarding the seizure of hides

The two regiments of the army, when they are in the field – one in the southern region, the other in the northern region – have been seizing hides throughout the entire land, without ceasing for a single year … going from house to house with beatings and duckings, not leaving a single hide for anyone … [So that] when the Overseer of Cattle of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – goes to carry out the nationwide cattle census … no hide is found in their possession, with the result that they default, even though they put their trust in the explanation 'They were taken from us!' This is a case of cowardice … one should not act thus … As for any member of the army about whom it is heard that he is still to this day going about taking hides, let the law be applied against him with corporal punishment

of a hundred blows and five open wounds and by confiscating the hide he took by theft.

Regarding the provisioning of the royal progress

Now as for another case of wrongdoing which one hears about in the land, the fact that the agents of the queen's estate and the temple bureaucrats of the harem-palace are going after town mayors, oppressing them and looking for things for the (progress) downstream and upstream: … this is a case of cowardice. My Majesty has ordered that no one should be allowed to act like this further from this day forward.

Regarding the tax on fodder

Likewise, those who gather fodder for the offering-halls of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – are going into the gardens of private individuals and gathering their fodder on a daily basis, saying, 'It is for the work of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health', and hence depriving these private individuals of the fruits of their labour … If one hears that they are going into any garden belonging to any member of the army or anyone in this entire land, and are gathering their fodder for the work of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – let the law be applied against (them) according to the rules, as is done to people who disobey orders.

Regarding fraudulent tax-assessors

Further, as for the baboon-keepers who are going about exacting dues in the southern region or the northern region, taking grain from citizens using the estate *oipe*-measure of 50 *hin* …[2] My Majesty has commanded that they should be ignored entirely to prevent them [committing] fraud [against] private individuals.

Regarding the administration of justice

I have restored this entire land … I have traversed it … I know it inside out. I have touched its innermost parts. I sought out people, looking for officials with good communication and (good) characters, who know how to read (people's) gut instincts, who listen (obediently) to the decrees of the King's House and the laws of the council chamber. I appointed them to judge the Two Lands and to placate those in the palace … I installed them in the two great cities of Upper

and Lower Egypt, (so that) every man could live peaceably in them, without exception. I placed instructions in front of them and (made) laws [their] daily concern … I guided them on the path of life and I led them to the right place. My instruction to them is: do not fraternize with other people, do not receive gifts from another (person).

Regarding local courts

Now as for any town mayor or any priest about whom it is heard that he sits in judgement in a local court convened for proceedings and he gives a guilty (verdict) in an innocent case, let it count against him as a serious capital offence. Behold, My Majesty has done this in order to restore the laws of Egypt …

[As for] the judges of the local court, it is the temple priests, the mayors from the country's interior and the gods' lay-priests who make up every local court as they see fit, in order to judge the citizens of every city. My Majesty has cared for Egypt in order to prosper the lives of those in it ever since he appeared on the throne of Ra. Thus local courts have been established throughout the entire land, in every city, to serve as local courts in the cities according to My Majesty's excellent plans.

Regarding rewards for the royal bodyguard

I shall observe custom concerning the protection of My Majesty … (As for the royal bodyguard) it will be like a holiday for them: every man seated with a share of every good thing – good bread, meat and cakes from the king's property – applauded for all (his) good deeds … throwing (rewards) to them from the Window[3] and summoning every man by his (own) name. It is the king himself in whose presence they will parade, shouting (acclamations), receiving provisions from the property of the royal estate, even as they continue to draw their rations from the Double Granary[4] – every one of them – of wheat and barley … I have specified the protocol of the audience-chamber, the customs of the inner palace … (with) the king's entourage in their (appointed) places and the Thirty[5] in their customary positions.

Conclusion

As long as the span of my existence upon earth continues in a stable fashion, it shall be spent making monuments for the gods. I shall be reborn (continually) like the moon. [I have done this] to make you listen to these edicts which My

Majesty has made anew, in order to govern the entire land after My Majesty recalled those cases of greed which are done throughout this land.

NOTES

1. A fortress on Egypt’s remote north-eastern frontier.
2. The *oipe* was a measure of volume equal to 18 litres; a *hin* was one-fortieth of an *oipe*, i.e. 0.45 litres.
3. The balcony of the royal palace.
4. The main granary of the Royal Treasury.
5. The senior judiciary.

2

The Will of Naunakht

Uniquely for the ancient world, women in pharaonic Egypt enjoyed a legal status equal to that of men. Wives could testify against their husbands in a court of law. Women maintained control over their own property even after marrying (property acquired jointly by a married couple belonged one-third to the wife and two-thirds to the husband). And women were free to dispose of their wealth as they wished.

This last point is amply demonstrated in the last will and testament of Naunakht, a woman of modest means who lived in Thebes in the mid Twentieth Dynasty, at the end of the New Kingdom. A remarkable and fascinating survival, the papyrus document was drawn up in the presence of fourteen named witnesses in the third year of the reign of Ramesses V; it can be dated with reasonable precision to November 1147 BC. In it, Naunakht sets out how she wishes her property to be divided after her death.

Naunakht married twice, first a scribe named Qenherkhepeshef and subsequently a tomb workman named Khaemnun, with whom she had eight children: four boys (Qenherkhepeshef, Amennakht, Maanakhtef and Neferhotep) and four girls (Wasetnakht, Menatnakht, Henutshenu and Khatanub). In many cultures (even today), all children would have an equal claim on a parent's estate. Not in ancient Egypt. Naunakht makes it very clear that she intends to leave her property to be divided among those five of her eight children who have looked after her in her old age. The other three children (Neferhotep, Henutshenu and Khatanub) she disinherits – although she cannot prevent them from inheriting their father's property. One of the three disinherited children, Neferhotep, is cut out of the will also because he has already received more than his fair share in the form of copper vessels, which he has spent. By contrast, her favourite son Qenherkhepeshef is singled out for special favour, receiving not only his (one-fifth) share of Naunakht's estate but also her single most valuable asset, a bronze washing-bowl. In between these two extremes, Menatnakht is

included in the general division of Naunakht's property, but is excluded from sharing her ration of emmer and fat which Naunakht and her husband had received from the other four children (Qenherkhepeshef, Amennakht, Maanakhtef and Wasetnakht).

About a year after the will was made, the whole family had to appear before a second legal hearing to confirm that they were content with, and would respect, the terms of the will. Naunakht, though merely a 'free woman of the land of Pharaoh', clearly knew her own mind. Her will offers fascinating insights, not only into ancient Egyptian law, but also into the dynamics of an ancient Egyptian family.

Year 3, fourth month of the inundation season, day 5 under the Majesty of the Dual King, Lord of the Two Lands, Usermaatra-sekheperenra – life, prosperity, health; the son of Ra, lord of appearances like Atum, Ramesses-amunher-khepeshef-meryamun[1] – life, prosperity, health – given life for ever and ever.

On this day, a declaration was made concerning her property by the citizeness Naunakht in the presence of this court:

– the chief workman Nekhemmut
– the chief workman Inherkhau
– the scribe of the tomb Amennakht
– the scribe Horsheri
– the draughtsman Amenhotep
– the workman Telmontu
– the workman Taa
– the draughtsman Pentaweret
– the workman Userhat
– the workman Nebnefer
– the workman Amenpahapi
– the district officer Amennakht
– the district officer Ramose
– the workman Nebnefer, son of Khonsu

She said: 'As for me, I am a free woman of the land of Pharaoh. I brought up these eight servants of yours and gave them a household – everything as is customarily done for those of their standing. But, look, I am grown old and, look, they do not care for me in turn. Whichever of them has given me a hand, to him will I give of my property; whichever has not, to him will I not give of my property.'

List of the workmen and women to whom she made gifts:

– the workman Maanakhtef
– the workman Qenherkhepeshef. She said, ‘I have given him a bronze washing-bowl as a bonus over and above his fellows and ten sacks of emmer.’
– the workman Amennakht
– the citizeness Wasetnakht
– the citizeness Menatnakht

As for the citizeness Menatnakht, she said concerning her, ‘She shall have her inheritance in the division of all my property except the (ration of an) *oipe* of emmer given to me by my three male children and the citizeness Wasetnakht and the (ration of a) *hin* of fat which they have given me in like manner.’

List of her children of whom she said, ‘They shall not share in the division of my one-third, but they shall share in the two-thirds of their father’:

– the workman Neferhotep
– the citizeness Menatnakht
– the citizeness Henutshenu
– the citizeness Khatanub

‘As for these four children of mine, they shall <not> share in the division of any of my property. And as for any property of the scribe Qenherkhepeshef, my (first) husband; and also his real estate; and also this storeroom of my father’s; and also this (ration of an) *oipe* of emmer which I received with my husband: they shall not share them.

‘And as for these eight children of mine, they shall share in the division of their father’s property in a single division.

‘And as for my copper cauldron which I gave to him[2] to buy bread for himself and the copper tool (weighing) 7 *deben* and the copper vase (weighing) 7 *deben* and the copper adze (weighing) 6 *deben* – (making) 40 *deben* in total – they shall comprise his share. He shall not share in any further copper; it shall go to his brothers and sisters.’

Made in writing by Amennakht, scribe of the Forbidden Tomb:[3]

(*in a different hand*) Year 4, third month of the inundation season, day 17: on this day there came again to the court the workman Khaemnun and his children, saying, ‘As for the documents made by the citizeness Naunakht concerning her property, they shall be exactly as prescribed. The workman Neferhotep shall not share in it.’ He made an oath by the lord, to wit, ‘If I reverse my undertaking and contest it, he (*sic*) shall be liable to a hundred blows and shall be deprived of his (*sic*) property.’

In the presence of:

– the chief workman Khau
– the chief workman Nekhemmut
– the scribe of the tomb Horsheri
– the district officer Ramose
– the district officer Pentaweret, son of Nakhtmin

(*Docket on the outside of the scroll*) Deed of declaration made by the citizeness Naunakht concerning their (*sic*) property.

NOTES

1. Ramesses V.
2. Naunakht’s son Neferhotep.
3. The pharaoh’s tomb in the Valley of the Kings.



Part Six

LETTERS



The overwhelming majority of writings to have survived from ancient Egypt are the products of the royal court and the tiny, literate elite that served it. They are written in a more-or-less formal style, use formal language and reflect the preoccupations of the ruling class: self-promotion, the maintenance of political and economic power, elevated concepts of philosophy and theology. They are the textual counterpart of the great monuments of the Nile Valley: the pyramids, tombs and temples of kings and gods. But there is another side to ancient Egyptian civilization, a largely hidden realm of the private individual, struggling against the vicissitudes of daily life in the fields and villages. There is only scant archaeological evidence for the lives and livelihoods of ordinary ancient Egyptians – very few settlements have been excavated – and the textual evidence, too, is rare: the concerns of humble citizens rarely warranted a mention in official documents.

Private correspondence has the potential to fill this gap, by giving us direct insights into the thoughts of the writers. Letters have not survived in great numbers from ancient Egypt, but those that have form a rich treasure-trove that rounds out our picture of pharaonic civilization. In a society where no more than 10 per cent of the population was literate, most people, if they wished to communicate by letter, would have had to resort to a scribe to write it for them. Only those with some education – minor officials and higher ranks – would have been able to pen letters themselves. The two groups of letters included here stem from this stratum of society, though separated by a period of 860 years.

The Heqanakht Letters, dating from the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty, conjure up the world of rural Egypt: tenant farmers, extended households living under the same roof, small-scale village concerns; but also of a thriving private economy, with complex financial arrangements of loans, profit and loss. They reflect Egyptian society in its prime. By contrast, the Late Ramesside Letters, written at the very end of the Twentieth Dynasty, show a society in decline, where crime and corruption were rife, state authority was on the wane and even the pharaoh himself was the subject of ridicule. The rise and fall of ancient

Egypt are written in these rare and precious survivors of a lost world of private correspondence.

1

Selections from the Heqanakht Letters

*The Heqanakht Letters – correspondence from a minor landowner during the early years of the Twelfth Dynasty (*c. *1930 BC) – were discovered during the 1921–22 excavation season in the Theban necropolis by an expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Altogether the documents comprise thirteen papyri – eight complete sheets and five fragments – representing five letters and a number of accounts.*

Though unremarkable in their contents, they are remarkable survivals. For in recording the daily concerns of a farmer, the documents shed light on those aspects of ancient Egyptian life that are rarely, if ever, given voice in the official record. Like farmers everywhere throughout history, Heqanakht was concerned with the management of his land, finances and also domestic matters concerning his household. In writing about these preoccupations, he reveals much information about agriculture, the private economy and family relationships in ancient Egypt. His language also reflects the colloquial usage of ordinary Egyptians, rather than the stiffer, more formal language of the royal court.

The letters seem to have been written by Heqanakht when he was away from home, on official duties connected with his service in a funerary cult in Thebes. His household, and the core of his landholdings, were some distance away at a place called Nebsyt, 'Sidder-grove', unidentified but perhaps in the region of the Fayum. Two letters are translated here.

Letter I (MMA 22.3.516), addressed by Heqanakht to the steward of his estate, Merisu, is written in cursive hieratic on a previously unused piece of papyrus, measuring 28.4cm long and 27.1cm wide. The writing, in black ink, is probably in Heqanakht's own hand. Concerned that his affairs are not being properly looked after in his absence, Heqanakht hectors his steward on matters of cultivation, rental agreements and fees, rations, complaints about the quality of grain, and personal matters connected with the household. Heqanakht comes across as bossy and irritable; he is fond of expressions such as 'watch out' and

‘don’t ignore it’. But he also shows his softer side: fondness for his son Sneferu, his ‘pride and joy’; respect for his mother Ipi; and concern for his wife who is being bullied by the housemaid Senen. This reference to domestic intrigue inspired Agatha Christie’s novel Death Comes as the End.

Letter III (MMA 22.3.518), written on pieces of reused papyrus, is addressed by Heqanakht to his superior, the overseer of Lower Egypt, Herunefer. It is written in a different hand from Letter I, suggesting that it was dictated by Heqanakht to a scribe. Perhaps Heqanakht did not feel confident in composing a letter to a person of higher rank. Certainly, the tone and language are much more formal than Letter I, opening with elaborate formulations of good wishes, although this formality is gradually abandoned towards the end of the letter, when Heqanakht’s true voice begins to come through. The subject of the letter is a request to Herunefer to provide assistance to two of Heqanakht’s colleagues, Hety’s son Nakht and Sanebniut, in recovering debts of emmer and barley that are owed to Heqanakht. Herunefer is asked to store the grain in his own estate until Heqanakht can have it collected.

Both letters are now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Egyptian letters were generally provided with two addresses, one at the beginning of the main body of text, the other written separately on the other side of the papyrus where it would be visible once the letter was rolled up and sealed.

(i) From Heqanakht to his steward Merisu – excerpts

Said by the servant of the funerary cult Heqanakht to Merisu:

As for all our land that is inundated, you are to cultivate it – take heed. All my people, as well as you. Look, I will hold you accountable for it.[1] Be extra dutiful in cultivating. Watch out[2] that my barley-seed is guarded and that all my property is guarded. Look, I will hold you accountable for it. Watch out for all my property.

…

Now, didn’t I say that Sneferu has grown up! Watch out for him. Give him an income; and greetings to Sneferu, my pride and joy,[3] a thousand times, a million times. Watch out (as) I have written. Now when my land is inundated, he should cultivate it along with you and Anubis[4] – take heed – and Sahathor.[5] Watch out for him. Send him to me after cultivating. Have him bring me two sacks of emmer together with (whatever) barley[6] you can find, but only out of your surplus revenue until you get to harvest-time. [Don’t] ignore anything I have

written to you about. Look, this is the year[7] when a man should act for his master!

…

Watch out for Anubis and Sneferu. You live by them and you die by them.[8] Watch out. Look, there is nothing more (important) with you in that house. Don't ignore it!

Now have that housemaid Senen thrown out of my house – see to it – on whatever day Sahathor reaches you. Look, if she spends a single day (more) in my house, act! You are the one who lets her do bad things to my wife. Look, how have I made it distressful for you? What did she do against you (to make) you hate her?

And greetings to my mother Ipi a thousand times, a million times. And greetings to Hetepet[9] and the whole household and Nefret.[10] Now what is this, bad things being done to my wife? Enough of it! Are you given equal rights with me?[11] It would be good if you stopped.

And have a letter brought explaining what is collected from those (debts) of Perhaa. See to it! Don't ignore it!

Address

Sent (by) the servant of the funerary cult Heqanakht to his household in Nebsyt

(ii) From Heqanakht to the overseer of Lower Egypt, Herunefer

The servant of the funerary estate and servant of the funerary cult Heqanakht says:

Your condition is life itself, a million times! May Herishef, lord of Herakleopolis, and all the gods act for you! May Ptah-south-of-his-wall sweeten your heart greatly with life and an old age! May you be revered at the last before the spirit of Herishef, lord of Herakleopolis!

Your servant here speaks to inform your honour[12] – life, prosperity, health – that I have had Hety's son Nakht and Sanebniut come about that barley and emmer which is there. What your honour – life, prosperity, health – should do is to have it collected, without letting it get muddled up, if you please.[13] Now, after collecting it, it should be placed in the house of your honour – life, prosperity, health – until it is come for.

…

And let there be no neglect concerning Nakht or anything he comes to you about. Look, he is the one who sees to all my things.

Address

The overseer of Lower Egypt, Herunefer

NOTES

1. Literally, ‘I will count it against you’.
2. Literally, ‘Exert yourself’.
3. Literally, ‘the foremost of my body’.
4. Heqanakht’s younger brother.
5. The household scribe and field-hand.
6. A particular kind of emmer and a particular kind of barley are designated.
7. The phrase ‘this is the year’ seems to have been the ancient Egyptian equivalent of ‘now is the time’.
8. Literally, ‘You die with them as you live with them.’
9. Heqanakht’s aunt or older sister.
10. Heqanakht’s daughter.
11. Literally, ‘Are you given with me as my sharer’.
12. Literally, ‘your literateness’.
13. Literally, ‘as your goodness, health and life’.

2

Late Ramesside Letters

Illicit excavations on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes in 1817 and 1818 uncovered a cache of papyri at the site of Deir el-Medina, the village of the workmen who built the tombs in the Valley of the Kings during the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties (1539–1069 BC). Many of the papyri had been reused and the texts that now covered their surfaces turned out to be examples of private correspondence between officials of the Egyptian state, written during the last few years of the reign of Ramesses XI (1099–1069 BC). These late Ramesside letters shed fascinating light on the decline and fall of the New Kingdom, as witnessed at first hand by the men and women caught up in events.

The end of the Ramesside Period was a sorry time for Egypt in general and Thebes in particular. The authority of the state was in terminal decline. Egypt faced insurrections in Nubia, attacks by marauding Libyan tribes and the disintegration of law and order throughout the land. After nearly two decades on the throne, and in a last-ditch and ultimately futile attempt to restore his beleaguered authority, Ramesses XI – the last of the New Kingdom pharaohs – announced a 'renaissance'. The nineteenth year of his reign was renamed 'Year 1 of the Renaissance', but it was no rebirth. The parlous state of the nation is revealed in the four letters translated here, which are dated to Year 10 of the Renaissance (i.e. the twenty-eighth year of Ramesses XI's reign, c. *1072–1071 BC).*

The first letter, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (number 197, III), was written by an unnamed army commander to the scribe of the Theban necropolis Tjaroy. It reveals where true power lay in late Ramesside Egypt – with the military. Although, in theory, the army still owed allegiance to the king, in practice it served its own interests. State officials took their orders from army commanders, not from the vizier or civilian officials.

The second and third letters (Papyri Berlin 10487 and 10488) belong to a group of three papyri which were found tied together. They are from the same sender – another (or perhaps the same) anonymous army commander – to three different recipients: the aforementioned scribe of the necropolis Tjaroy, the agent Payshuweben and the priestess Nedjmet. Once they had been read, they were evidently gathered up and bundled. All three letters contain an identical set of instructions, revealing the tactics used by military juntas throughout history to enforce their rule: interrogations and disappearances, in this case to be enforced against two policemen who have apparently been speaking inconvenient truths. The letter to Tjaroy also contains an extraordinary passage, unparalleled in ancient Egyptian writing, in which the writer shows his disdain for the king. Not only does the army commander doubt his sovereign's ability to reconquer rebellious Nubia, he even questions the king's position at the head of Egyptian society. While official texts brooked no opposition to royal authority, some private individuals clearly thought differently and were even prepared to put such heretical thoughts in writing.

The fourth letter, now in the British Museum (Papyrus BM 10375), is from two foremen of the Theban necropolis, Butehamun and Kar, to the Viceroy of Kush, Paiankh. In the extract translated here, the writers confirm that they have carried out the viceroy's order to identify a tomb in the royal necropolis and guard it ready for his return. There can be no doubt as to Paiankh's motive: tomb-robbery. With the active complicity of the very men charged with protecting the royal necropolis, the military authorities in late Ramesside Thebes systematically plundered the Valley of the Kings in order to finance their state-within-a-state. Pharaonic authority had reached rock bottom and had no further to fall. It may be no coincidence that this letter was rolled up very tight before it was sent, perhaps to hide its incendiary contents from prying eyes.

All four letters were written in ink, in cursive hieroglyphs, on papyrus of a fairly standard width (between 21 and 24.5cm), the length varying according to the length of the letter.

(i) From the army commander to the scribe Tjaroy

The commander of the army of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – to the scribe Tjaroy:

I have noted every matter you wrote to me about.[1] You wrote, 'I have accomplished every commission and all the commands of my lord which were assigned to me. I am not idle.' So you said. What you have done has been done

promptly; you shall do likewise from now on. When my letter reaches you, you will accomplish every commission and will carry out all my commands which are assigned to you. Don't let me find fault with you; note this well.

Address

The commander of the army of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – to the scribe of the necropolis Tjaroy

(ii) From the army commander to the scribe Tjaroy

The commander of the army of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, heath – to the scribe of the necropolis Tjaroy:

I have noted all the matters you wrote to me about. (As for) what you wrote about this affair of the two policemen,[2] namely, 'They said these things': join up with Nedjmet, and Payshuweben as well; have them send and bring these two policemen to the house and get to the bottom of these matters promptly. If they are found to be true, you shall put them (i.e. the policemen) [in] two baskets and have them thrown [into] the water at night – but don't let anyone in the land find out!

Another matter: as for Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health[3] – how will he ever vanquish this land (i.e. Nubia)? And as for Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – whose superior is he anyway?

Now in these past three months, while I have provided a barge, you have not sent me a single *deben* of gold or a single *deben* of silver. Do it promptly! Don't worry about what he has done. As soon as my letter reaches you, you will obtain a *deben* of gold or a *deben* of silver and send it to me by barge.

Address

(*added when the letter was subsequently forwarded*)

The agent of the army commander Payshuweben to the scribe of the army commander Qenkhnum[4]

(iii) From the army commander to the agent Payshuweben

The commander of the army of Pharaoh to the agent Payshuweben:

I have noted all the matters you wrote about. (As for) what you wrote about this affair of the two policemen, namely, ‘They said these things’: join up with Nedjmet, and the scribe Tjaroy as well. Send and have these two policemen brought to my house and get to the bottom of these matters promptly. (Then) kill and throw them [into] the water at night – but don’t let anyone in the land find out!

(iv) From the foremen Butehamun and Kar to the Viceroy of Kush – excerpt

(To) the fan-bearer on the king’s right hand, royal scribe, army commander, high priest of Amun-Ra [king of the gods], Vice[roy] of Kush, overseer of southern foreign lands,[5] overseer of the granary of the Granaries of Pharaoh, [leader of the] troops of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – [from] the two foremen, the scribe of the [necropolis] Buteh[amun and the guardian Kar] …

… Now see, you wrote saying, ‘Open a tomb among the tombs of yesteryear and guard its seal until I come back.’ So said our lord. We are carrying out the commands. We will ensure you find it set aside and prepared – the place in question. (But) you should order the scribe of the necropolis Tjaroy, to have him come and look for a marker for us – because when we walk about, we get lost and don’t know where we’ve (already) been.

May Amun-Ra king of the gods do for you everything good and may you lack nothing!

I am writing to inform our lord via the policeman of the necropolis Hadnakht, in the first month of the harvest season, day 29.

Address

The commander of the army of Pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – from the captains of the necropolis

NOTES

1. This seems to have been a common way of beginning a letter, signalling receipt of previous correspondence and confirming that appropriate actions had been taken.
2. The Egyptian term *medjay* originally referred to a nomadic tribe from the Eastern Desert, employed as scouts and guards by the early New Kingdom rulers. The word subsequently came to mean ‘policeman’, without specific ethnic connotations.

3. Given the disdain of the writer towards the pharaoh, the inclusion of the customary epithets – life, prosperity, health – may seem somewhat ironic. However, it is likely that use of the epithets in conjunction with the word ‘Pharaoh’ had become so ingrained as to be automatic, even when the pharaoh was no longer a figure of respect.
4. Tjaroy evidently handed his letter to the agent Payshuweben, who forwarded it, along with his own letter from the army commander (number iii), to Qenkhnum.
5. i.e. Nubia.



Part Seven

MORTUARY TEXTS



Ancient Egypt is often thought of as a civilization obsessed with death. Many of its most impressive monuments – pyramids, tombs, mortuary temples – and its most iconic classes of object – coffins, shabti figurines, canopic jars – are funerary in nature. Even if the preferential survival of burials over houses, of cemeteries over villages, gives a distorted picture of the ancient Egyptians' priorities, there can be no doubt that the desire for rebirth in the afterlife was powerfully felt and that proper preparation for one's final journey was considered an essential investment (although see Text 9.1 for a more sceptical view).

Just as important as the physical infrastructure of the tomb and its contents were the texts specially composed to aid the deceased beyond the grave. The oldest religious verses to have survived from ancient Egypt – indeed from any civilization – are the Pyramid Texts, inscribed inside royal tombs of the Old Kingdom to assist the king in his rebirth and transfiguration. As the prospect of an afterlife was opened up to a wider section of the population, so the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts were transformed into the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts and ultimately into the New Kingdom Book of Coming Forth by Day (better known as the Book of the Dead).

Although distinct in their underlying theology, these three sets of mortuary texts, spanning a thousand years of belief, have much in common. Their orational style reflects the ancient Egyptian view that speaking words made them effective; hence the pronouncement of mortuary texts – by priests, visitors to the tomb, or even the deceased himself – was considered essential. In terms of the imagery of the texts, death and rebirth are characterized as dangerous transitions, full of perils, obstacles and unpleasantness which can only be overcome with the appropriate magical formulae. Despite all their hopes for the afterlife, the ancient Egyptians could not escape the natural human fear of death and its many unknowns.

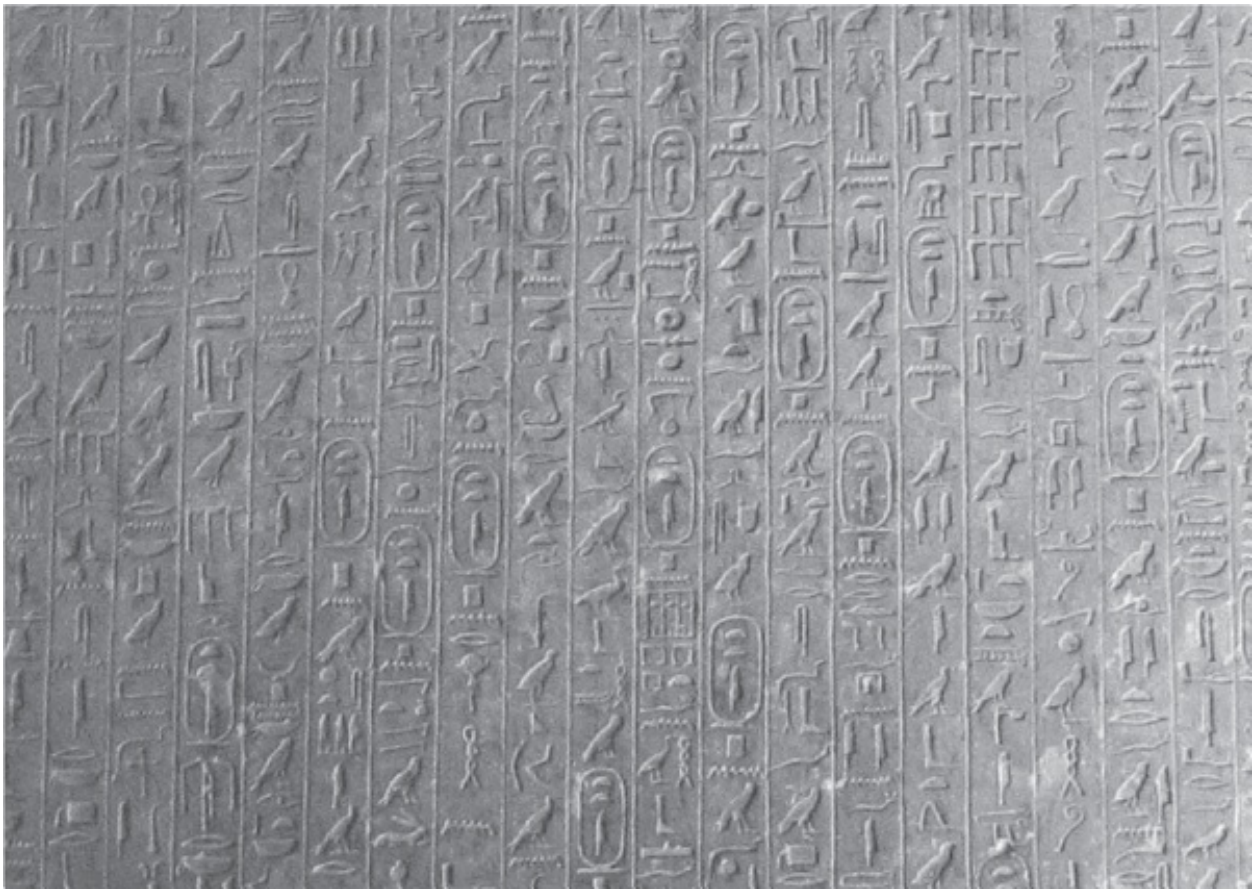
1

From the Pyramid Texts: The King Becomes a Star

Carved on the walls of the interior chambers and corridors of nine royal pyramids of the late Old Kingdom,[1] *the Pyramid Texts comprise the oldest body of religious writing from ancient Egypt. They are a diverse group of hymns, incantations and spells, composed to assist the deceased king in his resurrection, ascension to the sky and admission into the company of the gods. Some deal with purification and aspects of the funerary rites; some are in the form of spells to protect the king against specific dangers; others speculate on the realm of the gods and the king's ultimate destiny. Altogether the corpus contains 759 distinct utterances; the oldest group, carved in the pyramid of Unas, comprises 228; many of these were reused in later pyramids, but some were discarded and new ones added as religious beliefs evolved.*

The utterances vary greatly in length, but all seem to have been written for oral recitation: they are characterized by bold rhythms and the repetition of key phrases. The tone of many of the texts is threatening, even bullying, with the king haranguing the gods into granting him a blessed afterlife; they seem to reflect a period of absolute monarchy and absolute certainty about the king's power.

It is possible that some of the more 'primitive' texts (e.g. Text 3.1) had been passed down orally and were already old by the time they were written down in the Fifth Dynasty. The earliest Pyramid Texts reflect a belief in an astral afterlife among the circumpolar stars, which pre-dates the Pyramid Age belief in a solar afterlife in the company of Ra. Later utterances illustrate the rise of the cult of Osiris, whose popularity as a god of the dead began only in the Sixth Dynasty.



Pyramid Texts (Wikimedia Commons)

An example of this latter tradition is Utterance 442, translated here. It is carved on the west wall of the sarcophagus chamber in the pyramid of Pepi I. Although it deals with the king's ascension to heaven as a star (reflecting an early strand of afterlife beliefs stretching back to the very beginning of pharaonic civilization), it makes explicit references to Osiris and the Osiris-myth, thus absorbing a new strand of theology into an ancient system of belief.

Utterance:

This great one is fallen on his side; he who is in Nedyt[2] is cast down.
Your arm is taken by Ra, your head is lifted up by the two enneads.[3]
Behold, he has come as Orion;[4] behold, Osiris has come as Orion,
Lord of wine at the *wag*-festival.[5]
'Perfect one,' said his mother; 'Heir,' said his father.
Conceived by heaven, born of the underworld:
Heaven conceived you together with Orion;

The underworld bore you together with Orion.
Whoever lives, lives by the gods' commands: you shall live!
You shall set forth with Orion in the eastern part of heaven;
You shall descend with Orion in the western part of heaven.
Making three of you is Sirius,[6] pure of thrones:
She is your guide on the goodly paths of heaven,
In the Field of Reeds.[7]

NOTES

1. The pyramids of the last king of the Fifth Dynasty (Unas), the four main kings of the Sixth Dynasty (Teti, Pepi I, Merenra and Pepi II), three queens of Pepi II, and a king of the Eighth Dynasty (Ibi).
2. Mythical location where Osiris was slain by his brother Seth; the sentence includes a play on words between the place Nedyt and the verb *nedi*, 'to cast down'.
3. i.e. all the gods.
4. The god Sah, conventionally translated as 'Orion', may in fact have been Rigel, one of the constituent stars of Orion, rather than the entire constellation.
5. An annual festival named after the ululation (*wag*) that accompanied the rites.
6. Sirius, the dog star, was worshipped as the goddess Sopdet from earliest times; the heliacal rising of Sirius coincided with the start of the annual inundation of the Nile, and was celebrated as New Year's Day in the ancient Egyptian calendar.
7. The Field of Reeds (akin to the Classical Elysian Fields) is a concept strongly associated with the Osirian model of the afterlife: an agricultural idyll where the deceased could live an eternal life of fertility and abundance.

2

From the Coffin Texts

The collapse of the centralized Old Kingdom state and the ensuing period of political fragmentation, known as the First Intermediate Period (2125–2010 BC), ushered in a revolution in ancient Egyptian religion. Beliefs and practices that had previously been the preserve of the king and his closest relatives spread to a wider section of the population. The result was the so-called 'democratization of the afterlife' which brought to ordinary people the promise of a life after death in the company of Osiris.

One manifestation of this profound change was the selection and adaptation of the royal Pyramid Texts for use in private burials, where they were joined by a raft of newly composed spells. The resulting Coffin Texts, which were generally written in cursive hieratic script on the inside of coffins, conjure up an afterlife full of magic and danger, as the deceased navigates through the winding waterways of the underworld to join Osiris in the Field of Reeds. In the Coffin Texts, Osiris is transformed from a dead king and lord of the underworld into a judge of the dead. The deceased, having passed the final judgement, is explicitly identified with Osiris. But older threads of belief remain: an astral afterlife in the company of the circumpolar stars, or a solar afterlife journeying with Ra across the heavens.

The selection of spells translated here demonstrates this dizzying combination of religious traditions that is so characteristic of the Coffin Texts. Spell 3, a description of Judgement Day, presents an entirely Osirian view of the afterlife, while Spell 19, designed to grant the deceased divine status, hedges its bets, offering an afterlife with Ra or Osiris. In Spell 53, spoken by Osiris's sister-wife Isis, the deceased is associated with the Indestructible (circumpolar) Stars, although Osirian imagery dominates. Spell 77 recounts the creation myth of Heliopolis, in which the great ennead (group of nine deities) is brought into being: Atum brings forth his own seed through masturbation, then spits out a son and a daughter, Shu and Tefnut; they produce a second generation of deities,

Geb and Nut, who in turn produce four offspring, Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys. Spell 224, for not walking upside down in the land of the dead (apparently one of the greatest fears associated with the afterlife), is a direct precursor of Chapter 189 of the Book of the Dead (see below, introduction to Text 7.3); it illustrates the long-term survival of many of the Coffin Texts in later compilations.

(i) Spell 3: Judgement Day

Hey, N![1] Take your staff, your loincloth and your sandals and go down to the court, so that you may be true of voice against your enemies, against those who would act against you, male or female, and those who would cast judgement before you on this happy day in the court!

(ii) Spell 19: The deceased is assured of divine status

Hey, N! You are a god and you shall be a god. You shall have no enemies or hangers-on, (either) with Ra who is in heaven or with Osiris the great god who is in Abydos.

(iii) Spell 53: Isis speaks to the deceased

Awake to life! Look, the earth is bright! Nephthys[2] has favoured you, you who are renewed daily at night-time. You are with the Indestructibles,[3] the gods who are in the sky, who are given as followers of your barque for ever and ever. Anubis is gladdened by it, Khnum is gladdened by it. The sky is lit up, the earth rejoices, (and) all the gods are joyful when N appears in peace in the goodly West.[4] Nephthys has favoured you, so you will not lose your abode of joy. Alas, my husband and my brother:[5] he rules in the necropolis and I am not with him! I command those who are in the great hall and who are heartbroken for their husbands: come, let us weep for Osiris, because he is far away from us! Rise, rise in the early morning, you mummy! For you are far away from your abode. Nephthys has favoured you so you shall not lose your abode of life – of life!

(iv) Spell 77: The birth of the gods

I am this soul of Shu in the blast of fire which Atum begat with his hand. He created orgasm and fluid fell from his mouth.[6] He spat me out as Shu together with Tefnut, who came forth after me – the great ennead, the daughter of Atum

who shines[7] upon the gods. I was appointed to it as the son and daughter of Nut[8] – she with the braided hair who bore the gods. This I am.

(v) Spell 224: Spell for not walking upside down in the land of the dead

Spell for not walking upside down in the land of the dead.

Spoken by N: I will <not> walk upside down for you. Indeed, I walk on my feet. I will not walk upside down for you. I walk like Horus, striding like Atum. My tomb is like a transfigured spirit's. I walk like one who is among the transfigured spirits who open up the gods' mounds.

NOTES

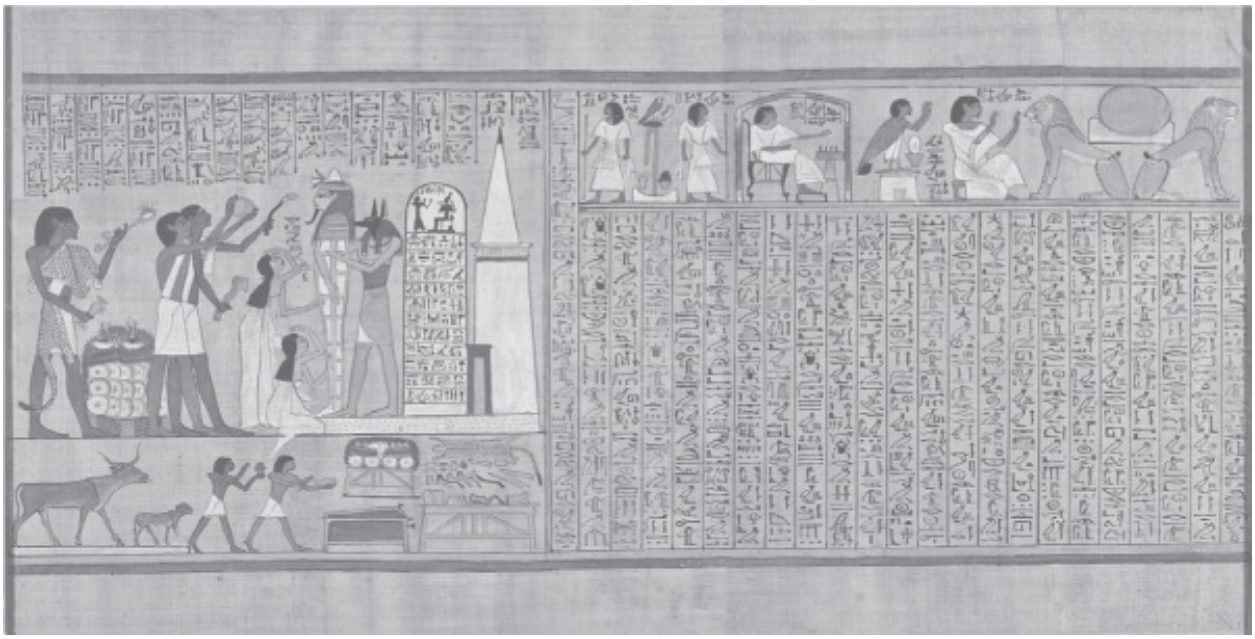
1. Here, as in other Coffin Texts, the name of the deceased would be inserted to personalize the spell.
2. The goddess Nephthys (ancient Egyptian Nebet-hut, 'lady of the mansion') was the sister of Isis; together the two sisters were believed to protect the deceased and assist him in his journey to join their brother Osiris.
3. The circumpolar stars.
4. i.e. the land of the dead.
5. Isis speaks directly of Osiris.
6. The reference is to the creator-god Atum fathering the first generation of deities (Shu, god of heat and light, and Tefnut, goddess of moisture) by masturbating and then spitting out his progeny.
7. There is a play on words between *pesdjet* 'ennead' and *pesdjet* 'who shines'.
8. Here the spell skips two generations and identifies the deceased with the divine couples (Osiris and Isis, Seth and Nephthys) who were born of the earth-god Geb and the sky-goddess Nut.

3

From the Book of the Dead

From the New Kingdom onwards, mortuary texts were generally produced in the form of portable illustrated manuscripts (generally of papyrus, occasionally of linen or vellum), although some continued to be inscribed on coffins or on the walls of tombs. The earliest surviving funerary papyri date to the mid-fifteenth century BC and they swiftly became an essential item of equipment, placed in the tomb to help the deceased navigate the dangers of the underworld and reach a blessed afterlife.

The texts are composed of individual chapters or spells. The total corpus numbers nearly two hundred, although no papyrus contains a complete set; rather, each compilation reflected the personal choice of the scribe or client. Some spells are ancient formulae, others are new compositions. Chapter 23, for the opening of the mouth, reflects a funerary ritual dating back to the Old Kingdom or earlier; Chapter 6, the shabti spell, first appears in the Coffin Texts; while Chapter 125, the declaration of innocence, reflects the particular preoccupations of New Kingdom religious beliefs. Among the stranger spells are Chapter 36 ('for repelling a beetle'), Chapter 40 ('for repelling him who swallowed an ass'), Chapter 53 ('for not eating faeces or drinking urine in the realm of the dead'), Chapter 76 ('for being transformed into any shape one may wish to take') and Chapter 153B ('for escaping from the catcher of fish)'. Others range from the sublime Chapter 179 ('for leaving yesterday and coming into today') to the ridiculous Chapter 189 ('for preventing a man from going upside down and from eating faeces').



Book of the Dead of Hunefer (Wikimedia Commons)

Although modern scholars have dubbed these magico-religious compositions the Book of the Dead, the ancient Egyptians called them the Book of Coming Forth by Day, since their purpose was to enable the eternal soul of the deceased to leave the tomb and enjoy a free-spirited afterlife.

Three of the most famous spells are translated here. Chapter 6, the so-called shabti spell, reflects the concept of an agricultural afterlife and the associated hardships. For the Egyptians, life on the land meant an unending round of ploughing, sowing, harvesting, irrigation works and repairs to field boundaries after the annual inundation. They imagined an afterlife in the Field of Reeds in the same vein and were anxious to avoid such back-breaking work for all eternity. The solution was the shabti (the Egyptian word means 'answerer'), a small statuette which would come alive in the tomb and answer for the deceased, acting as his or her substitute when the call came to perform manual labour. From the New Kingdom onwards, shabtis were commonly inscribed with Chapter 6 and depicted with agricultural implements in their hands, ready for action. They are among the commonest objects from later Egyptian burials.

Chapter 23, a spell to be recited at the opening of the mouth, is a theological elaboration of an ancient mortuary ritual. To enable a dead person to 'breathe' again in the afterlife, the funerary priest, or the heir in charge of the burial, would symbolically 'open the mouth' of the deceased, by holding a special implement of flint or meteoric iron against the face of the mummy. The spell includes many of the deities most closely associated with death and the afterlife

at different periods of Egyptian history: Ptah, god of Memphis and of craftsmen, who was often syncretized with Sokar, an ancient underworld deity; Thoth, the scribe of the gods, who noted down the result of the last judgement, when the heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of Truth; Seth, who assisted the passage of the sun-god through the underworld by fending off the serpent Apep; Atum, the dying sun-god who set in the west every evening; Shu, god of heat and light; Sekhmet, goddess of war and pestilence; and Orion, whom the king expected to join in the astral afterlife envisaged in the earliest Pyramid Texts.

Chapter 125, the declaration of innocence (also known as the negative confession), reflects the theology that came into fashion after the Old Kingdom, namely that, in order to achieve a blessed afterlife in the company of Osiris, the deceased first had to pass a last judgement – before Osiris himself – in which his or her deeds would be assessed. The spell is in the form of a declaration by the deceased, addressed to Osiris and his forty-two fellow judges in the Judgement Hall. The deceased declares that he/she has not committed a long list of sins, before asserting his/her purity and then repeating the list of sins not committed, each addressed to a different judge. Like the maxims in the Teachings of Ptahhotep and Ani (Texts 11.1 and 11.6), the list of transgressions provides vivid insights into the seamier side of daily life in ancient Egypt. In common with every society, past or present, ancient Egypt was evidently a place where poor men were deprived of their property, servants were slandered to their masters and people slept around, cheated and stole. There are several known variants of Chapter 125, with slightly different combinations of sins and judges. The one translated here is from the funerary papyrus of Nebseni, now in the British Museum.

(i) Chapter 6: The shabti spell

Spell for making a shabti do work in the afterlife:

O shabti allotted to me, if I am summoned or if I am assessed to do any work which has to be done in the afterlife, or if obstacles are put in your way when you are as a man at his duties, you shall assign yourself to me every time the fields are to be fertilized, the banks irrigated, or sand ferried from east to west. ‘Here I am!’ you will say.

(ii) Chapter 23: The opening of the mouth

Spell for opening the mouth of N:

My mouth is opened by Ptah and the bonds in my mouth have been loosened by my local god. Thoth comes indeed, full and ready with magic. The bonds of Seth which constricted my mouth have been loosened. Atum has driven them off and has cast off the constraints of Seth.

My mouth is opened, my mouth is forced apart by Shu with that iron[1] knife of his, with which he forced apart the mouths of the gods. I am Sekhmet, I sit beside her – she who dwells in the sky's storm-wind. I am Orion the Great who dwells among the souls of Heliopolis.

As for any magic or any spell spoken against me, the gods – yea, the entire ennead – will stand up against it!

(iii) Chapter 125: The declaration of innocence

What should be said upon arriving at this Hall of Truth,[2] purging N of all the wrongdoings he has committed and beholding the faces of the gods:

Hail to you great god, Lord of Truth! I have come before you, my lord, so that you may bring me to see your beauty. For I know you, I know your name, I know the names of the forty-two who are with you in this Hall of Truth – who live on those who nurture evil and gorge themselves on their blood on that Day of Reckoning in the presence of Wennefer![3]

Behold the twofold son of the musician-goddesses: Lord of Truth is your name. Behold I have come before you, I have brought you Truth, I have driven away Falsehood for you.

I have not done people wrong.
I have not impoverished my fellows.
I have not done wrong in the Place of Truth.
I have not learned false things.[4]
I have not done evil.
I have not, on any day, made extra work beyond what was due to be done for me.
I have not caused my name to become tainted as a slave-master.
I have not deprived a poor man of his property.
I have not done what the gods abhor.[5]
I have not slandered a servant to his master.
I have not caused pain.

I have not created hunger.
I have not caused tears.
I have not killed.
I have not given orders to kill.
I have not created suffering for anyone.
I have not diminished the food-offerings in the local temples.
I have not destroyed the gods' loaves.
I have not taken away the spirits' food.
I have not slept around.[6]
I have not fornicated.
I have not reduced provisions.
I have not committed fraud.[7]
I have not encroached upon (others') fields.
I have not interfered with the weights of the hand-scales.
I have not disturbed[8] the plummet of the standing-scales.
I have not taken milk from the mouths of children.
I have not deprived herds of their pastures.
I have not snared the birds in the gods' reserves.
I have not caught the fish in their marshlands.
I have not diverted water in its due season.
I have not dammed fast-flowing water.
I have not extinguished the flame.
I have not neglected the (proper) dates for (offering) choice cuts (of meat).
I have not held back cattle from the god's offerings.
I have not opposed a god in his procession.

I am pure, pure, pure, pure! My purity is the purity of the great heron[9] who is in Herakleopolis, because I am indeed the nose of the lord of the wind, who gave life to all the common people on that day when he restored the Sacred Eye[10] in Heliopolis, on the last day of the second month of the growing season, in the presence of the lord of this land. I am the one who witnessed the restoration of the Sacred Eye in Heliopolis; no evil shall occur against me in this land, or in this Hall of Truth, because I know the names of these gods who are in it!

O Far-Strider who came forth from Heliopolis, I have not done wrong.
O Fire-Embracer who came forth from Kheraha, I have not stolen.
O Nosey[11] who came forth from Hermopolis, I have not been greedy.
O Shadow-Swallower who came forth from the cavern, I have not robbed.
O Terrible who came forth from Rosetjau, I have not killed a person.

O Double-Lion who came forth from the sky, I have not destroyed food-offerings.
O Eyes-on-Fire who came forth from Letopolis, I have not acted crookedly.
O Burning who came forth backwards, I have not robbed the gods' possessions.
O Bone-Breaker who came forth from Herakleopolis, I have not told lies.
O Green-Flame who came forth from Memphis, I have not taken food.
O Cavern-Dweller who came forth from the West,[12] I have not been sullen.
O White-Teeth who came forth from the Fayum, I have not transgressed.
O Blood-Eater who came forth from the slaughter-house, I have not killed a sacred bull.
O Entrail-Eater who came forth from [the House of Thirty], I have not committed perjury.
O Lord of Truth who came forth from Maaty, I have not stolen bread.
O Wanderer who came forth from Bubastis, I have not eavesdropped.
O Pallid who came forth from Heliopolis, I have not gossiped.
O Twice-Evil who came forth from Andjet, I have not argued, except concerning my own property.
O Wememty-Snake who came forth from the place of execution, I have not sodomized a man.[13]
O Escort-Watcher[14] who came forth from the House of Min, I have not fornicated.
O Master-of-the-Elderly who came forth from Imau, I have not created fear.
O Demolisher who came forth from Xois, I have not gone astray.
O Disturber who came forth from Weryt, I have not been hot-tempered.
O Youth who came forth from the province of Heliopolis, I have not neglected words of Truth.
O Foreteller who came forth from Wenes, I have not interfered.
O Altar-Dweller who came forth from the secret place, I have not insinuated.
O Turn-Face[15] who came forth from the well of wrongdoing, I have not gone on the pull or slept around.
O Hot-Foot who came forth from twilight, I have not dissembled.
O Darkness-Dweller who came forth from the darkness, I have not been litigious.
O Offering-Bearer who came forth from Sais, I have not been a busy-body.
O Lord-of-Faces who came forth from Nedjefet, I have not been impatient.
O Accuser who came forth from Wetjenet, I have not acted against my nature or washed my hands of god.

O Horned who came forth from Asyut, I have not been a chatterbox.[16]
O Nefertum who came forth from Memphis, I have not wronged, I have not done evil.
O Never-Again who came forth from Busiris, I have not conspired.
O Self-Directed[17] who came forth from Tjebu, I have not waded in.
O Water-Smiter who came forth from the primeval waters, I have not raised my voice.
O Commander-of-the-People who came forth from his house, I have not cursed god.
O Bestower-of-Good who came forth from Harpoon-province, I have not been arrogant.
O Bestower-of-Powers who came forth from the city, I have not put on airs.
O Rearing-Serpent who came forth from the cave, I have not become wealthy except by my own endeavours.
O Bountiful-Serpent who came forth from the silent land, I have not demeaned god in the city.

NOTES

1. The Egyptian term for iron translates literally as ‘miracle of heaven’, indicating that the Egyptians first encountered iron in its meteoric form.
2. i.e. the Judgement Hall.
3. An epithet of Osiris.
4. Literally, ‘what is not’.
5. Literally, ‘the abomination of the gods’.
6. The reduplicative phrase *nk nkk nkk* indicates a repeated pattern of sexual intercourse.
7. Specifically fraud in matters of land registration: the literal translation is ‘reduced the land measure’.
8. Literally, ‘taken away from’.
9. The sacred *benu*-bird was a symbol of the sun-god and of rejuvenation.
10. The eye of Horus, which, according to legend, was plucked out by Seth and restored by Thoth.
11. The ibis-god Thoth, whose Egyptian name, Djehuty, means ‘beaky’.
12. i.e. the land of the dead.
13. Literally, and more graphically, ‘fucked a lady-man’.
14. Literally, ‘you who see whom you bring’.
15. Literally, ‘his face is behind him’.
16. Literally, ‘multiplied the speaking of words’.

17. Literally, ‘who acts according to his will’.



Part Eight

ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS



Almost from the very beginning of ancient Egyptian writing, rulers recognized the peculiar efficacy of the written word to promote, idealize and perpetuate their place in Egyptian society. Royal inscriptions are among the very earliest texts to have survived from ancient Egypt. At first, they were little more than brief captions, annotating scenes of the king's triumph over his enemies or of royal ceremonial. By the dawn of the Pyramid Age (*c*. 2600 BC), more extensive texts were being compiled to laud the monarch and his achievements, or stress his relationship with the divine. And during the civil war that followed the collapse of the Old Kingdom and presaged the rise of the Middle Kingdom, royal inscriptions truly came into their own, taking centre stage in the propaganda battles between the factions competing for the throne. Thenceforth, until the very end of hieroglyphic writing, texts recording royal achievements – whether factual or heavily fictionalized – were composed with great frequency and are among the best attested of all genres of writing from ancient Egypt.

To render them permanent, royal inscriptions were generally inscribed on stone, cut in carefully executed hieroglyphs. Such inscriptions could be carved straight into the living rock of a quarry or cliff face for public display (the quarrying inscriptions of Mentuhotep IV and the boundary stela of Akhenaten), incised onto stelae (the Semna inscription of Senusret III, the tempest stela of Ahmose, the restoration decree of Tutankhamun and the adoption stela of Nitiqret) or other monuments (the obelisk inscription of Hatshepsut) to be set up in a temple, or, occasionally, used to decorate commemorative objects presented as gifts to loyal courtiers (the marriage scarab of Amenhotep III). In all cases, the very act of committing the text to writing, in monumental hieroglyphics, was intended to make it eternal. Even though royal inscriptions have been used to reconstruct events in ancient Egypt, their primary purpose was not historical but celebratory. They were intended to perpetuate an idealized state of affairs, not to record objective facts. Indeed, throughout most of pharaonic civilization, as far as we can tell, the ancient Egyptians did not share the modern concept of objective history.

While they do not lend themselves to a literal reading, royal inscriptions from ancient Egypt are none the less a rich source of information about the preoccupations of the pharaoh and his court. Most have a religious or quasi-religious theme, since the divinity of the king and his role as high priest of every cult were central tenets of the ideology of ancient Egyptian kingship. The particular focus of an inscription might be the description of omens signifying the king's right to rule (Texts 8.1 and 8.3) or, very often, the restoration and embellishment of temples (Texts 8.3, 8.4 and 8.7). Other royal inscriptions have a more secular purpose, such as the demarcation of political boundaries (Texts 8.2 and 8.6), or matters of marriage and inheritance in the royal family (Texts 8.5 and 8.8); yet, even in these cases, the message is still usually set in a religious context and laden with religious references.

The eight texts selected for translation here span a period of nearly thirteen centuries, from the end of the Eleventh Dynasty (the mid-twentieth century BC) to the beginning of the Twenty-sixth (the mid-seventh century BC). Five of the eight date to the Eighteenth Dynasty (1539–1292 BC), not just because this is one of the best-attested eras of ancient Egyptian history, but also because the variety and sophistication of royal inscriptions in this period was rarely equalled and never surpassed. From the highly unusual description of a natural disaster under Ahmose to Hatshepsut's very personal reflections on her relationship with the god Amun, from the revolutionary idealism of Akhenaten to the plodding orthodoxy under his son Tutankhamun, royal inscriptions chart the highs and lows of pharaonic authority and offer us fascinating insights into the rarefied world of ancient Egypt's ruling class.

1

Quarrying Inscriptions of Mentuhotep IV

*Throughout ancient Egyptian civilization, the deserts bordering the Nile Valley were exploited for their deposits of precious stones and minerals. One of the most important quarries, visited by royal expeditions at nearly all periods, lay in the heart of the Black Mountains in the Wadi Hammamat, due east of the town of Coptos and midway between the Nile and the Red Sea. The local fine-grained, greenish-black siltstone (*bekhen *in ancient Egyptian) was highly prized for statues and sarcophagi.*

*On the south face of the quarry, numerous expeditions left commemorative inscriptions. No fewer than five of these relate to a single expedition during the reign of the last king of the Eleventh Dynasty, Nebtawyra Mentuhotep IV (*c. *1948–1938* BC*), who is otherwise only sparsely attested. Although the inscriptions pay due reverence both to the king, as the expedition's sponsor, and to the Coptite god Min, 'lord of the hill-countries', as its divine protector, they give most of the credit for the expedition's success to its actual leader, the vizier Amenemhat. Herein lies the historical importance of the inscriptions, for the next time we encounter a man named Amenemhat in high office, he has assumed the throne as King Amenemhat I, founder of the Twelfth Dynasty. Although the transition from king's right-hand man to monarch is not explicitly attested, there can be little doubt that the vizier Amenemhat took full advantage of his unrivalled position to seize the throne when it fell vacant, or when the opportunity arose.*

The first inscription recounts a natural miracle which pointed the way to the block destined for the king's sarcophagus. The second and third inscriptions illustrate the scale of a royal quarrying expedition – a considerable feat of logistics and administration. The fourth inscription relates a second miracle, interpreted as a second signal of divine favour. The fifth, brief inscription records the successful completion of the expedition.



Quarrying inscription of Mentuhotep IV (Toby Wilkinson)

First inscription

The Dual King Nebtawyra, who lives for ever. This marvel which happened to His Majesty: the wild herds of the hill-countries descended for him and there came a pregnant gazelle, walking with her face on the people in front of her. Her eyes looked straight ahead and she did not glance back until she reached this noble mountain, this (very) block which was (still) in place, (destined) for the lid of this sarcophagus. She gave birth upon it, with this expedition of the king watching. Then her neck was cut and she was placed on it (the block) as a burnt offering. Then it (the block) descended in safety.

Lo, it was the Majesty of this noble god, lord of the hill-countries, who guided his son, Nebtawyra, who lives for ever, in order that he might be joyful. May he live upon his thrones for ever and ever; may he celebrate millions of jubilees!

The member of the elite, high official, overseer of the city, vizier, overseer of all judicial officials, overseer of (all that) heaven gives, the earth creates and the inundation brings, overseer of everything in this entire land, the vizier Amenemhat.

Second inscription

Year 2, second month of the inundation season, day 15. The Horus ‘Lord of the Two Lands’, the Two Ladies ‘Lord of the Two Lands’, the Gods of Gold, the Dual King Nebtawyra, the son of Ra Mentuhotep, who lives for ever: His Majesty commanded to set up this stela for his father Min, lord of the hill-countries, at this noble mountain – primeval; first-ranking place in the land of the horizon-dwellers; god’s palace endowed with life; Horus’s divine nest in which this god is content; his pure place of enjoyment high above all the hill-countries of God’s Land – in order to satisfy his spirit and honour the god in his favourite place, as does a king who is upon the great throne – first-ranking; enduring of monuments; potent god; possessor of joy; great of dread; abundant of love; heir of Horus in his Two Lands; nursling of divine Isis, the mother of Min, great of magic – to fulfil the kingship of Horus of the Two Riverbanks.

The Dual King Nebtawyra, who lives like Ra for ever, he says:

My Majesty sent the member of the elite, overseer of the city, vizier, overseer of the king’s works and confidant Amenemhat, together with an expedition of ten thousand men from the southern districts of Upper Egypt and the pure estates of Thebes, to bring me back a noble block of the pure stone which is in this mountain, whose potency Min created for a sarcophagus which conjures up eternity even more than the monuments in the temples of Upper Egypt, as a mission of the king who rules the Two Lands, in order to bring him his desire from the hill-countries of his father Min. He made (it) as his pious act for his father Min of Coptos, lord of the hill-countries, ruler of the bowmen, that he may grant abundant [jubilees] and life like Ra for ever.

Third inscription

Nebtawyra, who lives for ever: year 2, second month of the inundation season, day 15. A royal commission carried out by the member of the elite, high official, overseer of the city, vizier, royal confidant, overseer of works, great in his office, rich in his nobility, first-ranking in his lord’s estate, inspector of the courts, foremost of the Greatest of the Six,[1] who judges the elite and the common people and hears pleas, to whom the greatest nobles of the whole land come prostrating themselves, whose offices his lord advances, his intimate friend in the gateway of Upper Egypt, who controls for him millions of subjects to do his will so that his monument might be enduring on earth, the king’s great one, the monarch’s senior official, controller of the mansions of the Red Crown, servant of Min at the stretching of the cord,[2] impartial judge, overseer of Upper Egypt in its

entirety, to whom are reported occurrences and omissions, executioner of the Lord of the Two Lands, who brings satisfaction in carrying out the king's commission, inspector of inspectors, controller of overseers, vizier of Horus at his appearances, Amenemhat – he says:

The lord – life, prosperity, health – and Dual King Nebtawyra sent me, as a god directs (one of) his (own) limb(s), to establish his pious act in this land, having chosen me above his (whole) city, I being honoured above his (whole) entourage. Now His Majesty commanded that there should proceed to this hill-country an expedition comprising the finest men in the whole land: stonemasons, sculptors, quarrymen, stone-carvers, foremen, metalworkers, goldsmiths, seal-bearers of the palace, every seal-bearer of the Treasury, (indeed) every office of the royal household: assembled at my behest. The hill-country was traversed as if a river, the upper valleys as if waterways. I brought back for him a sarcophagus which conjures up everlasting life and is beneficent for ever. Never has the like occurred upon this hill-country since the time of the god. The expedition returned without loss, without a fatality, without a reversal, without the death of a donkey, without a lack of craftsmen. It came about for the majesty of my lord through the power which Min had created for him out of the greatness of his love for him. May his spirit repose upon the great throne with the kingship of Horus. May there be done for him even greater things than this. For I am his favourite servant who does all that he favours in the course of every day.

Fourth inscription

The Dual King Nebtawyra, who lives for ever, born of the king's mother Iamshepses: second month of the inundation season, day 23. Setting to work on this mountain, on the block set aside for the sarcophagus. The marvel was repeated: rain was created; the creations of this god were beheld; his power was given to the people; the hill-country was made like water; water flowed over dry rock; a well was found in the midst of the wadi, ten cubits[3] by ten cubits on every side, filled to its brim with water – pure, kept clean from gazelles, hidden from the tribesmen of the hill-countries. Though there passed by and descended right next to it expeditions in the past and kings of yesteryear, no eye had beheld it, nobody's face had fallen upon it (until) it was revealed to His Majesty himself. For he was concealing it, knowing this exact moment, anticipating this very time – because he saw his power and knew of His Majesty's excellence – when he would create order upon his hill-countries for his son Nebtawyra, who

lives for ever. Those in the Nile Valley heard (about) it; the common people of Egypt – Upper Egypt together with the Delta – bowed their heads on the ground and they praised the goodness of His Majesty for ever and ever.

Fifth inscription

Day 27: descent of the lid of this sarcophagus, being a block four cubits by eight cubits by two cubits, as it came from the works. Calves were slaughtered, goats sacrificed and incense burned. Lo, an expedition of three thousand sailors from the districts of Lower Egypt conducted it safely to the Nile Valley.

NOTES

1. A judicial title.
2. Part of the foundation ceremony of a new temple.
3. A cubit was the standard unit of length, equal to 52.4cm.

2

Semna Inscription of Senusret III

*During the course of the Twelfth Dynasty, Egypt became increasingly concerned with the growing political and economic threat posed by the Kingdom of Kush in Upper Nubia. To counter this threat, King Khakaura Senusret III (*c. *1836–1818* BC*) pursued an aggressive policy of annexation and containment, colonizing Lower Nubia and constructing a massive series of fortifications at the Second Nile Cataract to repel possible invasion by Kush. Although designed to operate as an integrated frontier defence, each individual fort had its own particular role to play. One served as a campaign palace, another as a fortified granary and centre for forced labour. A third was a base for paramilitary patrols, while a fourth served as a command centre for the regional garrisons.*

The most impressive group of forts, and the focus of the entire policy, guarded the narrow gorge of Semna (ancient Heh), a natural border that was easy to defend. On the west side of the gorge stood the principal fortress of Semna, named 'Powerful is Khakaura, true of voice'. Dominated by large barracks housing 400–500 men, it could seal the gorge during an attack, while in times of peace the garrison's job was to control traffic along this strategically vital stretch of the Nile.

As an added incentive to his troops, in the sixteenth year of his reign Senusret III had a monumental stela of red granite set up inside the fortress at Semna (the stela is now in Berlin). Its inscription, carved in twenty-one lines, urged the soldiers to defend the king's conquests and Senusret boasted of his own ruthlessness against the Nubians. The inscription also refers to a statue of the king that was installed in a special shrine at Semna, to inspire his men to loyalty and bravery. The surviving statues of Senusret III, with their bulging eyes under hooded lids, sunken cheeks, brooding mouth and oversize ears, do indeed project a terrifying image of royal power, commensurate with the uncompromising tone of the stela's inscription.

Long live the Horus ‘Divine of forms’, the Two Ladies ‘Divine of births’, the Dual King Khakaura given life! Long live the Golden Horus who has come into being, the bodily and beloved son of Ra, the Lord of the Two Lands Senusret, given life, stability and dominion for ever!

Year 16, the third month of the growing season: His Majesty made the southern border at Semna. ‘Lo, I have made my border (further) upstream than my forefathers. I have increased what I was bequeathed. For I am a king who speaks and acts – what my mind devises my arm brings into being – and who is aggressive in order to conquer and impatient to succeed. A plan does not sleep in his mind. (He is) considerate towards (his) subjects, consistent in mercy, but merciless towards the enemy who attacks him. (He) attacks his would-be attacker and silences the one who desists. (He) responds to a situation as necessary, because if one holds back in the face of an attack, it merely gives heart to the enemy. Aggression is brave; retreat is cowardly! He who does not defend his borders is a pansy.[1] Because the Nubian listens to words, to respond to him is to make him retreat. Be aggressive towards him and he will show you his back; but retreat and he will turn aggressive. They are not people worthy of respect; they are despicable and broken-spirited. My Majesty has seen this: it is not a lie. I have carried off their women and brought away their relatives, emptied their wells and driven off their cattle, cut down their grain and set fire to it. As my father lives for me, I speak the truth. No exaggeration comes from my mouth!

‘As for any son of mine who strengthens this border which My Majesty has made, he is indeed my son, born of My Majesty, for the model son champions his father and strengthens the border of his begetter. But he who loosens (his grip) on it and will not fight for it: he is not my son; he is not born of me.

‘Now My Majesty has had an image made of My Majesty at this border which My Majesty has established, so that you will strengthen it and so that you will fight for it.’

NOTE

1. The Egyptian term connotes an effeminate man.

3

Tempest Stela of Ahmose

Among the reused blocks discovered in the foundations of the Third Pylon at Karnak were two limestone stelae dedicated by Ahmose, first king of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1539–1514 BC). Together with a third stela found nearby, they record major events of the king's reign connected with the temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak, which under the patronage of Ahmose and his successors was to become the greatest religious building in Egypt.

The so-called Tempest Stela recounts Ahmose's restoration of Karnak and the other holy sites of Thebes (including the pyramid-chapels of his Seventeenth Dynasty ancestors) following a cataclysmic rainstorm and the ensuing floods. The disaster is described in unusual detail, the more to emphasize Ahmose's piety in restoring everything to its proper state (a literary technique repeated, at the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, in the restoration decree of Tutankhamun, Text 8.7). Maintaining and beautifying the shrines of the gods was the primary religious duty of an Egyptian king. Ahmose's actions in restoring Karnak were thus presented as legitimizing his rule following the civil war of his early reign. The message was clear: whatever the source of chaos, Ahmose, the true king and upholder of creation, would impose order in its place.

The Tempest Stela inscription lacks a date, but it is thought to have been composed during the last decade of Ahmose's reign. The beginning of the inscription is badly damaged and, at other points, words are lost or difficult to read; but the overall sense is clear.

[The Horus 'Great of forms'], the Two Ladies 'Fair of birth', the Golden Horus 'who has knitted together the Two Lands', the Dual King [Nebpehtyra, son of Ra Ahmose] … Ra appointed him to be king of Lower Egypt … His Majesty went … to the south of Dendera … Lo, His Majesty [moored] at the quay of Sedjefa-tawy … pure things; and, further, after the offering … Now … led … his body

enclosed in this temple, his limbs rejoicing … this great god thirsted … His Majesty …

… the gods were cursing their [discontent]. The gods [caused] the sky to bring forth a rain-storm. It was dark in the west and the sky was filled with storm clouds without [end and thunder] more than the noise of a crowd … [The rain] was heavy [and fell in torrents] upon the mountains, noisier than the cavern which is in Elephantine.[1] Every [shrine] and every sanctuary which (the waters) reached [was flooded and their contents] were floating in the water like papyrus skiffs outside the palace for days … no torch could be lit throughout the Two Lands.

Then His Majesty said, 'These things surpass (even) the power of the Great God and the affairs of the gods.' His Majesty came down in his barque, his council in attendance. [The people] were on the east (bank) and on the west (bank), (struck) silent because they had no clothes upon them following the wrath of god.[2]

Then His Majesty arrived at the heart of Thebes the Golden and turned to confront the state of affairs … this statue received what it desired. Then His Majesty set about re-establishing the Two Lands – though they were flooded to (a depth of) three cubits – and supplied them (anew) with silver, gold, copper, oil, clothing, bundles of everything that was desired.

Then His Majesty rested inside the palace – life, prosperity, health. Then it was mentioned to His Majesty that the irrigated land had been deluged, the buildings cast down, the chapels destroyed, the pyramid-chapels [ruined] – total destruction. Then His Majesty ordered the rebuilding of the temples which had fallen into ruin throughout this entire land; the restoration of the gods' monuments; the rebuilding of their ramparts; the replacement of the sacred objects in their sanctuaries; the reconsecration of their secret places; the reintroduction of statues in their shrines which had been cast to the ground; the cleaning out of the incense-burners; the re-erection of the altars and the reinstatement of their offerings; the doubling of office holders' incomes: putting the land back as it was before. It was done in accordance with everything that His Majesty commanded.

NOTES

1. A cavern beneath the island of Elephantine was believed to be the source of the annual Nile flood.
2. The deluge apparently washed away people's homes, leaving them destitute.

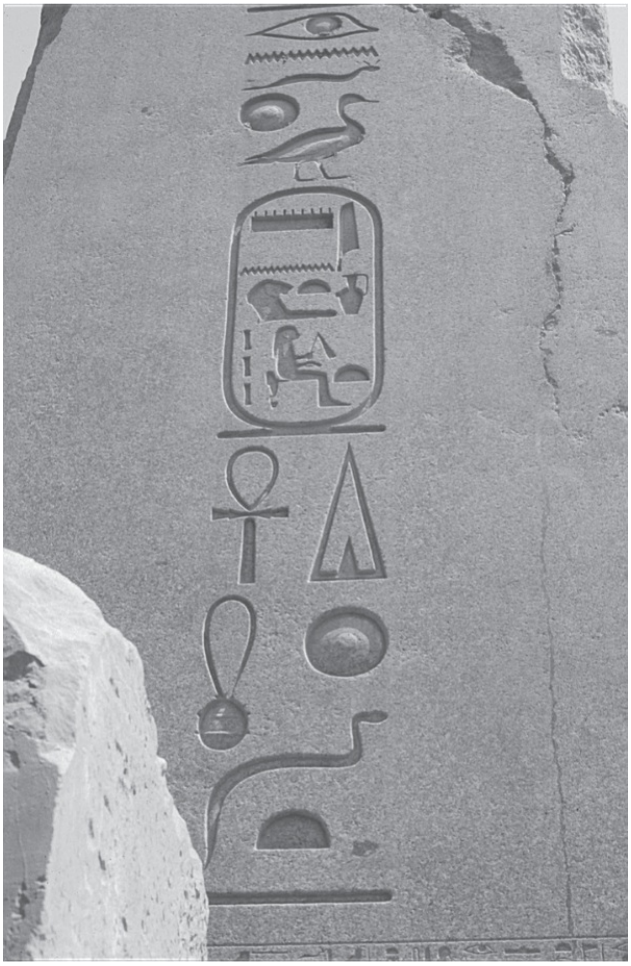
4

Obelisk Inscription of Hatshepsut

The rise to power and reign of the female king[1] Hatshepsut (1473–1458 BC) is one of the most remarkable and fascinating episodes in pharaonic history. Succeeding to an empire forged by her father Thutmose I and secured by her husband Thutmose II, Hatshepsut turned her attention – and her country's burgeoning wealth – to acts of royal patronage closer to home. Her reign was marked by extraordinary building projects in and around Thebes, the sacred city of her patron deity, the state god Amun-Ra.

In the great temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak, the god's principal cult centre, Hatshepsut commissioned a pair of great granite obelisks. She had them erected between the two great gateways (pylons) built by her father, thus deliberately associating herself with Thutmose I in the architectural as well as the textual records of her reign. The southern obelisk fell in antiquity and has been moved to a site next to the sacred lake; but the northern obelisk stands to this day in its original position. The four sides of the shaft are carved with Hatshepsut's names and titles, while the base bears a lengthy inscription, translated here, recounting the creation of the obelisks. The text is remarkable for its insights into Hatshepsut's motives, her piety towards Amun-Ra and her concern for her posthumous reputation. It is at once bombastic and intimate, a revealing account by a revolutionary monarch.

(Long) live the female-Horus 'Powerful of spirit', the Two Ladies 'Flourishing in years', the Golden Horus 'Divine of appearances', the Dual King Maatkara, the daughter of Ra Hatshepsut-united-with-Amun, who lives for ever and ever!



Obelisk inscription of Hatshepsut (Toby Wilkinson)

The daughter of Amun-Ra who is in his heart; his unique one who came into being through him; the glorious image of the Lord of All, whose beauty the souls of Heliopolis created, who seizes the Two Lands like the Self-created One, whom he created to exalt his crowns, who creates beings like Khepri, who appears like Horakhty; pure egg which came forth (already) glorious; nursling of the Two Magicians, whom Amun himself caused to ascend to his throne of Thebes,[2] whom he chose to guard Egypt and to protect all the people;[3] the female-Horus who avenges her father; eldest of Kamutef, whom Ra fathered in order to create for him glorious offspring upon earth, for the well-being of humanity; his living image; the Dual King Maatkara, the electrum of kings!

She made as her pious act for her father Amun, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, pre-eminent of Karnak, the creation for him of two great obelisks of solid granite from the southern district,[4] their sides covered with electrum of the finest of all foreign lands. Seen on both sides of the River, their rays flood the Two

Lands when the Orb shines between them, just like when he rises on the horizon of heaven.

‘I have done this with a loving heart for my father Amun,
Having entered into his secrets from the beginning,
Conversant with his effective power.
I did not neglect anything that he ordained,
For My Majesty knows that he is divine.
Lo, I have acted under his command:
It is he who led me.
I did not plan works
But of his doing.
It is he who gave directions.
I did not sleep because of his temple.
I did not stray from what he commanded.
My heart was Perception itself in respect of my father’s wishes,
Having entered into the matters of his mind.
I did not ignore the city of the Lord of All;
Rather, I turned my face to it.
I know that Karnak is the horizon upon earth,[5]
The noble primeval mound,[6]
The Sacred Eye of the Lord of All,
His favourite place which exalts his beauty
And gathers in his disciples.’

The king himself says:
‘I declare unto the people
Who shall come after,
Who shall consider this pious act which I have performed for my father,
Who shall discuss (it)
And look to the future:
It was when I was sitting in the palace
And remembered my creator
That my heart told me to make for him two obelisks of electrum,
Their points joining the heavens,
In the noble columned hall
Between the two great gate-towers of the king,
The strong bull, the Dual King Aakheperkara,[7] the Horus, true of voice.
Now my mind was turning this way and that,

Anticipating the words of the populace
When they see my pious act in years to come
And speak of what I have done.
Beware lest you say,
“I do not know, I do not know, why this has been done,
The fashioning of a mountain of pure gold
Like something which has just happened!”
As Ra lives for me
And loves me,
As my father Amun praises me,
As my nose is rejuvenated with life and dominion,
As I wear the white crown,
And appear in the red crown,
As the Two Lords[8] have united their shares for me,
As I rule this land like the son of Isis,[9]
As I have triumphed like the son of Nut,[10]
As Ra rests in the evening-barque
And endures in the morning-barque,
As he joins his two mothers in the divine boat,
As heaven remains,
As his creation endures,
As I shall be eternal like the undying star
And rest in life like Atum:
So, as for these two great obelisks
Which My Majesty has wrought in electrum for my father Amun,
So that my name might endure in this temple
For ever and ever,
Each is a single block of solid granite,
Without a join,
Without a flaw!
My Majesty began the work in Year 15, second month of the growing season, day 1,
And finished in Year 16, fourth month of the harvest season, last day,
Making seven months of quarrying work.
I did this with clarity of mind
As a king (does) for any god.
It was my wish to make them for him smelted in electrum,
But instead I covered their sides along their entire length,
Anticipating the words of the people.

My mouth is effective in its speech:
I do not go back on what I have said.
So listen!
I provided for them the finest electrum,
Measured in gallons like sacks of grain.
My Majesty summoned a quantity
More than the Two Lands had seen before.
The ignorant knows it as well as the wise.
Those who hear this shall not say it is a boast, what I have said.
Rather, they shall say,
“How like her it is,
True to her father!”[11]
For the god knows me, Amun, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands.
He caused me to rule the Valley and the Desert[12] as a reward.
There is no rebellion against me in any land;
All foreign lands are my subjects.
He made my boundary at the limits of heaven;
Everything the Orb encircles works for me.
He presented it to the one who came from him,
For he knew that I would govern it for him.
I am his daughter, in very truth,
Who glorifies him,
Who discovers what he has ordained.
My reward from my father is life, stability and dominion
Upon the throne of Horus of all the living,
Like Ra, for ever.’

NOTES

1. There is no term for queen in ancient Egyptian; rulers were required to be male theologically, even if of female gender; Hatshepsut presented herself, and is always referred to by Egyptologists, as a female king.
2. Literally, ‘Upper Egyptian Heliopolis’.
3. Literally, ‘the elite and the common people’.
4. i.e. the First Cataract region.
5. i.e. the place of creation.
6. The mound of creation.
7. The throne name of Thutmose I.
8. Horus and Seth.

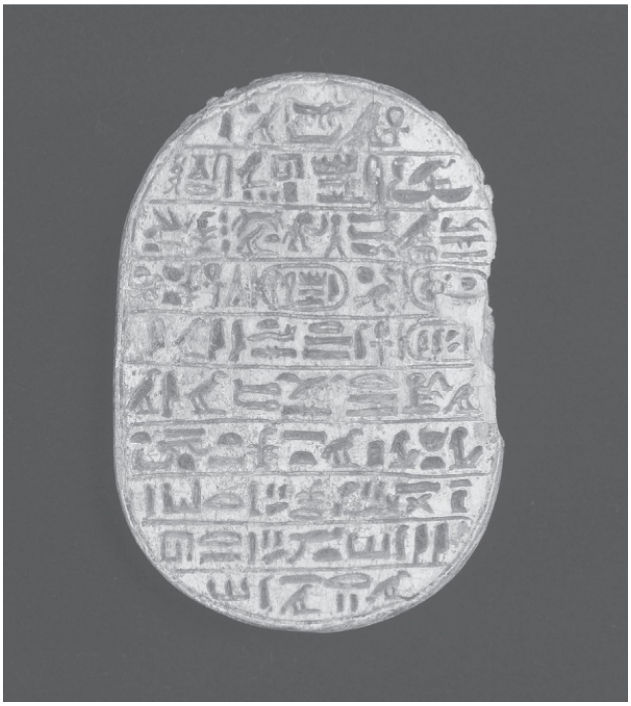
9. i.e. Horus.
10. i.e. Osiris.
11. Hatshepsut refers to herself sometimes as male, sometimes as female, reflecting the difficulties of being a female king.
12. Literally, ‘the black-land and the red-land’.

5

Marriage Scarab of Amenhotep III

As befitted a king who elevated the position of the monarch to unprecedented heights, Amenhotep III (1390–1353 BC) publicly marked major royal events by issuing commemorative scarabs (large dung-beetles, modelled in faience, inscribed on the underside with a commemorative text) that were distributed throughout his realm. Five such scarab series (the ancient equivalent of coins or medals) are known, all from the first decade of Amenhotep III's reign. The first scarab, issued in the king's first year on the throne, marked his marriage to Tiye and his alliance with her powerful family. The second scarab, issued the following year, celebrated a hunt of wild bulls in the Wadi Natrun, staged as a demonstration of the king's virility. The third and fourth scarabs were issued in the same year, the king's tenth on the throne; one celebrated a royal lion hunt, the other the king's diplomatic marriage to Gilukhepa, daughter of the ruler of Mittani. The fifth and last known commemorative scarab was issued in the eleventh year of the king's reign, to mark the excavation of a boating lake for Tiye.

The marriage scarab of Year 10 signals the importance to Egypt of maintaining cordial diplomatic relations with the other great powers of the Near East. The military campaigns of Thutmose I and III (see Text 2.2) had succeeded in creating an Egyptian empire in the Levant, but the balance of power remained fragile. Where his predecessors had committed themselves to repeated military interventions to defend Egyptian interests, Amenhotep III pursued a policy of diplomatic détente and reciprocal trade. Egypt sent regular shipments of gold (from its Nubian mines) to the other great powers; in return, they were encouraged to send their daughters as diplomatic brides for the pharaoh.



Commemorative scarab of Amenhotep III (Wikimedia Commons)

*In Year 10 (*c. *1381 BC), Amenhotep III succeeded in winning the hand of Princess Gilukhepa, the daughter of Shatturna, ruler of the Kingdom of Mittani – a powerful state which stretched across northern Mesopotamia (and which, three generations earlier, had backed the revolt that led to the Battle of Megiddo). The commemorative scarab records Gilukhepa's arrival in Egypt with a retinue of 317 female attendants, aptly and succinctly described as a 'marvel'. Twenty-five years later, Amenhotep III sought another Mittanian princess for his harem. The negotiations over this second diplomatic marriage were delicate and detailed, involving much reciprocal gift-giving. Eventually, the new Mittanian king, Tushratta, sent his daughter Tadukhepa with an entourage of 300 and an enormous dowry.*

Year 10 under the Majesty of the Horus 'Strong bull risen in truth', the Two Ladies 'Who establishes the laws and pacifies the Two Lands', the Golden Horus 'Mighty strong arm who smites the Asiatics', the Dual King, lord of action, Ra's chosen one Nebmaatra, the son of Ra Amenhotep-ruler-of-Thebes, given life; and (of) the King's Great Wife Tiye, the living one, her father's name (being) Yuya (and) her mother's name Tjuyu.[1]

The marvel which was brought to His Majesty – life, prosperity and health: Gilukhepa, daughter of Shatturna, chief of Mittani; and the personnel of her harem (numbering) 317 women.

NOTE

1. Amenhotep III’s parents-in-law were given unusual prominence during his reign, including the rare privilege of a tomb in the Valley of the Kings.

6

Boundary Stela of Akhenaten

The site of Akhetaten (‘Horizon-of-the-Orb’, modern Amarna) was carefully chosen by Akhenaten for his new capital city, not only because it was virgin territory, unassigned to any other cult, but also because the topography of the site – a wide desert embayment, protected on three sides by high cliffs, facing a broad swathe of agricultural land on the opposite bank of the Nile – suited the king’s requirements perfectly. Pleased with his choice, Akhenaten took pains to demarcate his new city by means of a series of boundary stelae, carved into the surrounding cliffs at key points.

The initial royal decree establishing the city (‘the earlier proclamation’) was issued in the fifth year of the king’s reign. It was carved on two stelae at the northern and southern edges of the Amarna plain. It seems to have laid out the king’s plans for Akhetaten, as well as the background to his royal revolution. Exactly one year later, Akhenaten visited the site again (now the focus of feverish building work) and issued a second decree (‘the later proclamation’). This was duly carved on eight further stelae on the east bank of the Nile, and at least three on the west bank, and established the boundaries of Akhetaten with greater precision than before.

The wording of the decree is formulaic and repetitive. The text comprises a lengthy enumeration of the titles of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, a description of the king’s formal appearance and the associated offerings, the king’s chariot ride across Akhetaten and his oath establishing the city’s limits. The inscription itself was accompanied by statues of Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti and their two eldest daughters, Meritaten and Meketaten.



Boundary stela of Akhenaten (Toby Wilkinson)

Date formula

Year 6, the fourth month of the growing season, day 13. Long live the Perfect God who is pleased with Truth, lord of heaven, lord of earth, the great living Orb who illuminates the Two Riverbanks! Long live the father 'The living Ra-Horus-of-the-two-horizons who rejoices on the horizon in his name of Light which is (the essence of) the Orb, given life for ever and ever',[1] the great living Orb who is in jubilee within the House of the Orb in Horizon-of-the-Orb! Long live the Horus 'Strong bull beloved of the Orb', the Two Ladies 'Great of kingship in Horizon-of-the-Orb', the Golden Horus who exalts the name of the Orb, the Dual King, who lives on Truth, the Lord of the Two Lands Neferkheperura, Ra's only one, the son of Ra who lives on Truth, lord of appearances, Akhenaten great in his lifetime, given life for ever and ever!

Titles and epithets of Akhenaten

The Perfect God, Ra's only one, whose beauty the Orb created; truly effective (in carrying out) the will of Him who begot him; who satisfies Him with what pleases His spirit; who does effective things for Him who begot him; who

controls the land for Him who placed him upon His throne and provisions His house of eternity with millions and hundreds of thousands of things; who exalts the Orb and magnifies His name, causing the earth to belong to Him who created it; the Dual King, who lives on Truth, the Lord of the Two Lands Neferkheperura, Ra's only one, the son of Ra who lives on Truth, lord of appearances, Akhenaten great in his lifetime, given life for ever and ever.

Titles and epithets of Nefertiti

The elite lady, great in the palace, beautiful of face, fair in the twin plumes, lady of rejoicing, who receives praises, at the hearing of whose voice one rejoices, the King's Great Wife, his beloved, the Lady of the Two Lands Neferneferuaten-Nefertiti, who lives for ever and ever.

Appearance of the king

On this day, One[2] was in Horizon-of-the-Orb in the tent of carpets which His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – (had) made in Horizon-of-the-Orb and the name of which is 'The Orb is pleased'. His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – appeared mounted upon the great chariot of electrum, like the Orb when he rises on the horizon and fills the Two Lands with his love. He took the good road to Horizon-of-the-Orb on the first anniversary of its discovery, which His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – made in order to found it as a monument for the Orb, just as his father 'The living Ra-Horus-of-the-two-horizons who rejoices on the horizon in his name of Light which is (the essence of) the Orb, given life for ever and ever' had commanded to make a monument for him there.

The offering

A great offering was presented of bread and beer, long-horned cattle, fatted oxen, livestock, fowl, wine, fruit, incense and all good plants on the day of founding Horizon-of-the-Orb for the living Orb. Praise and love were received (in return) on behalf of the life, prosperity and health of the Dual King, who lives on Truth, the Lord of the Two Lands Neferkheperura, Ra's only one, the son of Ra who lives on Truth, lord of appearances, Akhenaten great in his lifetime, given life for ever and ever.

The royal journey

Journey southwards: His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – took up position in his chariot in the presence of his father ‘The living Ra-Horus-of-the-two-horizons who rejoices on the horizon in his name of Light which is (the essence of) the Orb, given life for ever and ever’ on the south-eastern escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb, the rays of the Orb upon him (conferring) life and dominion and rejuvenating his limbs every day.

The king’s speech

Speech by the Dual King, who lives on Truth, the Lord of the Two Lands Neferkheperura, Ra’s only one, the son of Ra who lives on Truth, lord of appearances, Akhenaten great in his lifetime, given life for ever and ever:

As my father ‘The living Ra-Horus-of-the-two-horizons who rejoices on the horizon in his name of Light which is (the essence of) the Orb, given life for ever and ever’ lives; and (as) my heart is joyful because of the King’s Wife and her children, (thereby) granting a great age (to) the King’s Great Wife Neferneferuaten-Nefertiti, who lives for ever and ever in these millions of years under the authority of the pharaoh – life, prosperity, health – and granting a great age (to) the King’s Daughter Meritaten and the King’s Daughter Meketaten, her children (who are) under the authority of the King’s Wife, their mother, for ever and ever: this is my true oath which it is my will to declare and which I will not abjure for ever and ever.

As for the southern stela which is upon the eastern escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb, it is the stela of Horizon-of-the-Orb at whose limit I make (this) stand: I shall not go beyond it in a southerly direction for ever and ever. Make the south-western stela directly facing it upon the [western] escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb.

As for the middle stela which is upon the eastern escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb, it is the stela of Horizon-of-the-Orb at whose limit I make (this) stand on the orient[3] escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb: I shall not go beyond it in the direction of the orient for ever and ever. Make the middle stela which is on the western escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb directly facing it. I shall not go beyond it in a westerly direction for ever and ever.

As for the north-eastern stela of Horizon-of-the-Orb at whose limit I make a stand, it is the northern(most) stela of Horizon-of-the-Orb. I shall not pass it in a downstream direction for ever and ever. Make the north-western stela which is upon the western escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb directly facing it.

Now, as for Horizon-of-the-Orb, starting from the southern stela and finishing at the northern stela, measured from stela to stela on the eastern escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb, it comprises six river-lengths, one-and-three-quarter rods and four cubits.[4] Likewise, starting from the south-western stela of Horizon-of-the-Orb to the north-western stela upon the western escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb, it comprises six river-lengths, one-and-three-quarter rods and four cubits – the same exactly.

Now as for what is within these four stelae, starting from the eastern escarpment and finishing at the western escarpment, it is Horizon-of-the-Orb in its entirety. It belongs to my father 'The living Ra-Horus-of-the-two-horizons who rejoices on the horizon in his name of Light which is (the essence of) the Orb, given life for ever and ever' and comprises the mountains, the hill-country, the marshlands, the reclaimed land, the high ground, the fresh land, the fields, the water, the towns, the riverbanks, the people, the livestock, the copses and everything that the Orb, my father, brings into being, for ever and ever.

I shall not neglect this oath which I have made for the Orb, my father, for ever and ever. Rather, it shall endure upon a tablet of stone at the south-eastern border of Horizon-of-the-Orb. Likewise upon the middle stela which is at the eastern border of Horizon-of-the-Orb. Likewise at the north-eastern border of Horizon-of-the-Orb. Likewise at the south-western border of Horizon-of-the-Orb. Likewise upon the middle stela which is upon the western escarpment of Horizon-of-the-Orb. Likewise at the [north-]western border. It shall not be obliterated. It shall not be washed out. It shall not be scraped out. It shall not be plastered over. It shall not be erased. If it is erased or if it disappears, or if the stela on which it is (inscribed) falls down, I shall renew it anew in this (very) place where it is.[5]

NOTES

1. This complex formula was the earlier form of the 'royal' name given to the Orb as the king's divine co-regent.
2. i.e. the king.
3. The Egyptian word means 'sunrise' rather than 'east'.
4. A river-length equalled 10.5km (20,000 cubits), a rod 52.4m (100 cubits) and a cubit 52.4cm; hence the total extent of Horizon-of-the-Orb, south to north, was 63.098km.
5. Akhenaten was as good as his word: when one of the stelae suffered damage, it was duly replaced.

7

Restoration Decree of Tutankhamun

The death of Akhenaten, after only seventeen years on the throne, ushered in a period of great political turmoil in Egypt, as the forces of conservatism sought to overturn his revolution and re-establish the old orthodoxies. There may have been opposition among Akhenaten's surviving relatives, but the eventual accession of a boy as king (Tutankhamun) allowed the powers behind the throne to assert themselves and complete the counter-revolution. The final triumph of orthodoxy and the death of Akhenaten's radical ideas were celebrated in a great commemorative inscription, carved on a large stela of red quartzite. Although issued in the name of Tutankhamun, its measures bear the fingerprints of his commander-in-chief Horemheb; indeed some of the phraseology of the so-called restoration decree of Tutankhamun is closely paralleled in the Edict of Horemheb (Text 5.1) issued a few years later.

The restoration decree was probably set up at Karnak, symbolic heart of the restored religion. It was discovered in the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak in 1905 (today it resides in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo); a fragmentary duplicate was found in the foundations of the nearby temple of Montu two years later. Some time after Tutankhamun's reign, the stela was apparently reused for another purpose, resulting in a line of deep grooves down the centre. At the top of the stela, under a winged sun disc, delicate reliefs show the king presenting offerings to Amun-Ra of Karnak and his divine consort Mut; while Amun-Ra offers life to the king's nose. Figures of Tutankhamun's wife Ankhesenamun, which originally stood behind the king, were erased when the stela was usurped by Horemheb. The base of the stela is decorated with a series of hieroglyphic symbols which can be read as 'all the people adore', facing the king's names in cartouches.

The inscription itself opens with the king's titulary, emphasizing his devotion to the traditional gods. It then lambasts the effects of Akhenaten's radical policies (without mentioning the 'heretic pharaoh' by name), as a prelude to

describing the measures taken by Tutankhamun's regime to restore the traditional temples and compensate them for losses incurred.

Year …, the fourth month of the inundation season, day 19, under the Majesty of the Horus 'Strong bull, model of births', the Two Ladies 'Perfect in laws who pacifies the Two Lands', the Golden Horus 'Exalted of appearances who satisfies the gods', the Dual King [Nebkheperura], the son of Ra [Tutankhamun-ruler-of-Thebes] given life like Ra for ever [and ever], beloved of [Amun-Ra], lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, foremost in Karnak; (of) Atum, Lord of the Two Lands, from Heliopolis; (of) Ra-Horus-of-the-two-horizons; (of) Ptah-south-of-his-wall, lord of Memphis; (and of) Thoth, lord of divine words.

Appearance [upon the throne] of Horus [of the living] like his father Ra every day: the Perfect God, son of Amun, offspring of Kamutef, effective seed and holy egg which Amun himself put forth, the father [of the Two Lands] who created the one who fashioned him; for whose birth the souls of Heliopolis assembled to create a king for eternity, a Horus who endures for ever; the perfect ruler who does whatever is effective for his father and all the gods, having restored what was destroyed as a pious act for all time and having driven out Chaos throughout the Two Lands so that Order remains [in her place]; and who causes falsehood (once again) to be an abomination and the earth (to be) as it was in the beginning.

When His Majesty rose as king, the temples and the cities of the gods and goddesses from Elephantine to the marshlands of the Delta … were fallen into ruin. Their shrines were fallen into decay and had become weed-strewn mounds. Their sanctuaries were as if they had never been and their enclosures had become footpaths. For the earth was like a sickness. The gods (had) turned their back on this land. If an army [was] sent to the Levant to extend the borders of Egypt, it met with no success. If supplication was made to a god to ask something of him, he did not come at all. If a goddess was beseeched likewise, she did not come at all. Their spirits were weak in their bodies and they were destroying creation.

But after some days had passed, [His Majesty] appeared on the throne of his father to rule the Riverbanks of Horus. The Valley and the Desert were under his supervision; every land bowed down before his power.

When His Majesty was in his palace, which is in the estate of Aakheperkara,[1] like Ra inside heaven, His Majesty was conducting the affairs of this land and the daily business of the Two Riverbanks. Then His Majesty reflected, considered every effective strategy and sought (to perform) favours for his father Amun, (namely) to fashion his noble image in pure electrum. He surpassed what

had been done before. He fashioned his father Amun (to be carried) upon thirteen carrying-poles, his sacred image of electrum, lapis lazuli, turquoise and every precious stone – whereas the Majesty of this noble god had previously been (carried) upon (just) eleven carrying-poles. He fashioned (the image of) Ptah-south-of-his-wall, lord of Memphis, his noble image in electrum (to be carried) upon eleven carrying-poles, his sacred image of electrum, lapis lazuli, turquoise and every precious stone – whereas the Majesty of this noble god had previously been (carried) upon (just) seven carrying-poles. His Majesty made monuments for (all) the gods, [fashioning] their images from the best pure electrum from foreign lands; building their shrines anew as monuments for eternity, endowed with possessions for ever; laying down divine offerings for them – daily offerings – and endowing their food-offerings on earth. He gave more than had existed before, surpassing what had been done since the time of the ancestors. He appointed lay priests and clergy from among the children of town officials, the reputed sons of well-known men. He multiplied their [offering-tables] in gold, silver, bronze and copper, without limit. He filled their workshops with male and female servants from the booty captured by His Majesty. All the possessions of the temples and towns were augmented – doubled, trebled, quadrupled – with silver, gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise and every precious stone, royal linen, white linen, fine linen, moringa-oil, resin, fat … incense, aromatics and myrrh: all good things without limit. His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – hewed their river-barques from new pine from the hilltops, the very best of Negau,[2] worked with the best gold from the hill-countries so that they lit up the river. His Majesty – life, prosperity, health – appointed male and female servants and female musicians and dancers who had been employees of the royal court. Their work is charged to the Palace and the Treasury of the Lord of the Two Lands.[3] ‘I am causing them to be exempted and protected for my fathers – all the gods – so that they may be satisfied with the performance of what their spirits desire, so that they will protect the Homeland.’

The gods and goddesses who are in this land, their hearts are joyful. The owners of shrines[4] rejoice, the riverbanks shout praises, exultation is throughout the [entire] land now that good things have come to pass. The ennead of the temple, their arms are (raised) in admiration, their hands filled with eternal jubilees. All life and dominion (come) from them to the nose of the strong king, the Horus ‘Renaissance’, the beloved son [of his father Amun-Ra, king] of the gods, who begot him to fashion him, the Dual King [Nebkheperura], beloved of Amun, his eldest son, truly his beloved, who champions the father who begot him, whose kingship is the kingship of his father Osiris, the son of Ra [Tutankhamun-ruler-of-Thebes], a son who is effective for the one who begot

him, rich in monuments, abundant in marvels, who performs pious acts with high intent for his father Amun, the image of the renaissance, a sovereign who has [restored] Egypt.

On this day, when One was in the beautiful palace which is in the estate of Aakheperkara, true of voice, [His Majesty – life, prosperity, health] – was rejuvenated; vigour flowed through his body, for Khnum had built him up to be a mighty king.[5] He is strong-armed, richer and more distinguished in strength than the strong, great in strength like the son of Nut, strong-armed like Horus. A second (like him) has not appeared among the brave of every land united. (He) understands like Ra, is [skilled like] Ptah, perceptive like Thoth, who ordains the laws, whose decrees are effective … of excellent speech, the Dual King, Lord of the Two Lands, lord of action, lord of strength [Nebkheperura], who satisfies the land … the bodily son of Ra, his beloved, the lord of every foreign land, lord of appearances [Tutankhamun-ruler-of-Thebes], given life, stability and dominion like Ra for ever and ever.

NOTES

1. A royal foundation of King Thutmose I.
2. A location in the Levant.
3. i.e. the royal household bears the cost of re-staffing the temples.
4. The word is uncertain.
5. This is hyperbole and wishful thinking: in reality, Tutankhamun was a slender youth who walked with a limp and suffered bouts of malaria.

8

Adoption Stela of Nitiqret

In 1897 a large stela of pink granite was discovered lying face down in the forecourt of the temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak. Its original location in the temple is unknown and it now forms part of the collections of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Although the upper part of the stela is broken off and missing, the thirty-one horizontal lines of writing that remain are likely to comprise the main body of the text. They constitute one of the most important historical sources for the early Twenty-sixth Dynasty, a royal line founded by the rulers of the north-western Delta city of Sais.

The inscription carved on the stela recounts a pivotal event in the dynasty's legitimation and the consolidation of its political power: the formal recognition, early in the reign of King Psamtek I (664–610 BC), of his daughter, Princess Nitiqret, as the future God's Wife of Amun. Since the early New Kingdom, the office of God's Wife – the most senior religious office available to a woman and second only in importance to the office of high priest – had been used by monarchs to secure their authority over the politically and economically powerful Amun priesthood. Following the Kushite conquest of Egypt in 728 BC that ushered in the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, the victorious king Piankhi (see Text 2.3) had installed his daughter Shepenwepet as future God's Wife while his son, Taharqo, had done likewise, nominating his daughter Amenirdis.

At the start of Psamtek I's reign, Shepenwepet had duly succeeded as God's Wife while Amenirdis held the deputy rank of Divine Adoratrice. In 656 BC, amidst great pomp and pageantry, Princess Nitiqret was conveyed southwards from the royal residence to Thebes, to be adopted by these two royal ladies as their eventual successor. Psamtek took pains to uphold the established line of succession, rather than simply promoting his daughter immediately to the top job. To have done otherwise would have been to risk incurring the wrath of the Amun priesthood and of a Theban population in whose eyes the now defeated Kushite kings had been models of righteous devotion.

The inscription conveys something of the political compromises that must have accompanied a change of ruling family. Just as Psamtek respected (some of) the decisions of his predecessors, so the adherents of the ousted Kushite dynasty – notably the mayor of Thebes, Montuemhat, and members of his immediate family – acknowledged the new dispensation by pledging significant material resources to enhance Princess Nitiqret's income. Indeed, a large part of the inscription is taken up with an exhaustive list of 'all the property given to her as a gift in the towns and provinces of Upper and Lower Egypt'. Its donors are a who's who of contemporary Theban society, while the widespread geographical distribution of lands underscores Psamtek I's complete hegemony over Egypt.

… (lines missing and damaged) …

I am his firstborn son, whom the father of the gods has made to prosper, who carries out the gods' affairs, whom he made for himself to satisfy his will. I have given him my daughter to be God's Wife and have enriched her more than her predecessors. He will assuredly be satisfied with her praise and protect the land of him who gave her to him. Now, I have heard it said that there is the daughter of the king – the Horus 'High-crowned', the Perfect God [Taharqo], true of voice – whom he gave to his sister to be her first-ranking daughter and who is there as Divine Adoratrice. I shall not do what should not be done and drive out an heir from his seat, because I am a king who loves Justice – my particular abomination is lying – and a son who avenges his father, who has seized the inheritance of the earth-god and joined the two shares (while still) a youth. Rather, I will give her to be her first-ranking daughter, just as she was made over to her father's sister.

Then they kissed the ground and worshipped the Dual King Wahibra,[1] who lives for ever. They said, 'Firm and enduring to the end of eternity, every command of yours will be firm and enduring! How good is this which god has done for you! How beneficial is that which your father has done for you! He put it in the mind of his beloved, that he might make his creator endure upon earth, for he wants your spirit to be remembered and he rejoices at the pronouncing of your name: the Horus 'Great of mind', the Dual King Psamtek, who lives for ever. He made as his pious act for his father Amun, lord of heaven, ruler of the ennead, the giving to him of his beloved eldest daughter Nitiqret, her good name (being) Shepenwepet, to be God's Wife and to play the sistrum before his fair face.'

Year 9, first month of the inundation season, day 28: departure from the royal harem-palace by his eldest daughter, clothed in linen and adorned with new

turquoise. Her accompanying retinue was great in number and constables cleared her way. They set forth joyfully to the quayside to head upstream to the district of Thebes. The ships under her command were great in number, with brave crews, laden along their (entire) length and up to the gunwales with every good thing from the royal estate. Their commander was the unique friend, governor of Upper Oleander-province, great army general and harbourmaster Sematawytefnakht. Messengers had sailed upstream to the south to ensure provisions ahead of her (arrival). The mainsail was hoisted and the rising wind caught his nostrils. Her provisions were garnered from every provincial governor from his own stores – consisting of every good thing: bread and beer, oxen and fowl, vegetables, dates and herbs; every good thing (indeed) – one handing on to another until she reached Thebes.

Year 9, second month of the inundation season, day 14: landing at the quay of Thebes, city of gods. The prow rope was grasped and she found Thebes with throngs of men and crowds of women standing and crying out to meet her, accompanied by oxen, fowl and abundant provisions, great in number. Then they said, 'May Princess[2] Nitiqret come to the House of Amun, that he may receive her and be satisfied with her! May Princess[3] Shepenwepet come to Karnak that the gods who are there may praise her!'

Enduring and abiding are all the pious acts of the Dual King Psamtek, who lives for ever and ever: Amun, lord of heaven, king of the gods, received what was done for him by his son, the Horus 'Great of mind', who lives for ever and ever; Amun, ruler of the ennead, praised what was done for him by his son, the Two Ladies 'Possessor of the warrant', who lives for ever and ever; Amun, greatest of the gods, loved what was done for him by the Golden Horus 'Brave', who lives for ever and ever. The reward for this from Amun, bull of the two heavens, and from Montu, lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, is a million years of life, a million years of stability and a million years of dominion: all health and joy from them for their beloved son, the Dual King and Lord of the Two Lands Wahibra, the son of Ra Psamtek, who lives for ever and ever – given to him together with his spirit.[4] Horus has given him his throne, Geb has given him his divine inheritance, that he may be foremost of all the living spirits, for he is the Dual King upon the throne of Horus – no spirit is his equal!

Now, after she came to the God's Wife Shepenwepet, (Shepenwepet) saw her, was pleased with her and loved her more than anything. She made (over) to her the deed which (Shepenwepet's) father and mother had executed for her; as did her first-ranking daughter, Amenirdis, daughter of [Taharqo], true of voice. Their decision was confirmed in writing, as follows: 'We hereby give to you all our property in country and town. You shall be established upon our throne and shall

endure and abide until the end of eternity.' Their witnesses were all the priests, pure-priests and friends of the temple.

Sum of all the property given to her as a gift in the towns and provinces of Upper and Lower Egypt:

– What His Majesty gave to her in seven provinces of Upper Egypt:

  – In the district of Herakleopolis, an estate called Iuna which is in its district: 300 *setjat* of fields
  – In the district of Oxyrhynchus, the place of Putawy which is in its district: 300 *setjat* of fields
  – In the district of Anty-province, the place of Kuku which is in its district: 200 *setjat* of fields
  – In the district of Hare-province, the places of Nes-min which are in its district: 500 *setjat*
  – In the district of Wadjet-province, Kay which is in its district: 300 *setjat*
  – In the district of Hu, the place of Harsiese which is in its district: 200 *setjat*
  – All this, sum total: 1,800 *setjat* of fields together with all their produce in country and in town, together with their dry land and their canals.

– Bread and beer to be given to her for the temple of Amun:

  – Given to her by the fourth prophet of Amun, mayor of the city (Thebes) and overseer of the whole of Upper Egypt, Montuemhat, who thrives: 200 *deben* of bread, 5 *hin* of milk, 1 cake, 1 bundle of vegetables every day and a monthly due of 3 oxen and 5 geese
  – Given to her by his eldest son, the inspector of priests of Thebes, Nesptah: 100 *deben* of bread, 2 *hin* of milk, 1 bundle of vegetables every day and a monthly due of 15 cakes, 10 jars of beer and (the yield of) a 100-*setjat* field in Wadjet-province
  – Given to her by the wife of the fourth prophet of Amun Montuemhat, Udajrenes, true of voice: 100 *deben* of bread every day
  – Given to her by the first prophet of Amun Harkhebha: a daily due of 100 *deben* of bread and 2 *hin* of milk and a monthly due of 10 cakes, 5 jars of beer and 10 bundles of vegetables
  – Given to her by the third prophet of Amun, Padiamunnebnesuttawy: a daily due of 100 *deben* of bread and 2 *hin* of milk and a monthly due

of 5 jars of beer, 10 cakes and 10 bundles of vegetables

– Sum total: daily due: 600 *deben* of bread, 11 *hin* of milk, 2⅙ cakes, 2⅔ bundles of herbs; monthly due: 3 oxen, 5 geese, 20 jars of beer and (the yield of) 100 *setjat* of fields

…

– What His Majesty is to give to her from the temple of Ra-Atum in Upper Pomegranate-tree-province as divine offerings laid down by His Majesty:

  – 3 sacks[5] of first-class emmer after it has been offered in the (god's) presence every day and the god has been satisfied with it.

– What is to be given to her from the temples of:

  – Sais: 200 *deben* of bread
  – Buto: 200 *deben* of bread
  – Kom Abu Billo: 100 *deben* of bread
  – Per-inebwy: 50 *deben* of bread
  – Kom el-Hisn: 50 *deben* of bread
  – Per-manu: 50 *deben* of bread
  – Ta-at-en-tjar: 50 *deben* of bread
  – Tanis: 100 *deben* of bread
  – Per-hathor: 100 *deben* of bread
  – Bubastis: 100 *deben* of bread
  – Athribis: 200 *deben* of bread
  – Mest: 50 *deben* of bread
  – Biaset: 50 *deben* of bread
  – Per-herishef-neb-henen-nesut: 100 *deben* of bread
  – Per-sopdu: 100 *deben* of bread
  – Sum total: 1,500 *deben* of bread

…

– What is to be given to her from four provinces of Lower Egypt:

  – In the district of Sais, the estates of the southern bedouin which are in the district: 360 *setjat* of fields
  – In the district of Biaset, Ta-at-en-neferher which is in the district: 500 *setjat* of fields
  – In the district of Geb, Tint-ta-wat-nehet which is in the district: 240 *setjat*

– In the central district of Heliopolis, ‘The wall of Hori, son of Djedti’, also called ‘The wall of Pasheri-en-Mut, born of Meret-ub-khetekh’, which is in its district: 300 *setjat*
– Total: 1,400 *setjat* of fields in four provinces together with all their produce in country and town, together with their dry land and canals

– Grand total: 2,100 *deben* of bread and 3,300 *setjat* of fields in eleven provinces: stable, stable, flourishing, flourishing, without destruction and without decay, for ever and ever!

Added as an afterthought:
In the district of Tawer-province: Inep, together with all its people, all its fields and all its property in country and in town.

NOTES

1. The throne-name of Psamtek I.
2. The Egyptian term is ‘King’s daughter’, with the word for ‘king’ being the one used to indicate the divine office holder, i.e. the king as representative of the gods on earth.
3. The Egyptian term is again ‘King’s daughter’, but the word used for ‘king’ indicates the secular office holder, i.e. king as head of state.
4. This section links each part of the king’s five-fold titulary to a different manifestation of Amun, state god and chief deity of Karnak.
5. A *khar*, ‘sack’, was a unit of dry volume equal to about 77 litres.



Part Nine

SONGS



Music and singing were essential features of ancient Egyptian culture, in both sacred and secular contexts. Temple singers – who, in the New Kingdom and later periods, were often women – performed at religious festivals, accompanied by sistra and other instruments. As in Elizabethan England, troops of travelling players seem to have wandered from village to village, entertaining the wealthy in their houses, as suggested by the reference in the Tales of Wonder (Text 10.1) where a group of deities disguise themselves as musicians, and no Egyptian banquet was complete without music, often led by a harpist.

Few texts have survived that can be identified with certainty as songs. The exceptions are the harpists' songs, two examples of which are translated here. To judge from surviving representations, playing the harp seems often to have been the preserve of blind musicians. We know that loss of one sense can heighten others, but it was not just the musicianship of blind harpists that was cherished in ancient Egypt: their lack of sight seems to have been associated with greater insight. Freed from quotidian distractions, they were believed to have greater understanding of the human condition. In a society where disability in general was probably regarded as a curse, the blind harpist occupied a privileged position in society as philosopher-entertainer. Harpists' songs were highly valued for their brevity, wit and profundity.

This is reflected in two harpists' songs from the Middle and New Kingdoms. Both were carved on the walls of funerary chapels, one apparently in the tomb of a King Intef (Text 9.1), the later example of the genre in the tomb of a high official, Neferhotep (Text 9.2). Their primary interest lies in the different attitudes they reveal towards death, ranging from the optimistic to the sceptical. Such songs possibly originated in secular settings, but may also have been sung at the funerary banquets that were held in cemeteries on festival days, when surviving relatives would 'join' their deceased loved ones for merry-making. The complex and contradictory feelings of joy and sadness, hope and fear that such occasions must have engendered is reflected in the message of the harpists'

songs, which praise death as a blessed state while recoiling from its horrors and finality.

The incongruity of including these songs in a tomb setting did not escape the ancient Egyptians and is explicitly acknowledged in the later song (Text 9.2). For all the official rhetoric, the barrage of religious dogma and imagery and the sheer effort expended on provision for the afterlife, the ancient Egyptians were, it seems, prone to the same haunting doubt as all human beings: that death may, indeed, be the end.

1

Harpist’s Song from the Tomb of King Intef

The most sceptical of the surviving harpists’ songs, and hence the most important example of the genre, is preserved in two copies dating to the New Kingdom. An incomplete version is inscribed on decorated blocks from the tomb-chapel of Paatenemheb at Saqqara (now in the Leiden Museum of Antiquities), dating from the Eighteenth Dynasty reign of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten (1353–1336 BC). It was carved above a group of four musicians, led by a blind harpist, that originally formed part of a larger banquet scene. A later, complete copy of the song is preserved in the Ramesside Papyrus Harris 500 (now in the British Museum). Since the language of the song is classical Middle Egyptian, its attribution to the tomb of a King Intef (of whom there were several in the Eleventh, Thirteenth and Seventeenth Dynasties) is plausible.

The song opens with a traditional view of death, describing it as ‘a good fate’, but quickly turns more sceptical in tone, commenting on the futility of building a tomb and urging listeners instead to live for the day and ‘be happy’ by ignoring what is to come. The refrain encapsulates the song’s overall sentiment: ‘make merry’ because ‘no one who departs returns’.

Like Be a Writer (Text 11.4), composed several centuries later for a very different audience, the harpist’s song from the tomb of King Intef mentions two of the most famous wise men from Egypt’s past, Imhotep and Hordedef. Indeed, the two texts share a common scepticism about life after death, suggesting that such doubts were less rare in ancient Egypt than the official texts would lead us to believe.

The song which is in the tomb of (King) Intef, true of voice, which is presented by the singer with the harp:

He flourishes, this goodly noble:
To perish is a good fate!
One generation passes,

Another remains,
Since the time of the ancestors.
The gods of the past are at peace in their tombs;
The blessed nobles likewise are buried in their tombs:
Yet those who built the tombs,
Their places are no more.
What has become of them?

I have heard the words of Imhotep and Hordedef,[1]
Whose sayings are (still) recited in their entirety.
What of their places?
Their walls are in ruins,
Their places are no more
As if they had never existed!
None returns from there
To tell of their condition,
To tell of their ruin,
To cease our heartache
Until we hasten to the place where they have gone!

So be happy!
Ignorance is bliss![2]
Follow your heart as long as you live!
Put myrrh on your head,
Wear fine linen,
Anoint yourself with the real wonders that belong to a god![3]
Increase your joys,
Let not your heart be weary,
But follow your heart and your happiness.
Do as your heart commands while you are upon the earth!
When that day of wailing comes for you,
The Weary-Hearted[4] hears not their wailing,
Their mourning rescues no man from the netherworld!

Refrain:

Make merry,
Do not weary of it!
Look, no one is allowed to take his possessions with him.

Look, no one who departs returns!

NOTES

1. Two famous sages of the Old Kingdom.
2. Literally, ‘Forgetfulness makes you blessed’.
3. An elaborate circumlocution for precious oils and unguents.
4. A euphemism for the god Osiris, lord of the underworld.

2

Harpist’s Song from the Tomb of Neferhotep

*Theban tomb number 50 was constructed for a priest of the cult of Amun named Neferhotep who lived in the reign of Horemheb (*c. *1319–1292 BC), the last king of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The pictorial decoration of Neferhotep’s tomb-chapel comprises the standard scenes for a funerary monument of the period. Much more noteworthy are the three harpist’s songs that are inscribed on the chapel’s walls, two of them accompanying scenes of banqueting. Although included in one and the same tomb, the three songs convey strikingly different attitudes to death.*

The first song is sceptical about death, continuing the theme first attested in the tomb of King Intef (Text 9.1), but blends its scepticism with traditional, pious sentiments more suited to a funerary context. The third song describes the afterlife in traditional terms, as a destination for the blessed dead. The second and most striking song, translated here, openly acknowledges the sceptical view of death, only to reject it. Instead, the song praises the land of the dead, hailing it, to use Shakespeare’s famous phrase, as ‘a consummation devoutly to be wished’.

The song is inscribed on the left-hand rear wall of the hall of the tomb-chapel.

Recited by the harpist[1] of the God’s Father[2] of Amun, Neferhotep, true of voice:

All you excellent nobles and gods[3] of the burial ground,
Listen to the praise-giving for the God’s Father,
To the honouring of an excellent noble’s effective soul,
Now that he is an ever-living god, magnified in the West:[4]
May they become a remembrance for posterity,
For everyone who comes to pass by.

I have heard those songs that are in the tombs of old,
What they say to magnify (life) on earth

And diminish the necropolis.
Why is this done to the land of eternity,[5]
Which is right and correct and without terror?
It abhors discord:
Nobody readies himself against his fellow.
This land which cannot be resisted,
All our kin rest there since the dawn of creation;[6]
Those yet to be born, to millions upon millions,
Shall come to it, without exception –
For none may linger in the Homeland[7] –
And there is none who will fail to reach it.
As for the span of one's deeds upon earth,
It is a dream.
One says, 'Welcome, safe and sound!'
To him who reaches the Beyond.

NOTES

1. The harpist remains anonymous; only his boss (the owner of the tomb) is named.
2. A priestly title.
3. Literally, 'enneads' (groups of nine deities).
4. The land of the dead.
5. i.e. the afterlife.
6. Literally, 'since the time of the first beginning'.
7. A translation of *ta-meri*, an affectionate term for Egypt.



Part Ten

TALES



Since people first acquired language, it seems, words have been used both to convey information about the real world and to conjure up imaginary worlds. The human mind is capable of extraordinary flights of fancy, and the human imagination positively relishes them. Stories are thus a feature of every known culture. In most societies until recent times, stories were passed down orally. Even the invention of writing did not supplant oral recitation, but allowed some of the most popular tales to be recorded for posterity without the need for a narrator. While the best-known writings from ancient Egypt are factual – autobiographies, battle narrative and royal inscriptions – the ancient Egyptians possessed imaginations as lively as any people before or since, and they were fine story-tellers, as their surviving tales attest.

In common with all examples of the genre, Tales of Wonder and The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor were written to be read aloud, to be performed. The repetition of key words and phrases is a prominent feature, intended to guide the listener along as the narrative unfolds. The language is generally simple and direct, without the complex constructions seen in other genres, and much use is made of fantastical situations and magical occurrences – perennially popular themes in fiction. Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss these works as mere children's tales, for the imagery is richly layered and the subject matter is at times highly controversial. Themes such as the character of the king and the royal succession (Text 10.1) or the inevitability of fate and the relationship between humans and the divine (Text 10.2) were sensitive in ancient Egypt, especially in a court setting. Only in magical tales, with their overtly and unmistakably fictional character, could such subjects be explored without offending the rules of decorum or – worse – being accused of lese-majesty or blasphemy.

Both texts translated here were composed during the Middle Kingdom, the golden age of ancient Egyptian writing. But tales continued to be composed, enjoyed and written down in subsequent periods too. In common with people throughout history, the ancient Egyptians loved a good story.

1

Tales of Wonder

Tales of Wonder, also known as The Tale of the Court of King Khufu, is preserved on a papyrus (Papyrus Westcar) dating from the Second Intermediate Period or early New Kingdom (sixteenth century BC). The language of the text suggests that it was composed somewhat later than other Middle Kingdom tales, probably in the Thirteenth Dynasty (second half of the eighteenth century BC). Twelve columns of writing survive; the end of the papyrus is lost and the manuscript breaks off in the middle of a story.

The work comprises a series of tales told to King Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid, by his sons; the first three tales are set in the reigns of earlier monarchs (Djoser, Nebka and Sneferu respectively). The first tale, presumably related by Khufu's eldest son, Djedefra, is lost, apart from the king's response; it probably concerned the actions of the legendary priest and courtier Imhotep. The second tale, which is poorly preserved, is told by Khufu's second son, Khafra, and concerns the actions of a chief lector-priest named Ubainer. Following the same format, the third tale, related by Prince Bauefra, tells of the exploits of the chief lector-priest Djadjaemankh. The fourth tale, told by Prince Hordedef, is set in the present and tells of a magic deed performed by a commoner named Djedi in Khufu's own presence. After this, a fifth section takes the form of a story describing the miraculous birth of three royal children, destined to become the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty. The third and fourth tales and the fifth section are translated here.

The overall aim of the text seems to have been amusement: just as the tales are told to amuse King Khufu, so the work as a whole aimed to amuse its audience. Its blends historical characters (the royal personages) with fictional elements (the magic tricks, the birth of the royal children), while the underlying theme of kingship is subverted by references to Sneferu's lasciviousness and Khufu's bad temper. Miracles, interpreted in official documents as signs of divine favour and royal legitimation (compare Text 8.1), are presented as no more than

magic tricks. Historical fiction, fantasy and satire: these Tales of Wonder have all the ingredients of crowd-pleasers, ancient and modern.

Prince Bauefra's tale

Then Bauefra stood up to speak. He said:

I shall let [Your] Majesty hear a wonder which happened in the time of your father, Sneferu, true of voice [which was performed by] the chief lector-priest Djadjaemankh. Yesterday illuminates … today; these things which have not happened before …

[One day the Dual King Sneferu, true of voice, was going round] every [chamber] in the palace – life, prosperity, health – to seek for himself a place of relaxation, but he could find none. Then he said, 'Go and bring to me the chief lector-priest and scribe of the roll Djadjaemankh.' And he was brought to him immediately. Then His Majesty said to him, 'I went round every chamber of the palace – life, prosperity, health – to seek for myself a place of relaxation, but I could find none.' Then Djadjaemankh said to him, 'Then let Your Majesty proceed to the lake of the palace – life, prosperity, health – and equip a boat for yourself with all the beauties of your palace. Your Majesty's heart will be refreshed to see them row, rowing up and down. You will see the beautiful pools of your water-garden. You will see its fields and its beautiful banks. And your heart will be refreshed by it.'

'I will indeed make a rowing-trip. Let there be brought to me twenty oars of ebony, worked in gold, their handles of sandalwood, worked in electrum. Let there be brought to me twenty women with beautiful bodies, deep-bosomed with braided hair, who still have their virgin bloom.[1] Let there be brought to me twenty nets and give these nets to the women in place of their clothes.' Then it was done exactly as His Majesty commanded.

And they rowed up and down and His Majesty's heart was gladdened at seeing them row. Then the one who was at the stroke-oar got her braid entangled. Then (her) fish-pendant of new turquoise fell in the water. She stopped rowing and then her (whole) side stopped rowing. Then His Majesty said, 'Shouldn't you be rowing?' And they said, 'Our stroke has stopped rowing.' And His Majesty said to her, 'Why aren't you rowing?' And she said, '(Because) a fish-pendant of new turquoise fell in the water.' Then [he said], '… [If you] want it … it shall be replaced.' And she said, 'I want my own, not one like it.' And His Majesty said, 'Go and bring me the (chief) lector-priest Djadjaemankh', and he was brought to him immediately. Then His Majesty said,

‘Djadjaemankh, my brother, I have done as you said and [My] Majesty’s heart was refreshed at seeing them row. Then a fish-pendant of new turquoise belonging to the stroke fell in the water. Then she stopped rowing and ruined her (whole) side. And I said to her, “Why aren’t you rowing?” And she said to me, “(Because) a fish-pendant of new turquoise fell in the water.” And I said to her, “Row! Look, I will replace it!” And she said to me, “I want my own, not one like it.” ’

Then the chief lector-priest Djadjaemankh said his magic words. Then he placed one side of the lake’s water on top of the other and he found the fish-pendant lying on a pot-sherd. Then he fetched it and it was given to its owner. Now, as for the water, it was twelve cubits (deep) in the middle and it ended up twenty-four cubits (deep) after it had been folded over.[2] Then he said his magic words (again) and he restored the waters of the lake to their (original) position. His Majesty spent the day having fun with the entire royal household – life, prosperity, health. And so he rewarded the chief lector-priest Djadjaemankh with every good thing.

Behold the wonder which occurred in the time of your father, the Dual King Sneferu, true of voice, a deed of the chief lector-priest and scribe of the roll Djadjaemankh. Then the Majesty of the Dual King Khufu, true of voice,[3] said, ‘Let an offering be made of a thousand loaves, a hundred jars of beer, an ox and two balls of incense for the Majesty of the Dual King Sneferu, true of voice; and let there be given a cake, a jug of beer and a ball of incense for the chief lector-priest and scribe of the roll Djadjaemankh. For I have seen his act of wisdom.’ And it was done exactly as His Majesty commanded.

Prince Hordedef’s tale

Then Prince Hordedef stood up to speak. He said:

‘[How to relate a past] deed [is something only] those who have passed away (truly) know. Truth cannot be (truly) known any more than Falsehood. [There is a subject of] Your Majesty, in your own time, who not only knows [the things that do not exist, but also everything that does.]’ And His Majesty said, ‘What is this, Hordedef, my son?’ [And Prince Hor]dedef [said], ‘There is a fellow called Djedi who lives in Djed-Sneferu. He is a fellow of 110 years. He eats 500 loaves and the shoulder of an ox for meat and he drinks 100 jars of beer – right up to today. He knows how to reattach a severed head. He knows how to make a lion walk beside him with its leash on the ground. He knows the number of the chambers of the Sanctuary of Thoth.’[4]

Now the Majesty of the Dual King Khufu, true of voice, used to spend all day searching out these chambers of the Sanctuary of Thoth for himself, in order to make their replica for his own tomb. His Majesty said, ‘You yourself, Hordedef my son, you shall bring him to me!’ Then boats were made ready for Prince Hordedef and he travelled upstream to Djed-Sneferu. Once the boats had been moored at the riverbank, he travelled overland, seated in a palanquin of ebony with carrying-poles of boxwood, inlaid with gold. Once he had reached Djedi, the palanquin was set down. (Prince Hordedef) stood up to address (Djedi) and found him lying on a mat on the threshold of his porch, a servant holding his head, anointing it for him and another massaging his feet.

Then Prince Hordedef said, ‘You seem much younger than your years[5] – old age is (usually) the time of dying, the time of burial, the time of rejoining the earth – sleeping until daybreak, free from illness, without a rattling cough! This is a greeting for a revered one. I have come here to summon you on a commission of my father Khufu, true of voice. You shall eat fine things of the king’s bounty and (all) the provisions of his retinue. He will see that you live a good life until you join your forefathers who are in the necropolis.’

And Djedi said, ‘Welcome, welcome, Hordedef, a prince beloved by his father! May your father Khufu, true of voice, praise you! May he promote your position among the elders! May your spirit prevail[6] against your enemy! May your soul learn the roads that lead to the portal of the lord of the underworld![7] This is a greeting for a prince.’

Then Hordedef threw open his arms, raised him up and proceeded with him to the riverbank, giving him his arm. Then Djedi said, ‘Let me be given a barge to bring my children and my writings (with) me!’ And two boats and their crews were put at his disposal. Then Djedi came downstream in Prince Hordedef’s barque.

Once he had reached the Residence, Prince Hordedef went in to report to the Majesty of the Dual King Khufu, true of voice. And Prince Hordedef said, ‘Sovereign – life, prosperity, health – my lord! I have brought Djedi.’ And His Majesty said, ‘Go and bring him to me!’ His Majesty proceeded to the forecourt of the palace – life, prosperity, health – and Djedi was ushered in to him. And His Majesty said, ‘How is it, Djedi, that I have not seen you (before)?’ And Djedi said, ‘He who is summoned comes, sovereign – life, prosperity, health. Summon me and, look, I have come!’ And His Majesty said, ‘Is it true, what they say, that you know how to reattach a severed head?’ And Djedi said, ‘Yes, I know how to, sovereign – life, prosperity, health – my lord.’ And His Majesty said, ‘Let there be brought to me the prisoner who is in the gaol and inflict the

injury on him.' And Djedi said, 'Not on people, sovereign – life, prosperity, health – my lord! Look, it is not ordained to do such a thing to the noble flock!'

Then a duck[8] was brought to him and its head was cut off. Then the duck was placed on the west side of the court and its head on the east side of the court. Then Djedi said his magic words. And the duck stood up and waddled and its head likewise. When one reached the other, the duck stood up and quacked. Then he had a goose[9] brought to him and the same was done to it. Then His Majesty had a bull brought to him and its head was cast on the ground. Then Djedi said his magic words and the bull stood up … [Then His Majesty had a lion brought to him and its head was cast on the ground. Then Djedi said his magic words and the lion walked] behind him, its leash on the ground.

Then King Khufu, true of voice, said, 'And they say that you know the number of the chambers of the Sanctuary of Thoth.' And Djedi said, 'May it please you: I do not know their number, sovereign – life, prosperity, health – my lord, but I know where it is (kept).' And His Majesty said, 'Where?' and Djedi said, 'There is a casket of flint in a chamber called Sipti in Heliopolis. In the casket.' [And His Majesty said, 'Go and bring it to me!'] And Djedi said, 'Sovereign – life, prosperity, health – my lord, look: it is not I who will bring it to you.' And His Majesty said, 'Who, then, will bring it to me?' And Djedi said, 'It is the eldest of the three children in the womb of Ruddjedet who will bring it to you.' And His Majesty said, 'But I want it! These things you say: who is she, this Ruddjedet?' And Djedi said, 'She is the wife of a priest of Ra, lord of Sakhbu, and she is pregnant with three children of Ra, lord of Sakhbu. He has said of them that they will carry out this excellent office[10] in this entire land, and that the eldest of them will be high priest of Ra[11] in Heliopolis.'

And His Majesty fell into a bad mood at this. And Djedi said, 'What is this mood, sovereign – life, prosperity, health – my lord? Is it because of the three children I mentioned? First your son, then his son, then one of them!'[12] And His Majesty said, 'When will Ruddjedet give birth?' [And Djedi said,] 'She will give birth on the fifteenth day of the first month of the growing season.' And His Majesty said, 'That is when the sandbanks of Two Fish Channel[13] are exposed. My servant, would that I had crossed it myself so that I might see the temple of Ra, lord of Sakhbu!'[14] And Djedi said, 'Then I shall create four cubits of water upon the sandbanks of Two Fish Channel.' Then His Majesty proceeded to his palace and His Majesty said, 'Let Djedi be assigned to the household of Prince Hordedef, to reside with him and make him provisions of a thousand loaves, a hundred jars of beer, an ox and a hundred bundles of vegetables.' And it was done exactly as His Majesty commanded.

The tale of the royal children

One of those days, Ruddjedet was suffering the pains of childbirth. And the Majesty of Ra, lord of Sakhbu, said to Isis, Nephthys, Meskhenet, Heqet and Khnum, ‘Go forth and let Ruddjedet give birth to the three children who are in her womb, who will carry out this excellent office in the entire land. For they will build your temples, provision your altars, endow your offering-tables and increase your offerings.’ Then these gods proceeded, having assumed the forms of musicians, and Khnum (went) with them, carrying the baggage.

Then they arrived at the house of Rauser,[15] and they found him standing with his kilt on upside down. They presented to him their necklaces and sistra. Then he said to them, ‘My ladies, look: the woman is suffering the pains of childbirth.’ Then they said, ‘Let us see her! Look, we know about childbirth.’ Then he said to them, ‘Go in,’ and they entered in before Ruddjedet. Then they sealed the room with her and them inside. Then Isis took up position in front of her, Nephthys behind her, while Heqet hastened the birth. Then Isis said, ‘May you not be too powerful in her womb, in this your name of Userref!’[16] And this child slipped out into her arms, a child of one cubit, with strong bones; his limbs resembled gold, his headdress real lapis lazuli. And they washed him, when his umbilical cord had been cut, and placed him on a pillow of cloth. Then Meskhenet presented herself to him and said, ‘A king who will carry out the kingship in this entire land!’ Khnum strengthened his limbs.

Then Isis took up position in front of her, Nephthys behind her, while Heqet hastened the birth. Then Isis said, ‘May you not kick in her womb, in this your name of Sahura!’[17] And this child slipped out into her arms, a child of one cubit, with strong bones; his limbs resembled gold, his headdress real lapis lazuli. And they washed him, when his umbilical cord had been cut, and placed him on a pillow of cloth. Then Meskhenet presented herself to him and said, ‘A king who will carry out the kingship in this entire land!’ Khnum strengthened his limbs.

Then Isis took up position in front of her, Nephthys behind her, while Heqet hastened the birth. Then Isis said, ‘May you not be too dark in her womb, in this your name of Keku!’[18] And this child slipped out into her arms, a child of one cubit, with strong bones; his limbs resembled gold, his headdress real lapis lazuli. [And they washed him, when his umbilical cord had been cut, and placed him on a pillow of cloth.][19] Then Meskhenet presented herself to him and said, ‘A king who will carry out the kingship in this entire land!’ Khnum strengthened his limbs.

Then these gods went out, having delivered Ruddjedet of the three children. Then they said, ‘Be glad, Rauser, for three children have been born to you!’

Then he said to them, ‘My ladies, how can I thank you?[20] Please give this gallon[21] of corn to your porter and take it as a tip.’[22] And Khnum loaded himself with the gallon. Then they returned whence they had come. Then Isis said to (her fellow) gods, ‘What did we come here for, if we do not perform a wonder for these children that we can report to their father who sent us?’ Then they fashioned three crowns fit for a lord – life, prosperity, health – and placed them in the gallon. Then they made the sky turn into wind and rain. Then they turned back to the house and they said, ‘Please put this gallon in a locked room here until we return from making music in the north.’ Then they put the gallon in a locked room.

And Ruddjedet became pure (again) after a purification of fourteen days. Then she said to her maid, ‘Is the house prepared?’ And (the maid) said, ‘Everything is prepared except the jars which have not been brought.’ Then Ruddjedet said, ‘But why haven’t the jars been brought?’ And the maid said, ‘There is nothing here to put in them, except the musicians’ gallon and it is in a room which they locked.’ Then Ruddjedet said, ‘Go down and bring it from there. Rauser can repay them for it when he returns.’ And the maid went and unlocked the room. And she heard the sound of singing, music, dancing, rejoicing – everything that is done for a king – inside the room. Then she went back and reported everything she had heard to Ruddjedet. And *she* went around the room, but could not find the place it was coming from. Then she put her ear to the sack, and discovered (the noise) was being made inside it. Then she put (the gallon) in a box, placed inside another locked container, tied with leather. She put it in the room which contained her belongings and she locked it up. Then Rauser returned from the water-meadow. And Ruddjedet repeated this affair to him and he was happier than anything. Then they sat down and spent a happy time.

A few days later, Ruddjedet had an argument with the maid and punished her with a beating. Then the maid said to the other members of the household, ‘Why is this done? Why? She has borne three kings! I will go and tell it to the Majesty of the Dual King Khufu, true of voice!’ And she went and found her older brother binding flax and yarn on the threshing-floor. And he said to her, ‘Where are you off to, little girl?’ And she repeated the affair to him. And her brother said to her, ‘So, doing what should be done (means) coming to me and me agreeing to the accusations?’ And he took a bundle of flax to her and gave her a nasty beating. Then the maid went to get herself a cup of water and a crocodile seized her. Then her brother went to tell this to Ruddjedet. He found Ruddjedet sitting with her head on her lap, her mood worse than anything. And he said to her, ‘My lady, why this mood?’ And she said, ‘It is the little girl who grew up in this house. See, she is gone, saying, “I will go and accuse (them).” ’ Then he

lowered his head and said, ‘My lady, she actually came to tell me, so that she might go with me. I gave her a nasty beating. She went to draw herself a little water and a crocodile seized her.’

NOTES

1. Literally, ‘who have not yet been opened up in childbirth’.
2. This is a typically ancient Egyptian detail, reflecting the society’s penchant for counting and accounting.
3. The use of the phrase ‘true of voice’, as applied to King Khufu, is strictly speaking anachronistic – the tales are set in his reign – but reflects the fact that, by the time the tales were composed, Khufu was long dead.
4. A mythical location.
5. Literally, ‘Your condition is like living before old age’.
6. Literally, ‘institute proceedings’.
7. Literally, ‘him who shrouds the tired’.
8. Usually translated ‘goose’, a small domesticated waterfowl is indicated.
9. Literally, ‘*khetaa*-goose’, indicating a large domesticated waterfowl.
10. i.e. the kingship.
11. Literally, ‘Greatest of Seers’, a title referring to the astronomical/astrological aspect of the cult of Ra.
12. In other words, the royal succession will continue in Khufu’s family for another two generations.
13. The name for the southernmost part of the Canopic branch of the Nile, in the vicinity of Letopolis in the 2nd province of Lower Egypt.
14. There are overtones here of King Herod asking to visit the baby Jesus ‘so that I might come and worship him also’.
15. Ruddjedet’s husband.
16. The sentence contains a pun on the word powerful (*user*) and the name of the baby.
17. The sentence contains a pun on the word kick (*sah*) and the name of the baby.
18. The sentence contains a pun on the word dark (*kek*) and the name of the baby.
19. In the papyrus copy, this sentence has been misplaced at the end of the paragraph. It has been restored here in its proper place.
20. Literally, ‘what can I do for you?’
21. The *heqat* was a measure of liquid volume approximating to an imperial gallon (4.54 litres).

22. Literally, ‘as the price of beer’ (cf. the French word *pourboire*).

2

The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor

Composed in the early to mid-Twelfth Dynasty, The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor is a greater work of literature than it appears at first sight. Ostensibly a simple 'traveller's tale' of a sailor shipwrecked on a magical island ruled over by a giant snake, the work reveals itself on closer study to possess a complexity and sophistication of structure, symbolism and meaning.

The structure involves a tale within a tale. Each involves the use of a narrative (the snake's to the sailor, the sailor's to his boss) to demonstrate how catastrophe can be faced and overcome; both are prefaced with the words 'Let me relate to you something similar', setting up a deliberate parallelism. At the outset of the story, the sailor recounts a tale of his triumph over adversity in order to encourage his master to face a difficult interview with the king. In the middle of the sailor's tale, the snake tells of his own tragedy in order to encourage the sailor to face his difficult situation. The theme of the work is therefore a world of unfairness and suffering, in which facing up to calamity is best achieved by recounting it, since expressing events through the spoken word brings them safely under control. (Moreover, it is the sailor's rhetoric, his ability with words, that saves him from the snake at their first encounter.) In its focus on the darker side of life and the importance of 'perfect speech', The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor thus embodies the twin preoccupations of Twelfth Dynasty literature and literate culture.

Equally unsettling as the theme itself is the abrupt ending of the text, where the sailor's boss dismisses the attempt at reassurance with the words 'Do not be a know-it-all, my friend. For is water given to a bird at dawn that will be slaughtered in the morning?' The dark implication is that consolation is wasted in the face of adversity. This questioning of the value of rhetoric potentially undermines the most important of Twelfth Dynasty cultural values, posing yet further challenges to the tale's audience. In view of these complexities, The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor may be regarded as a miniature masterpiece.

The text is preserved in a single manuscript (Papyrus St Petersburg 1115), possibly from Thebes, which dates from the mid- to late Twelfth Dynasty.

Then the trusty retainer said:

May it please you, sir: look, we have reached the (royal) Residence. The mallet has been seized and the mooring post hammered home. The prow rope has been brought to land. Praise is given and god is thanked. Every man embraces his fellow. Our crew is returned safe, without loss to our expedition, (although) we reached the very ends of Wawat and passed Senmut. Look, we have come back in peace; we have reached our homeland!

Listen to me, sir! I am lacking in wealth. Wash yourself, pour water over your fingers. (You should) answer when you are questioned. Speak to the king with your wits about you; answer without stammering. For a man's mouth can save him; his words show indulgence to him. But if you act as you wish, what you have said is (likely to be) wearisome.

Let me relate to you something similar which happened to me. I had gone to the sovereign's mines and was returning by sea in a boat one hundred and fifty cubits in length and forty cubits in width. One hundred and fifty sailors were on board, of the finest of Egypt. Whether they looked at the sky or looked at the land, their hearts were braver than lions. They could foretell a storm before it arrived, bad weather before it appeared.

A storm came up while we were at sea, before we could reach land. A wind got up and it howled incessantly. There was a wave eight cubits (high); it hit the mast. Then the ship died and everyone in it. Not one (other) was spared. I was deposited on an island by a wave of the sea.

I spent three days alone, my heart (as) my only companion. I slept inside a wooden hut; I hugged the shade. Then I stretched my legs to discover what I might put in my mouth. I found figs and grapes there, all kinds of excellent vegetables, sycomore-figs and notched-figs, cucumbers like vines. There were fish and fowl. There was nothing that wasn't there! I sated myself and had to put some down because it was too much to carry. I cut a fire-drill, lit a fire, added kindling and gave a burnt offering to the gods.

Then I heard a thunderous noise which I thought was a wave of the sea. The trees were breaking and the ground was shaking. I uncovered my face and discovered it was a snake that had come – he was thirty cubits (long) and his beard was more than two cubits. His body was fashioned in gold, his eyebrows in real lapis lazuli and he reared up in front. He opened his mouth to me while I was on my belly in his presence. He said to me, 'Who brought you, who brought

you, little man? Who brought you? If you delay in telling me who brought you to this island, I will make you know what it is to be ashes, to become something unsightly. You speak to me but I am not hearing you! I am before you but you know me not!'

Then he put me in his mouth and carried me off to his resting place, where he put me down untouched. I was uninjured and nothing had been taken from me. He opened his mouth to me while I was on my belly in his presence. Then he said to me, 'Who brought you, who brought you, little man? Who brought you to this island of the sea, whose two sides are among the waves?'

Then I answered him, my arms bent (in respect) in his presence. I said to him, 'It was I: I had gone down to the mining country on a mission of the sovereign in a boat one hundred and fifty cubits in length and forty cubits in width. One hundred and fifty sailors were on board, of the finest of Egypt. Whether they looked at the sky or looked at the land, their hearts were braver than lions. They could foretell a storm before it arrived, bad weather before it appeared. Each one of them, his heart was braver and his arm stronger than his fellow. There was none incompetent among them. A storm came up while we were at sea, before we could reach land. A wind got up and it howled incessantly. There was a wave eight cubits (high); it hit the mast. Then the ship died and everyone in it. No one was spared except me. Look, here I am at your side. So I was brought to this island by a wave of the sea.'

He said to me, 'Do not fear, do not fear, little man. Do not blanch. For you have reached me. See, god has caused you to live. He has brought you to this island of the spirit where there is nothing that isn't here! It is filled with every good thing. Look, you will spend month upon month until you have completed four months on this island. Then a boat will come from the Residence with a crew known to you. You will go with them to the Residence and you will die in your (own) town. How joyful is he who relates what he has experienced when calamities have been overcome!

'Let me relate to you something similar which happened on this island. I was here with my brothers and my children (were) among them; we totalled seventy-five snakes with my offspring and my brothers, not to mention the daughter of another young female who came to me through prayer. Then a star fell and they were consumed in flames by it; but it happened that I was not burned with them, because I was not among them. Otherwise I would have died for them. I found them as one heap of corpses.

'If you are brave and your heart is strong, you will embrace your children, you will kiss your wife and you will see your house – it will be better than anything!

You will reach the Residence and dwell there surrounded by your brethren. You will survive.'

I prostrated myself and touched the ground in his presence. 'I say to you, I shall speak of your power to the sovereign. I shall let him know of your greatness. I shall cause there to be brought to you laudanum and holy oil, offering-loaves and spices and incense for the temples, so that every god is satisfied by it. Everything that has happened to me shall be told and all that I have seen through <your> power. God will be praised for you in the city, in the presence of the councils of the whole land. Oxen will be slaughtered for you as a burnt offering and I will wring the necks of poultry for you. I shall cause ships to be brought laden with all the good produce of Egypt – as is done for a god who loves the people in a far-off land, but whom the people do not know.'

Then he laughed at me, at these things I had said which were wrong to his mind. He said to me, 'You do not have an abundance of myrrh (in Egypt); incense is all there is. But I am the ruler of Punt and the myrrh there belongs to me. And that holy oil which you said would be brought, there it is more abundant than this (whole) island. But when you depart from this place, you will never see this island again: it will have disappeared beneath the waves.'[1]

Then a ship came, as he had previously foretold. I went and climbed a tall tree and recognized those aboard. I went to report it and found that he knew it (already). Then he said to me, 'Farewell, farewell, little man, (back) to your home, that you may see your children. Give me a good name in your town. See, my possessions are (all) yours.'

Then I prostrated myself with my arms bent in his presence. Then he gave me a cargo of myrrh, holy oil, offering-loaves, spices, cinnamon, *shas*,[2] kohl, giraffes' tails, great lumps of incense, elephants' tusks, hounds, monkeys, apes, all good riches. Then I loaded it into the boat, after which I prostrated myself to praise god for him. Then he said to me, 'See, you will reach the Residence in two months, you will embrace your children and be rejuvenated in your tomb.'

Then I went down to the shore where this boat was and called out to the sailors who were aboard. I gave praise upon the shore for the lord of this island and those aboard did likewise. We travelled northwards to the Residence of the sovereign and we reached the Residence in two months, in accordance with all that he had said. Then I was ushered in to the sovereign and presented to him this tribute which I had brought from the island. Then he praised god for me in the presence of the councils of the whole land. I was made a member of his retinue and became his chief of staff. Look at me, after I had reached land, after I had seen what I had tasted! Listen to me! See, it is good to listen to people!

Then he said to me, ‘Do not be a know-it-all, my friend. For is water given to a bird at dawn that will be slaughtered in the morning?’[3]

Thus it is, from beginning to end, as it was found in writing. Written down by the scribe with excellent fingers, Ameny-Amenaa – life, prosperity, health.

NOTES

1. Literally, ‘become waves’.
2. An unknown commodity, perhaps a spice or an unguent.
3. This expression is difficult to translate into a modern idiom, although its meaning is relatively clear.



Part Eleven

TEACHINGS



Texts with an explicitly instructional purpose comprise one of the most distinctive genres of ancient Egyptian writing. Two categories are represented in the surviving corpus. Reflective works, often focusing on the theme of personal or national distress and categorized in this book as lamentations, were presented as monologues (see Text 4.1) or dialogues (Text 4.2). Teachings (ancient Egyptian *sebayt*) consisted of a series of sayings or maxims for living the ideal life, addressed by the narrator to his audience, and were often attributed to a named author, either royal (Text 11.2) or private (Texts 11.1, 11.3, 11.5 and 11.6).

The survival of a relatively large number of teachings is no accident. They were considered ideal texts for use in scribal training schools – imparting both writing skills and lessons in morality at the same time (see especially Text 11.4) – and so were extensively copied by trainee scribes. As a result, the chances of at least one copy having survived the vagaries of archaeological preservation are perhaps greater than for other genres of writing on papyrus.

The six teachings translated here span a period of some 700 years, from the early Middle Kingdom to the Ramesside Period. Four of the texts – The Teaching of Ptahhotep (Text 11.1), The Teaching of King Amenemhat I for His Son (Text 11.2), The Loyalist Teaching (Text 11.3) and The Teaching of Khety (Text 11.5) – date from the Twelfth Dynasty, when the genre was perfected. The other two, Be a Writer (Text 11.4) and The Teaching of Ani (Text 11.6), were composed in the New Kingdom (Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties). While there are some differences between the earlier four and the later two (notably the hints of scepticism in The Teaching of Ani), all six texts emphasize the same broad themes: balance and restraint in one's personal life, respect for social norms and deference to one's superiors. This is hardly surprising: more than most Egyptian writings, teachings were the products of a small literate elite in a hierarchical, traditional and conservative society – moreover, a society in which fine oratory was prized above radical thought. Indeed, 'perfect speech' – the public delivery of finely crafted words that reflected the wisdom and experience

of the speaker, championed the correct order of things and served to educate as well as entertain the listener – was one of the most highly esteemed skills in ancient Egypt at all periods.

1

The Teaching of Ptahhotep

*One of the most extensive surviving examples of the 'teaching' genre, The Teaching of Ptahhotep is now generally believed to have been composed in the first half of the Twelfth Dynasty (*c. *1850 BC). In common with other contemporary writings, it is set in the preceding 'golden age' of the Old Kingdom, in this case the reign of King Djedkara Isesi, the eighth king of the Fifth Dynasty (*c. *2350 BC), and the maxims are attributed to Isesi's vizier, Ptahhotep. The style is deliberately archaizing, reflecting the chronological setting of the work, while the language is highly idiomatic, presenting many difficulties for translation.*

The thirty-six maxims – presented as advice handed down from a great sage 'for instructing the ignorant in knowledge and in the correct method of perfect speech' – deal with a range of different subjects and situations. In their preoccupations, they illuminate the particular concerns of the literate elite, not just in the Twelfth Dynasty, but at most periods of ancient Egyptian history. Hence nearly a quarter of the maxims (numbers 1–3, 9, 16, 25–26 and 30) advise on how to deal with people of a different social status, reflecting the highly hierarchical nature of ancient Egyptian society. In a culture dominated by face-to-face, oral interaction, knowing when to speak and when to keep quiet was of the utmost importance; this topic – rhetoric and etiquette – forms the subject of six maxims (numbers 6–7, 12, 14 and 22–23), while the importance of being a good listener is hammered home repeatedly in the epilogue. Ancient Egypt was a village-based society, where lives were shaped by the relationships between and within families and small communities; hence another six maxims (numbers 11, 13, 20–21, 32 and 36) address appropriate behaviour towards a wife, a son, friends and neighbours, while four advise against the disruptive vices of lust and greed (numbers 17–19 and 31). In close-knit communities, modesty and moderation in behaviour (numbers 8, 15, 24 and 29) were the key to maintaining social cohesion, as were justice (numbers 4, 27–28 and 35) and

generosity towards one's fellows (numbers 33–34). It is striking that the theoretical sources of virtue – trust in god and self-determination – provide the material for just two maxims (numbers 5 and 10, respectively). Instead, the text is largely concerned with pragmatic lessons for worldly success: a quintessentially Egyptian attitude.

Despite the work's literate, courtly focus, two of its maxims reveal unexpected – though, one suspects, relatively commonplace – aspects of ancient Egyptian society not generally attested in the official record: maxim 31 advises a man against having sex with a boy (written references to homosexual practice are extremely rare and generally negative), while maxim 36 extols the virtues of a jolly, plump wife (contrasting with the slim, idealized portrayal of women in ancient Egyptian art).

The Teaching of Ptahhotep is preserved on two Twelfth Dynasty papyri; Papyrus Prisse, thought to be from Thebes, gives the only complete version and has been used as the basis of the translation given here.

Preamble

The teaching of the overseer of the (pyramid) town, the vizier Ptahhotep, in the time of the majesty of the Dual King Isesi, who lives for ever and ever. The overseer of the (pyramid) town, the vizier Ptahhotep, he says:

Sovereign, my lord!
Old age has come about, advanced years have descended,
feebleness has arrived, weakness has come anew.
One sleeps like a child all day.
Eyes are weak, ears are deaf,
strength perishes: for the heart is weary,
the silent mouth does not speak,
the failing mind[1] does not remember yesterday,
the bones suffer from old age,
good has turned to bad,
all sense of taste has gone!
What old age does to people
is bad in every way.
The blocked nose does not breathe;
standing and sitting are (both) painful.

Let this servant be ordered to create a staff for his old age

whom he will tell the words of the wise,[2]
the counsels of the ancestors
who listened to the gods.
May such be done for you
so that strife is driven away from the people
and the Two Riverbanks serve you!

The Majesty of this god[3] said:
Instruct him in the words of the past
so that he may be an exemplar for the children of the elite.
May he be endowed with attentiveness, and the affection of everyone who speaks to him,
(for) no one is born wise.

Beginning of the maxims of good words, spoken by the member of the elite and high official, God's Father, beloved of the god, king's eldest natural son, overseer of the (pyramid) town and vizier, Ptahhotep, for instructing the ignorant in knowledge and in the correct method of perfect speech, which will be beneficial to the listener but of no use to the neglectful. He said to his son:

Do not be arrogant about your knowledge.
Consult with the ignorant and the wise alike.
The limits of skill are never reached;
there is no craftsman endowed with perfect mastery.
Good speech is rarer than greenstone,[4]
yet it may be found among women at the grindstone.

First maxim: How to deal with an argumentative superior

If you come across a disputatious man in (the heat of) the moment,
who has authority over you as a superior,
bend your arms (in respect) and bow.
(For) if you vex him, he will not be friendly to you.
Diminish his bad speech
by not opposing him while he is in (the heat of) the moment.
He will be called an ignoramus
while your self-control will equal his wealth.[5]

Second maxim: How to deal with an argumentative equal

If you come across a disputatious man
who is your equal, your match,
you will make your esteem greater than his by keeping silent.
While he is saying bad things,
there will be much discussion by the judges
and your name will be good in the opinion of the elders.

Third maxim: How to deal with an argumentative subordinate

If you come across a disputatious man
who is a poor man, not your equal,
do not be aggressive to him (simply) because he is weak.
Leave him alone and he will confute himself.
Do not answer him back merely to lighten your heart.
Do not vent your anger[6] against your opponent,
for wretched is he who injures a poor man.
What you wish will be done (anyway):
you will beat him through the elders' disapproval.

Fourth maxim: The exercise of justice

If you are a leader,
controlling the affairs of many people,
seek out every effective deed
so that your conduct may be blameless.
Justice is great and lasting in effectiveness,
unconfounded since the time of Osiris.
The one who transgresses laws is punished –
though this escapes the greedy –
and crime never pays.
No wrongdoing attains its goal.
In the end, it is justice that lasts.
A man says, 'It is my father's ground.'[7]

Fifth maxim: Trust in god

Do not make people terrified:
god punishes accordingly.
If a man says, ‘I live by it’,
he will lack bread for his mouth.
If a man says, ‘I am powerful’,
he will (have to) say, ‘My cleverness has ensnared me’;
he will (have to) say, ‘I have ensnared myself.’
He will not say, ‘I have accomplished my purpose.’
If a man says, ‘I will rob another’,
he will end up (himself) being given over to a stranger.
People’s designs never come to pass:
it is god’s commands that come to pass.
So live peaceably.
What (the gods) give comes by itself.

Sixth maxim: How to behave as a dinner guest

If you are among the guests
at the place of one greater than you,
take what he gives as it is put in front of you;
look at what is before you.
Don’t keep shooting him glances.
If he feels put upon, he will be in bad spirits.
Do not speak to him until he calls:
one never knows what will cause offence.
Speak when he has addressed you,
then your speech will be pleasing.
The elder, when he is at a meal,
behaves as his spirit commands:
he will give to whomever he favours.
It is the custom of an evening;[8]
it is the spirit that makes him extend his hand.
The elder gives to the man within reach.
Thus eating is part of god’s plan:
only a fool complains about it.

Seventh maxim: Avoid slander

If you are a man in a position of trust,
sent by one elder to another,
stick to the matter for which he sent you;
give him the message exactly as he told you.
Beware of slanderous speech
which embroils one elder with another.
Do not shun the truth, do not go beyond it;
but an outburst should not be repeated.
Do not speak against anyone
great or small: it is bad for the spirit.

Eighth maxim: How to deal with success

If, when you plough, your fields prosper,
and god grants you increase,
do not be self-satisfied when in your neighbours' company:
there is great respect for the silent man.
He who possesses character possesses wealth.
Do not make a claim against a man with no children;
do not decry or boast about it:
there is many a father in misery
and a mother of children less happy than another.
God nurtures the lonely
while the one who has a family prays for a follower.

Ninth maxim: How to deal with another's success

If you are humble, follow a man of virtue
that all your conduct may be good before god.
Do not think to yourself, 'He was poor once';
do not be arrogant towards him
on account of knowing his former state.
Respect him for what he has become.
Wealth does not come about by itself:
it is (the gods') law for the one they love.
As for his success, he has made it himself.
It is god who makes his virtue
and watches over him while he sleeps.

Tenth maxim: Use time wisely

Follow your heart as long as you live.
Do no more than is asked.
Do not stint from following your heart:
wasting time is bad for the spirit.
Do not fritter away time on daily chores
beyond (what is necessary to) provide for your household.
When wealth comes, follow your heart.
Wealth amounts to nothing if one is indolent!

Eleventh maxim: How to treat a son

If you are a man of virtue
and produce a son by god's grace;
if he is upright and takes after you,
looks after your possessions in their proper place:
do for him every good thing,
for he is your son, your spirit fathered him.
Do not separate your heart from him.
But progeny can make trouble.
So if he errs, disobeys your advice,
defies everything that is said,
and goes about saying bad things,
punish him for all his talk.
He who crosses you is hateful to (the gods);
his guilt was decreed in the womb.
He who is guided by (the gods) cannot go wrong,
(but) he whom they make boatless cannot make a crossing.

Twelfth maxim: How to behave in court

If you are in a court of law,
stand or sit according to your rank,
which was assigned to you on the first day.
Do not transgress or you will be detained.
Attention is paid to the one who enters (properly) announced;
a seat is made ready[9] for the one who is called.

For a court of law has its standards,
all conduct is measured.
It is the god who gives advancement:
those who use their elbows are not rewarded.

Thirteenth maxim: Trustworthiness and generosity

If you are with other people,
gain for yourself supporters by being trustworthy.
The trustworthy man
who does not give free rein to his baser thoughts[10]
will himself become a leader.
(As for) a wealthy man, what is his character?
Your reputation is good, you are not spoken against,
your body is well provided for, your face well-regarded,
you are boasted about without your knowing.
But he who listens to his baser instincts[11]
replaces love of him with dislike;
his heart is empty, his body unanointed.
The big-hearted person is god-given,
while he who listens to his baser instincts is inimical.

Fourteenth maxim: How to behave as a messenger

Report your business without dissembling;
deliver your counsel in your master's hall.
If he speaks fluently,
it will not be difficult for the envoy to report (accurately),
nor will he be answered, 'Who is he to know it?'
It is the master whose business will go wrong
if he plans to punish him for it,
for he should be silent upon (hearing) 'I have spoken'.

Fifteenth maxim: How to behave as a leader

If you are a leader
whose authority is unhindered,
you should achieve many things.

Be mindful of tomorrow:
a dispute does not come in the midst of praises
but when the crocodile charges in, hatred arises.

Sixteenth maxim: How to deal with petitions

If you are a leader,
listen quietly to the plea of a petitioner.
Do not rebuff him from what he planned to say:
a victim loves to vent his anger[12]
more than to achieve what he came for.
As for someone who rebuffs a petition,
it is said, ‘Why does he reject it?’
Not all that is petitioned for comes about,
but a good hearing soothes the heart.

Seventeenth maxim: Resist adulterous temptations

If you wish a friendship to last,
when you enter a house
as master, brother or friend,
whatever place you enter,
beware of approaching the women!
It is not a happy place where that is done.
Revealing it is (equally) unwelcome.
Men are easily diverted[13] from what is good for them –
a brief moment, like a dream –
then the realization is fatal.
‘Shoot the opponent’ is a cowardly maxim:
when one goes to do it, the mind rejects it.
He who is undone through lust,
none of his plans will succeed.

Eighteenth maxim: Do not be greedy

If you want your conduct to be good,
rescued from all evil,
guard against the vice of greed:

it is a grave and incurable disease;
there are no treatments for it.
It afflicts fathers and mothers
and uncles.
It drives apart wife and husband.
It is a mix of everything evil,
a combination of everything hateful.
The man endures whose rule is Truth,
who walks in a straight line.
Thus he will make a testament:
the greedy has no tomb.

Nineteenth maxim: Do not be greedy

Do not be greedy when sharing out,
do not covet more than your portion,
do not be greedy with respect to your relatives.
The gentle man has a greater claim than the strong.
He is diminished who betrays his family,
he is deprived of conversation.
A little of what is coveted
renders a quarrelsome man cool-headed.

Twentieth maxim: How to treat a wife

If you are successful and establish your household,
love your wife passionately,
fill her belly, clothe her back.
Ointment is the (proper) prescription for her body.
Bring her joy as long as you live,
for she is a fertile field for her master.
Do not judge her –
keep her from power, subjugate her,[14]
(for) her eye is tempestuous when she scrutinizes.
She will be made to stay in your house
if you restrain her.
A woman[15] left to her own devices is like water:
when she is argumentative, make a trough for her.[16]

Twenty-first maxim: How to treat friends

Please your friends with what you have,
for it is due to god's favour.
One who fails to please his friends,
he is called a selfish spirit.
One never knows what will be, even though one plans for tomorrow.
The right spirit is the pleasing spirit.
If praiseworthy acts are performed,
friends will say, 'Welcome'.
Supplies are not brought to a town,
but friends are fetched in a time of grief.

Twenty-second maxim: Avoid gossip

Do not repeat slander
nor listen to it,
for it is the outbursts of a hot temper.
Report (only) a matter you have seen, not (merely) heard.
If it is by the by, do not mention it,
for your interlocutor recognizes virtue.
If a theft is ordered and carried out,
hatred will attach to the thief, according to the law.
Mortal slander is a nightmare against which one covers one's face.

Twenty-third maxim: Know when to speak, when to remain silent

If you are a man of virtue
who sits in his master's hall,
turn your mind to virtuous things.
Your silence will be more effective than idle chatter.
Speak (only) when you have thought of a solution,
for it is (only) the skilled who should speak in the council.
Speaking is more difficult than all other tasks:
he who does it fluently makes it his servant.

Twenty-fourth maxim: Moderation in behaviour

If you are powerful, gain respect
through knowledge and pleasant speech.
Do not command unless it befits:
hostility gets you into trouble.
Do not be arrogant lest you be humiliated,
do not be silent lest you be rebuked.
When you reply to the speech of a hothead,
avert your face and control yourself.
The ire of the hothead sweeps by:
he who treads carefully, his path is clear.[17]
He who is troubled all day long
has no happy time,
while he who is frivolous all day long
cannot establish a household;
but he who aims to complete (a task)
is like someone who steers a matter (safely) to land,
and another (matter) is held fast.
He who listens to his heart will regret.[18]

Twenty-fifth maxim: How to deal with a bad-tempered superior

Do not oppose the deeds of an elder.
Do not vex the heart of one who is burdened:
he will rail against the questioner
and he will be out of spirits.
He provides food together with god,
so one should do for him what he wants.
When he faces you after raging
his spirit will be calm.
Just as opposition causes ill will,
so goodwill nurtures love.

Twenty-sixth maxim: How to curry favour with a superior

Teach an elder what is useful to him.
Be his helper before the people.
If you allow his wisdom to impress his boss,
his gratitude will feed you.

As the favourite's belly is satisfied
so your back will be clothed
and his help for you will in turn prosper your household.
For your elder, whom you love,
and who thrives by it,
he will be a good shoulder to you.
Thus will love of you endure
in the bodies of those who love you.
He who loves to listen is a (good) soul.

Twenty-seventh maxim: Impartiality in the exercise of justice

If you act as a magistrate,
commissioned to satisfy the many,
uphold the impartiality of justice.[19]
When you give judgement, do not incline to one side.
Take care lest someone should say,
'Judges, he is taking sides!'
and your deed turns into a judgement (against you).

Twenty-eighth maxim: Forgiveness of past offences

If you are merciful towards a misdeed
and favour a man on account of his (usual) rectitude,
pass over it (the misdeed), do not remember it,
since he was silent towards you on the first day.

Twenty-ninth maxim: How to deal with material success

If you achieve greatness and you are from a humble background,
and if you achieve wealth having been poor
in a town you know well
and which knows about your former state,
do not put your trust in your fortune,
which came to you as god's gift,
so that you will not fall behind another like you
to whom the same thing happened.

Thirtieth maxim: How to behave towards a superior

Bow to your superior,
your overseer from the royal household,
then your home will remain secure
and your rewards as they should be.
Wretched is he who opposes a superior –
you thrive (only) as long as he is mild –
when the bared arm is not bent (in respect).
Do not rob a neighbour's house,
do not steal the possessions of someone close to you,
lest he make a complaint against you before you are heard.
A chatterbox is without wit.
If he is known to be troublesome,
a hostile man will be wretched in (his) neighbourhood.

Thirty-first maxim: Resist satisfying another man's lust

Do not have sex with a boy[20]
when you know that what is condemned will satisfy his desire.[21]
There is no cooling his lust.[22]
Let him not spend the night doing what is condemned:
he will cool down (only) after he has mastered his desire.

Thirty-second maxim: How to deal with a troublesome friend

If you (wish to) investigate a friend's character,
do not make inquiries but approach him (directly).
Pursue the matter with him alone
so that you do not suffer his displeasure.
(By all means) argue with him after a while;
test his disposition in conversation.
If he lets slip what he has seen
or does something that angers you,
be friendly to him none the less;
do not have a face-off.
Be wary of revealing your (true) feelings to him;
do not answer with hostility;

do not break with him or humiliate him:
for his time will surely come.
One cannot escape one's fate.

Thirty-third maxim: Be generous

Be generous as long as you live,
for what goes out of the storehouse does not come back in;
it is bread for sharing that is coveted.
He whose belly is empty is wont to complain;
a sufferer becomes an opponent:
do not have him as a close neighbour.
Kindness is a man's memorial
for (his) years after power.

Thirty-fourth maxim: Be generous

Know your neighbours, (for they) will be your prosperity.
Do not be mean to your friends,
for they are a well-watered field, greater than riches.
One man's possessions are another's;
a good man's good deeds profit him;
a good character is a memorial.

Thirty-fifth maxim: Punish fairly

Punish with authority, teach thoroughly,
then suppression of wrongdoing remains a good deed.
Punishment that is not deserved
turns a complainant into an opponent.

Thirty-sixth maxim: How to treat a wife

If you marry a woman who is plump
and jolly and well known by her townsfolk,
if she is faithful and time is kind to her,
do not be driven apart, but let her eat,

for her jollity brings contentment.[23]

Epilogue

If you listen to these things I have told you,
all your affairs will go forward,
for their truth is their value;
remembrance of them goes forward in the mouths of the people
because of the worth of their maxims.
If every word is carried on,
it will not perish in this land.
If good advice is given,
the elite will speak accordingly.
It is instructing a man to speak to posterity:
he who hears it becomes a good listener.
If what is said to posterity is good, it will be listened to.

If a leader sets a good example,
he will be trusty for ever;
all his wisdom will endure.
For the wise man nourishes his spirit
with what is lasting, so that it will be good during his lifetime.
The wise (man) is known for his wisdom,
and the official on account of his good deeds.
His deeds match his words,
he tells it straight,
his eyes see (clearly),
and his ears hear what will benefit his son;
acting truthfully, he is free from falsehood.
Listening is effective for a son who will listen.
If what is heard enters the hearer,
the hearer becomes a listener.
He who listens well speaks well.
The listener reaps the benefit –
listening benefits the listener –
for listening is better than anything else;
it creates goodwill.
How good it is for a son to take heed of his father’s words!

He will attain old age as a result.

The listener is beloved of god;
god hates the one who does not listen.
It is the will that makes its master
a listener or a non-listener.
The will is a man's life, prosperity and health.
A hearer hears what is said
but he who loves to listen does what is said.
How good it is for a son to listen to his father!
How joyful is he who is told
'the son pleases because he is a good listener'!
The listener of whom this is said has power,
and is honoured by his father.
His memorial is in the mouths of the living –
those who are upon the earth and those who will be.

If a man's son takes heed of what his father says,
no plan of his will go wrong.
So teach your son to be a (good) listener
so that he will be admired among the nobles.
One who adjusts his speech according to what has been said to him,
and is seen as a (good) listener,
such a son is excellent, his actions distinguished.
Whereas error plagues the one who does not listen.
The wise (man) rises in the morning to his benefit,
while the fool is hard pressed.

As for the fool who does not listen,
he can do nothing.
He sees wisdom in ignorance,
usefulness in harmfulness.
He does everything that is hateful
and is blamed for it every day.
His life is deathly.
Distorted speech is his food and drink.
His type is well known to the officials,
who say, 'A living death, every day.'
His deeds are passed over

because of his numerous troubles, every day.

The son who listens is a follower of Horus.
He is well when he has listened.
When he is old and venerable
he will speak in similar fashion to his children,
renewing the teaching of his father.
Every man teaches as he acts.
He speaks to children
so that they will speak to their children.
Do a good deed, do not give offence.
If righteousness flourishes, your children will thrive.

As for the first who falls into sin,
people will say, when they see it,
‘That is just like him!’;
and will say, when they hear,
‘That is just like him too!’

To have regard for everyone is to satisfy the multitude.
Riches amount to nothing without them.
Do not play fast and loose with words;
do not confuse one thing with another;
beware of loosening your tongue
lest the wise say,
‘Listen! If you want your words to be passed on,
only speak when you have mastered the art!’
If you speak to good effect,
all your affairs will be in order.

Submerge your will and button your lip,
then you will gain repute among the officials.
Be absolutely precise in your master’s presence.
Behave so that people will say to him, ‘He is that man’s son’,
and so that those who hear (it) will say,
‘His father is fortunate.’

Be patient when you speak
so that you say things that count.

Then the officials who hear will say,
‘How good is that which comes from his mouth!’
Behave so that your master will say about you,
‘How well his father taught him!
When he issued from his loins,
he told him everything that was in his mind,
and now he does even better than he was told!’

See, the good son, god-given,
does more than his master has told him.
He will act aright
when his mind is clear.
When you succeed me, being in good health,
and the king is pleased with everything that has happened,
may you enjoy many years of life!
What I accomplished during my lifetime is not insignificant.
I enjoyed 110 years of life
as a gift from the king,
and honours more than the ancestors
by acting aright for the king until (I reached) a state of veneration.

Thus it is come, from beginning to end, as it was found in writing.

NOTES

1. Literally, ‘heart’.
2. Literally, ‘those who listened’ – since wisdom comes from listening.
3. i.e. the king.
4. i.e. malachite.
5. Literally, ‘pile’.
6. Literally, ‘wash your heart’.
7. An expression probably meaning ‘This is the correct order of things’.
8. Literally, ‘when night has come’.
9. Literally, ‘the seat is wide’.
10. Literally, ‘who does not let the speech in his belly circulate’.
11. Literally, ‘he whose heart listens to his belly’.
12. Literally, ‘wash his heart’.
13. Literally, ‘a thousand men are diverted’.
14. There is an abrupt change of advice from caring to dominating.

15. Literally, ‘vagina’, apparently used here pejoratively to refer to a woman (cf. English ‘cunt’).
16. The last two lines of the twentieth maxim are problematic and defy easy translation. The metaphor seems to be that a woman needs to be contained like rainwater, otherwise she runs away and is wasted.
17. Literally, ‘the pleasant man who treads, his way is built’.
18. Literally, ‘will (feel) “If only!” ’.
19. This sentence is problematic; the translation offered here seems to fit the sense of the maxim.
20. Literally, ‘a woman-boy’, i.e. a boy who performs the passive role in same-sex intercourse.
21. This line seems to contain a pun on ‘to wash the heart’ (i.e. to satisfy one’s desire) and ‘water on his heart’ (i.e. semen on his chest). The action that is condemned is the role of the passive partner.
22. Literally, ‘what is in his belly’, i.e. his baser instincts.
23. This sentence is problematic; the translation offered here seems to fit the sense of the maxim.

2

The Teaching of King Amenemhat I for His Son

*The teaching attributed pseudonymously to the Twelfth Dynasty king Amenemhat I was probably composed during the reign of his son and successor, Senusret I (*c. *1918–1875* BC*). For modern audiences, its daring treatment of the theme of regicide, not to mention its echoes of Shakespeare's* Hamlet*, have given it classic status.*

The text is presented as a morality tale delivered by the dead Amenemhat I to his son; it recounts a palace rebellion and the murder of the old king, laments the ingratitude of his subjects and urges Senusret to honour his father's memory by ruling firmly and wisely. Although many scholars have sought to interpret it as a commentary on historical events, its relationship with reality is likely to be less straightforward, its purpose as a literary composition more complex. In common with literature composed for courtly settings in other times and places, its poetical form allowed dark themes to be explored in relative safety. Whether Amenemhat I was killed in a palace conspiracy or not, this extraordinary work sets out to explore the emotions and implications of such an act, not its facts. In doing so, it reveals the early Twelfth Dynasty court as a milieu of considerable artistic sophistication, where literary sensibility was as advanced as the craftsmanship of the royal workshops.

As befits a classic, The Teaching of King Amenemhat I for His Son was extensively copied and remained popular for centuries. The text is preserved only in copies from the New Kingdom, the earliest of which dates from the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The end of the text presents several difficulties for translation, although the general meaning is clear.

Beginning of the teaching
made by the Majesty of the Dual King Sehetepibra,
the son of Ra Amenemhat, true of voice.
He speaks with a message of truth

to his son, the Lord of All.
He says: Risen as a god,
listen to what I tell you,
that you may reign (over) the land and rule the Riverbanks,
that you may increase goodness.

Be wary of subordinates who have not yet come into their own,
about whose plots one is not yet anxious.
Do not get (too) close to them; do not be alone (with them);
do not trust a brother; do not make friends;
do not promote intimates: there is no profit in it.

When you lie down, guard your heart yourself,
because a man has no helpers
on the Day of Suffering.
I gave to the poor, I promoted the orphan,
I gave the one who had nothing his due, just as I did for the one who had.

Yet he who ate my food made rebellion,
he to whom I gave arms plotted with them.
Those who wore my fine linen looked at me as if they were lacking.
Those anointed with my myrrh poured water while wearing it.[1]

My living brethren, my fellow people,
make for me a funeral oration such as has never been heard!
So great a fight has never been seen!
Success will not come to him who wilfully disregards experience.[2]

It was after supper, when night had fallen.
I was taking an hour of rest,
lying on my bed, for I was weary.
As I began to fall asleep,[3]
weapons for my protection were turned against (me);
I was like a snake of the desert.

I awoke at the fighting, came to,
and found it was an attack of the palace guard.
If I had hastened to seize weapons in my hand,
I would have made the sodomizers[4] retreat into their hole.[5]

But no one is brave at night, no one can fight alone,
no one can achieve success without a helper.

Thus did injury occur while I was without you,
without my foes having heard that I would hand over to you.
I had not sat down to counsel you,
because I had not prepared for it, had not expected it.[6]
My mind had not considered the servants' failings.

Had women ever marshalled troops?
Are revolutionaries nurtured in the royal Residence?
Is water that destroys the fields let loose?
Do poor men beggar themselves by their (own) actions?
No harm had come to me since my birth.
There was never my equal as a doer of brave deeds.

I travelled to Elephantine
and returned to the Delta.
I had stood at the limits of the land and seen its interior.
I reached the limits of power
through my strength and my actions.

I was a maker of grain, beloved of Nepri.
The inundation paid me respect in every valley-mouth.
No one was hungry during my years, no one was thirsty.
One sat (comfortably) because of what I did, and spoke well of me.
For I had ordained everything in its proper place.

I subjugated lions, I captured crocodiles;
I suppressed the people of Wawat, I captured the Medjay,[7]
I made the Asiatics[8] walk like dogs.

I made for myself a house decorated with gold,
its ceilings of lapis lazuli,
walls of silver,
floors of acacia-wood,
doors of copper,
door-bolts of bronze:
made for eternity,

prepared for everlastingness.
I know it because I am Lord of All.

Surely there is much hatred in the streets.[9]
The wise man says ‘yes’, the ignorant says ‘no’;
because no one (can) know without your presence,
Senusret my son!
As my feet depart, my own heart draws near;
my eyes behold you,
offspring of an hour of happiness,
before the people who praise you.

Behold, I have made the past and modelled the future.
I have furnished you with the contents of my mind.
You wear the white crown of a god’s seed.
The royal seal is in its place, assigned by me to you.
Jubilation is in the barque of Ra;[10]
kingship has become what it was in the past:
for it is what I have achieved, in the midst of (everything).
Raise your monuments and establish your strongholds.
Fight for the wisdom of the wise,[11]
for you loved him beside Your Majesty – life, prosperity, health.

NOTES

1. The meaning of this sentence is not entirely clear and may be idiomatic. The theme is the ingratitude of the king’s beneficiaries.
2. Literally, ‘If one fights in the arena forgetful of yesterday, there will be no good outcome for him who ignores what he should know’.
3. Literally, ‘as my heart began to follow sleep’.
4. The Egyptian word – a pejorative term for effeminate and/or homosexual men – has no direct equivalent in British vernacular English.
5. The last two words can be translated in two ways: ‘with a charge’ or ‘into their hole’; the latter seems preferable, given the imagery of the sentence as a whole.
6. i.e. death.
7. The people of the Eastern Desert.
8. The Egyptian word is a pejorative term for the inhabitants of Syria-Palestine.

9. An alternative reading is ‘the children of the masses are in the streets’. Either way, the image is one of civil unrest.
10. An alternative reading is ‘I have descended into the barque of Ra’.
11. ‘The wise’ refers to the dead king, Amenemhat.

3

The Loyalist Teaching

The text dubbed The Loyalist Teaching has an intriguing history. It was first discovered on a stela (now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo) set up at Abydos by a high official named Sehetepibra during the reign of Amenemhat III (1818–1770 BC). Sehetepibra had evidently selected an existing text, usurped its authorship and included it on his monument to demonstrate his loyalty to his monarch. The name of the original 'author' was lost until the discovery in 2005 of a graffito in a tomb at Asyut which attributes the text to a vizier named Kairsu. This seems to corroborate evidence from later copies of the work. The original text was probably composed in the early Twelfth Dynasty (mid-nineteenth to mid-eighteenth century BC).

The text as preserved on the stela of Sehetepibra deals with loyalty to the ruler, enjoining its audience to 'praise the king' and 'be close to His Majesty in your minds'. The language conforms to the style of official hymns (compare Text 3.3), lauding the king in idealizing terms and casting the cosmic battle between Order and Chaos in terms of loyalty and rebellion. Because of its loyalist theme, the text remained popular for generations. Some sixty-nine copies survive, dating to the New Kingdom or later. By piecing these together, a second section has been restored which addressed the (elite) audience's responsibility to the working class. The work as a whole thus examined the topic of social cohesion and the proper relations between different strata of society: a counterbalance to the theme of national distress explored in other Twelfth Dynasty writings such as The Words of Khakheperraseneb (Text 4.1).

Scholars differ as to the length of the original work: either the version preserved on the stela of Sehetepibra is an abridgement, or the second section represents a later expansion. Only the first, 'loyalist' section is translated here.

Beginning of the teaching made by the member of the elite and high official; God's Father and beloved of god; master of secrets of the king's house – life,

prosperity, health; chief of the entire land; *sem*-priest; controller of every kilt; overseer of the city and vizier, Kairsu, when he delivered a teaching in the presence of his children:[1] …

I shall speak of a great matter, and shall cause you to listen.
I shall cause you to know eternal counsels:
The successful way of living, of spending a lifetime in peace.
Praise the king Nimaatra,[2] who lives for ever in your heart of hearts,
be close to His Majesty in your minds!
For he perceives what is in hearts,
His eyes search out every body.
He is the sun, by whose rays one sees;
He illumines the Two Lands more than the Orb.
He nourishes more than the great inundation,
For he has filled the Two Lands with the strength of life!
Noses are refreshed when he is content;[3]
His contentment is necessary for breathing air.
He gives sustenance to his followers,
He feeds the one that sticks to his path.
The king is goodwill, his mouth (brings) increase.
He creates existence;[4]
He is Khnum of every body,
The begetter who creates the people.
He is Bastet, who protects the Two Lands;
His arm shelters the one who praises him.
He is Sekhmet against the disobedient;[5]
The one he hates will succumb to distress.
Fight for his name, respect his oath!
Be not remiss on any occasion,
For the one whom the king has loved will be revered,
While the one who rebels against His Majesty has no tomb,
And his corpse is thrown into the water.
If you do this, you will prosper
And you will find it so for ever.

NOTES

1. This introduction translates the graffito found in a tomb at Asyut; the remainder of the text translates the inscription on the stela of Sehetepibra.

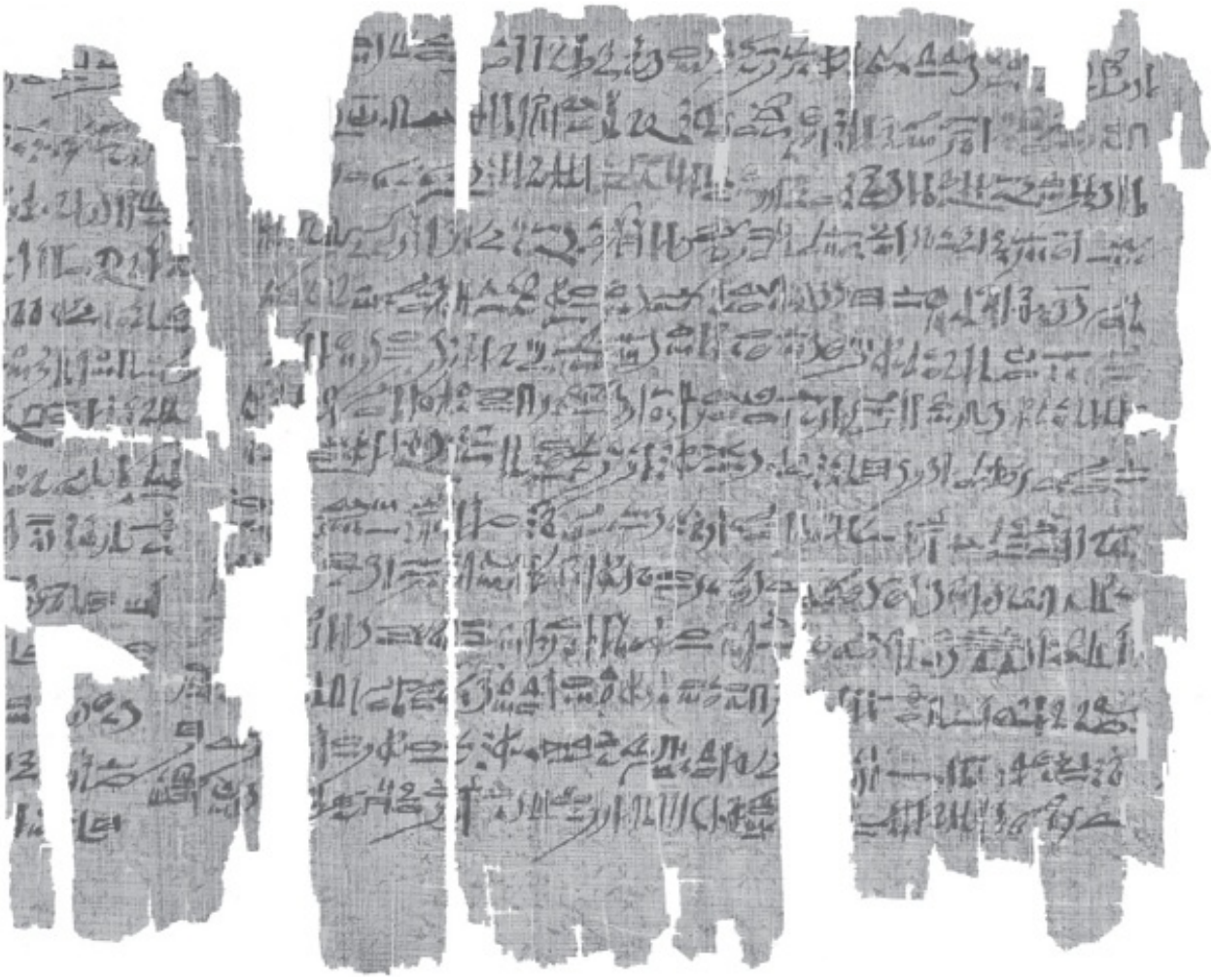
2. The throne-name of Amenemhat III.
3. Literally, ‘far from rage’.
4. Literally, ‘He causes him who will exist to come into being’.
5. Literally, ‘him who transgresses his command’.

4

Be a Writer

In ancient Egypt, or at least in the New Kingdom, writing was taught in scribal schools. Young boys (there is little evidence for girls' schooling) were taught to read and write by dictation and by copying existing texts. Various compositions, of different genres and from different periods, were deemed suitable for teaching purposes. Classics of Egyptian literature, such as The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor (Text 10.2), were used alongside letters, hymns and more mundane lists of words. Teachings were a favourite category of text for copying practice, since it was hoped that their moral message would help mould the character of the young scribes even as they learned to write. Many of the best-known teachings therefore survive as scribal copies, complete with the students' copying errors and mistakes of comprehension. Students' exercise books – rolls of papyrus – might contain copied texts of many different genres, side by side.

A Ramesside papyrus in the British Museum (10684), known as Papyrus Chester Beatty IV, is a typical example. One side is inscribed with hymns while the other side contains a group of instructional texts, including an exhortation to Be a Writer. Unusually, this work goes beyond the usual praise of the scribal profession (as, for example, in Text 11.5) by suggesting that only writings confer true immortality, because men's bodies and tombs turn to dust. Scepticism about the afterlife, first expressed in the harpist's song from the tomb of King Intef (Text 9.1), is rare in Egyptian writings; here it reaches its logical, extraordinary conclusion. To emphasize the point, the text mentions the famous authors of the past whose names endure. This is also remarkable, since the tradition of authorial attribution was almost unknown in ancient Egypt; most texts were deliberately anonymous. In several respects, therefore, Be a Writer is radical work, suggesting that the schooling of scribes was not, perhaps, as traditional or stultifying as it might appear.



Hieratic writing on Papyrus Chester Beatty IV (Gardiner, 1935)

The work is inscribed in twenty horizontal lines and is divided into sections/stanzas by rubrication. It is composed in an orational style, to be recited aloud, and shows evidence of metre. Fittingly, the copy preserves a number of scribal errors.

Now if you do this, you are skilled in writing. As for those wise writers from the time after the gods, they who foretold what was to come, their names have become everlasting, (even though) they have departed this life[1] and all their relatives are forgotten.

They did not make for themselves mausolea[2] of copper with tombstones of iron;[3] they did not think to leave heirs, children to proclaim their names: (rather) they made heirs of writings, of the teachings they had composed.

They gave themselves [a book[4]] as (their) lector-priest, a writing-board as (their) dutiful son. Teachings are their mausolea, the reed-pen (their) child, the burnishing-stone[5] (their) wife. Both great and small are given (them) as their children, for the writer is chief.

Their gates and mansions have been destroyed, their mortuary priests are [gone], their tombstones are covered with dirt, their tombs are forgotten. (But) their names are proclaimed on account of their books which they composed while they were alive. The memory of their authors is good: it is for eternity and for ever.

Be a writer, take it to heart, so that *your* name will fare likewise. A book is more effective than a carved tombstone or a permanent sepulchre. They serve as chapels and mausolea in the mind of him who proclaims their names. A name on people's lips[6] will surely be effective in the afterlife![7]

Man perishes; his corpse turns to dust; all his relatives pass away.[8] But writings make him remembered in the mouth of the reader.[9] A book is more effective than a well-built house or a tomb-chapel in the West,[10] better than an established villa or a stela in the temple!

Is there one here like Hordedef? Is there another like Imhotep? None of our kin is like Neferti or Khety, their leader. May I remind you about Ptahemdjehuty and Khakheperraseneb! Is there another like Ptahhotep, or the equal of Kairsu?[11]

Those wise men who foretold what was to come: what they said came into being; it is found as a maxim, written in their books. Others' offspring will be their heirs, as if they were their own children. They hid their magic from the world, but it is read in their teachings. They are gone, their names forgotten; but writings cause them to be remembered.

NOTES

1. Literally, 'they have departed having completed their lives'.
2. The Egyptian term indicates the visible part of a tomb, a mud-brick edifice shaped like a steep-sided pyramid.
3. The Egyptian term for iron translates literally as 'miracle of heaven', indicating that the Egyptians first encountered iron in its meteoric form.
4. Here and elsewhere in this text, the term for 'papyrus roll' has been translated as 'book'.

5. Used to prepare papyrus as a writing medium.
6. Literally, ‘in the mouth of the people’.
7. Literally, ‘necropolis’.
8. Literally, ‘return to the earth’.
9. Literally, ‘reciter’.
10. i.e. the land of the dead.
11. This paragraph recounts the names of famous men to whom the Egyptians ascribed exemplary works of didactic literature or other great achievements of learning. Imhotep was revered as a sage, healer and the architect of the first pyramid. Hordedef (Texts 9.1 and 10.1), Neferti, Khety (Text 11.5), Khakheperraseneb (Text 4.1), Ptahhotep (Text 11.1) and Kairsu (Text 11.3) were revered as authors – as was, presumably, the otherwise unattested Ptahemdjehuty.

5

The Teaching of Khety (‘The Satire of the Trades’)

The text dubbed ‘The Satire of the Trades’ is more accurately termed The Teaching of Khety. Like other examples of the teaching genre, it takes the form of an address by a pseudonymous author (Khety) to a listener (his son), instructing him in how to get on in life. What sets the work apart is its focus, not on the experience of a member of the literate elite, but on the unsavoury alternatives to the scribal profession. In a series of mocking caricatures, various jobs performed by the illiterate peasantry are contrasted with the benefits and comforts of life as a scribe. It is little wonder that the text became a favourite for use in scribal schools, resulting in the preservation of numerous copies.

The main interest of the work lies in the satirical description of the different ‘trades’. Rather like the characters in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, *the various jobs vividly evoke the trials and tribulations of a largely rural way of life. The fisherman and washerman have to contend with crocodiles down at the riverbank, while the reed cutter, arrow maker and messenger are out in all weathers. The smith, potter, sandal maker and mat maker struggle in dirty and uncomfortable working conditions, while the mason, gardener and farmer are simply exhausted by their back-breaking work.*

The epilogue presents a series of more general pieces of advice for an aspiring member of the elite, focusing on themes already encountered in the broadly contemporary work The Teaching of Ptahhotep, such as self-restraint, etiquette and correct speech, and the importance of listening attentively.

Believed to have been composed in the Twelfth Dynasty, the earliest surviving copy of The Teaching of Khety dates from the early Eighteenth Dynasty, but most copies are Ramesside in date, corrupt and riddled with errors. This makes interpretation especially difficult and it is often necessary to compare several parallel texts in order to arrive at the correct sense of a passage.

Prologue

Beginning of the teaching
made by the man from Tjaru,
whose name is Khety, son of Duauf,
for his son named Pepy,
as he fared south to the Residence
to put him in the school for scribes,
surrounded by the children of officials,
among the upper echelons of the Residence.
He said to him:

I have seen beatings!
Set your mind to writings!
I have observed those taken away for the corvée.[1]
See, there is nothing that surpasses writing:
it is like being on the water!
Read the end of *Kemyt*[2]
and you will find this sentence there:
Whatever position a scribe may occupy in the Residence,
he will not suffer in it.
(Even) as he carries out another's requirements,
rewards will not escape him.
I have not seen an office like it,
of which this saying could be said.
I shall make you love writing more than your mother.
I will make you appreciate its benefits.
It is greater, indeed, than all other offices:
there is nothing (like it) in this (whole) land.
When he has (only just) begun to grow and is still a child,
he is greeted and sent to carry out commissions,
before he has even arrived at (the age of) wearing a loincloth!
I never saw sculptors as agents,
or a goldsmith sent (on a commission).

The smith

But I have seen the coppersmith at his labours,
at the mouth of his furnace.
His fingers are like a crocodile's,

and he stinks more than fish roe.

The carpenter

Every carpenter who wields an adze,
he is more tired than the corvée labourer.
His fields are the timber,
his hoe the adze.[3]
There is no end to his labour.
He does more than his arms can manage,
yet at night he (has to) light (his own) fire.

The jeweller

The jeweller willingly pierces
hard stones of all sorts.
When he has completed the inlay of the eye,
his arms are exhausted (and) so is he.
When he sits down at sunset,
his knees and back are crooked.

The barber

The barber shaves until the end of the evening.
He takes his bag, puts it on his shoulder,
and takes himself from street to street,
seeking someone to shave.
He weakens his arms to fill his belly,
like the bee that feeds as it works.

The reed cutter

The reed cutter travels downstream to the Delta
to obtain arrow(-shafts).
When he has done more than his arms can manage,
midges have killed him
and sand flies have slaughtered him,

so that he is quite spent.

The potter

The potter is under the earth
even as he stands among the living.
He digs in the fields more than pigs,
in order to fire his pots.
His clothes are stiff with clay,
and his kerchief is in shreds
so that when the air enters his nose
it comes straight from the fire.
He paddles (the clay) with his feet
and is stuck fast in it himself.
He digs the courtyard of every house
and roams the public places.

The mason

I will tell you also of the mason:
his loins are painful.
Although he is outside in the wind,
he builds without (wearing) a loincloth.
His (only) covering is a twisted cord
and a thread between his buttocks!
His arms are exhausted from effort,
having mixed all (kinds of) shit.
He (has to) eat bread with his fingers,
(even though) he has washed himself (only) once.

The carpenter

The carpenter also suffers greatly, [working at a ceiling],[4]
the roof of a room,
a room measuring ten cubits by six cubits.[5]
A month passes until the (roof) beams are laid,
the mats spread across, and all the work is done.
As for the goods he (is able to) provide for his household,

they do not (even) fill his children.

The gardener

The gardener carries a yoke;
his shoulders are bent as with age.
There is a lesion on his neck
and it festers.
He spends the morning watering vegetables
and the evening with the coriander,
while at noon he has done himself in in the orchard.
He works himself to death
more than all (other) jobs.

The farmer

The farmer cries out more than the guinea fowl;
his voice is louder than a crow's.
His fingers are swollen[6]
and stink greatly.
He is weary, having been sent to the Delta.
He is ruined.
He prospers, if one prospers among lions.
The hippos are grievous for him:
his labour is trebled by them.
He goes out,
and when he reaches his house in the evening,
the walk has finished him off.

The mat maker

The mat maker in the weaving room,
he is worse (off) than a woman.
With his knees (pressed) against his heart,
he cannot breathe air.
If he wastes a day's weaving,
he is beaten with fifty lashes.
He gives food to the doorkeeper

(just) to glimpse daylight.

The arrow maker

The arrow maker is sorely afflicted,
going out into the desert.
He gives his donkey more
than the work it does in return.
He gives much to the farmer
who puts him on the (right) path.
When he reaches his house in the evening,
the walk has finished him off.

The messenger

The despatch messenger goes out into the desert,
leaving his possessions to his children.
Afraid of lions and Asiatics,
he only feels himself (when he is back) in the Valley.[7]
When he reaches his house in the evening,
the walk has finished him off.
Whether his house is of matting or brick,
his return is joyless.

The stoker

The stoker: his fingers are putrid
and smell of corpses.
His eyes are inflamed with lots of smoke;
he cannot rid himself of his dirt.
He spends the day cutting reeds;
his clothes revolt him.

The sandal maker

The sandal maker is sorely afflicted
among his vats of oil.

He prospers, if one prospers among corpses,
for he chews leather.

The washerman

The washerman washes on the riverbank,
walking in front of crocodiles.
‘Father, get out of the flowing water,’
says his son, his daughter,
‘into a job more satisfying.’[8]
His food is mixed with dirt;
no limb of his is clean.
He handles the clothes of menstruating women.
He weeps as he spends the day at his washboard and mangle.
People say to him, ‘Dirty washing for you! Come to me!
The banks are overflowing with it!’

The fowler

The fowler is sorely afflicted
as he watches the sky.
When the flocks pass over him,
he says, ‘Would that I had a net!’
But god does not make it happen,
and his is an unhappy fate.

The fisherman

I will tell you also of the fisherman.
He is afflicted more than all (other) jobs.
Look, he works on the river,
consorting with crocodiles.
When the time of reckoning comes,
he will lament.
He does not say, ‘There is a crocodile’,
for fear has blinded him.
Coming out of the flowing water,
he says, ‘Like the might of god!’

Epilogue

Look, there is no job without a boss
except for the scribe: he is the boss.

So if you know writing, it will be more beneficial for you
than these jobs I have put before you,
each more wretched than the other.
A peasant is not called a man: beware!

Look, what I have done while journeying south to the Residence,
I have done for love of you.
A day in the classroom is good for you:
though difficult, its works last for ever.
The corvée labourers I told you about
are mobilized and defiant.

I will tell you likewise other words (of wisdom),
to teach you to be wise.
Such as: if a fight breaks out,
do not approach the parties.
If a brick is seized by an impatient man
and it is not known how to calm his temper,
(and there are) witnesses before the judges,
answer him with care!

If you walk behind elders,
follow at a good distance.
If you enter a householder's home
and his hands are full with another (who has arrived) before you,
sit with your hand over your mouth,
and do not ask anything from him.
Do as he tells you.
Beware of rushing to the table!

Be dignified[9] and very honourable.
Do not tell secrets.
He who hides his (true) intent makes a shield for himself.
Do not say things recklessly

when you sit with a defiant person.

If you go out of the schoolhouse
when midday (break) is announced,
and go walking in the streets,
everyone will dispute with you in the end.

If an elder sends you with a message,
tell it as he told it.
Don’t take away, don’t add to it.
He who stops praising,
his name will not endure.
He who is of wise character,
nothing is hidden from him.
He is not thwarted anywhere.

Do not tell lies against your mother; the elders abhor this.
After a meal has been prepared,
Your hands should be placed at your nose.[10]
Do not keep company with a defiant person:
it is bad for you when it is heard about.
If you have stuffed yourself with three loaves,
washed down with two jugs of beer,
and your belly is (still) not full, fight against it!
If another person is eating, do not stand.
Guard against rushing to table!

See, it is good if you are sent frequently to listen to the words of the elders.
Thus you will form the character of the well-born,
as you follow in their footsteps.
The scribe is seen as a listener,
and the listener becomes a doer.
Stand up when you are spoken to;
make haste when you walk.
Do not be (too) trusting.
Attach yourself to people of distinction;
make friends with a man of your (own) generation.

See, I have set you on the path of the god.

A scribe's Fortune[11] is upon his shoulder,
from the day of his birth
until he reaches the council chamber
and the assembly of the people.
See, no scribe is lacking in food
or in good things from the royal estate – life, prosperity, health!
Destiny[12] is assigned to the scribe
to promote him in the council.
So praise god for your father and mother
who set you on the path of life.
Look, this is what I (put) before you,
your children and their children.
It has been accomplished well and pleasingly.

NOTES

1. The conscripted labour to which ordinary Egyptians were routinely subject as a form of taxation.
2. A well-known text for scribal training, composed in the early Middle Kingdom and preserved in copies from the New Kingdom.
3. Literally, 'tool'.
4. The text is corrupt and difficult to translate, although the context seems clear.
5. Approximately 5m by 3m.
6. Literally, 'his fingers are become like his arms'.
7. Literally, 'the black land'.
8. Literally, 'a job that satisfies more than all other jobs'.
9. Literally, 'weighty'.
10. Apparently a gesture of restraint.
11. Renenet was the goddess of fortune.
12. Meskhenet was a goddess of childbirth, and hence of destiny.

6

The Teaching of Ani

For a long time, The Teaching of Ani was known only from a single manuscript, Papyrus Boulaq 4 (now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo). While the papyrus was inscribed in the Twenty-first or Twenty-second Dynasty, the text itself is dated to the New Kingdom, probably the Eighteenth Dynasty. Papyrus Boulaq 4 is riddled with scribal errors: it seems that the copyist had only a poor understanding of the text he was transcribing. As a result, it presents major challenges of translation and interpretation. Some help has subsequently been provided, however, by the discovery of an incomplete papyrus in the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina in western Thebes, which contains about a third of the text. In addition, the introductory sentence of the work is preserved on a tablet now in the Berlin Museum (8934), while small portions of the text are attested on fragments of papyrus and ostraca in various collections. None the less, frequent corruptions and lacunae have given The Teaching of Ani 'the unenviable reputation of being the obscurest of all Egyptian Wisdom texts'.[1]

A prologue (which survives only in a fragmentary state) would have introduced the speaker in the same way as the other teachings. The text is attributed to a man named Ani, a humble scribe in the household of Queen Ahmose-Nefertari, the wife of Ahmose, first king of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1539–1514 BC). Unlike the earlier teachings of the Middle Kingdom, Ani's words of wisdom reflect middle-class values and concerns, rather than the lofty ideals of works like The Teaching of Ptahhotep. The text is aimed at men like Ani himself, minor officials who wanted to get on in the world. Ani's advice is, above all, practical and pragmatic. No fewer than eight of his maxims deal with how to amass and keep wealth. Appropriate behaviour towards one's superiors and family life are the subject of seven maxims apiece. Other popular topics include avoiding trouble, rejecting sin, the importance of friendship, proper behaviour and personal piety. Two maxims give general advice on how to live a good life,

but only one deals with literacy (compare Be a Writer, Text 11.4) and only one with death.

Another novel feature of the work is an extensive epilogue in which Ani's son rejects his father's advice as too complex to understand and too difficult to follow. (Ani, though, has the last word.) This injects a realistic tone into the text, acknowledging that teachings could be questioned and good advice ignored.

The main body of the text (which comes between the prologue and the epilogue), comprising some fifty-three maxims, with a brief interjection after the fourteenth, is translated here.

First maxim

Restrain yourself from slandering your superiors when you report an accusation.

Second maxim

Keep private what is said at home. Have others be deaf to it and not hear it. If what you say is [not] heard, you will find it beneficial. Be mindful of it …

Third maxim

… an obscure maxim about gluttony …

Fourth maxim

Do not make excuses to your superior or to god. It is bad to listen to people rather than to your superiors – your mind knows it. As a humble man, make supplication to your superior and he will bring you the fat of the land.

Fifth maxim

… an obscure maxim about work …

Sixth maxim

Take a wife while you are young, so that she may bear you a son. She should bear (children) for you while you are (still) a youth. It is right to make offspring! Happy is the man whose offspring are many: he is respected on account of his children.

Seventh maxim

Observe the festival of your god and repeat it in due season. God is angry if it is neglected. Call witnesses after you have made him an offering, the first time that you do it. When someone comes to check your record, have them enter you in the roll. When the time comes to seek your reward, it will exalt god's might. Singing, dancing and incense are his daily bread, receiving obeisance his wealth. He who does this: god will magnify his name, while another man remains befuddled.[2]

Eighth maxim

Do not enter another's house until he lets you in and greets you. Do not snoop around in his house, but let your eye observe in silence. Do not speak about him to an outsider who was not there with you: it is a great and mortal vice when it is reported!

Ninth maxim

Guard against a woman who is an outsider, who is not known in her town. Do not look at her when she passes by. Do not have carnal knowledge of her. A deep stretch of water of unknown course is a woman away from her husband! 'I am fair,' she says to you every day when there are no witnesses. She is ready to ambush you. It is a great and mortal vice when it is reported! …

Tenth maxim

Do not go out when the elders enter, lest your name stink! If a quarrel breaks out, do not speak: your silence will serve you well.

Eleventh maxim

Do not shout inside the house of god: shouting is an abomination to him. Pray with a loving heart whose every word is hidden. He will grant your needs. He will hear what you say. He will accept your offerings.

Twelfth maxim

Pour libations for your father and mother who are at peace in the necropolis.[3] When the gods witness your action, they will say, 'Accepted!' Do not ignore a

stranger; your son will act for you likewise.

Thirteenth maxim

Do not indulge in drinking beer lest bad words come out of your mouth without you knowing what you are saying. If you fall and hurt yourself, no one will give you a helping hand. Your drinking companions will stand around saying, ‘Out with the drunkard!’ If someone comes to find you and talk to you, you will be discovered lying on the ground like a little child.

Fourteenth maxim

Do not leave home without knowing your (final) resting place. Let your chosen place be known; remember it and know it. Set if before you as the path to take: if you keep straight you will find it. Embellish your place in the necropolis, the tomb that will conceal your corpse. Set it before you as your mission, as something that counts in your eyes. Emulate the great ones of old who are at peace in their tombs. No blame attaches to the one who does this: it is good for you to be prepared, too. When your messenger comes to take you away, let him find you prepared for your resting place and saying, ‘Here comes one ready for you.’ Do not say, ‘I am too young to be taken!’ For you do not know (the time of) your death. When death comes, he takes the child in its mother’s arms as well as the old.

Look, I tell you these useful things for you to heed. Do it and it will be good for you; you will be kept from all ills.[4]

Fifteenth maxim

Guard against the vice of greed, against false words. Conquer the malice inside you.

Sixteenth maxim

A quarrelsome man does not rest in the morning. Stay away from a hostile person: don’t let him be your companion. Be friends with one who is straight and true, whose behaviour you have witnessed. If your rectitude matches his, the friendship will be equal.

Seventeenth maxim

Look after your household wealth: it profits him who protects it. Don’t fritter it away on strangers, lest you suffer loss.

Eighteenth maxim

If wealth is placed where it bears (interest), it comes back to you redoubled. Make a storeroom for your wealth. Your descendants will inherit[5] it according to your plans.

Nineteenth maxim

A small gift generates a big return.[6]

Twentieth maxim

The wise man lives off the fool.

Twenty-first maxim

Look after what is yours and you will (always) find it. Keep it to hand, lest you end up a beggar.

Twenty-second maxim

Nothing becomes of a layabout; but you will be honoured if you are a man of business.

Twenty-third maxim

Do not punish another’s servant, even though his name stinks.

Twenty-fourth maxim

A badly educated man, when he becomes a great official, does not know how to behave in conversation.[7] … They go after him and seize his belongings … Learn the right way for a man who seeks to establish his household.

Twenty-fifth maxim

Make a garden and enclose a plot, in addition to your fields. Set out trees in it to shelter your house. Fill your hand with all the flowers that your eye can see.[8] One needs all of them!

Twenty-sixth maxim

A good piece of advice to remember: do not put your trust in another's wealth, but look after your own. Do not depend on another's profit, lest he be promoted over you. Build a house for yourself, or find one and buy one. Avoid disputes. Do not say, 'My grandfather has a house that will come down to me.'[9] For when you come to share (it) with your brothers, your share may be a (mere) storeroom.

Twenty-seventh maxim

If god grants you children … Like your father, know this: whether a man is hungry or sated at home, he is within his own walls.[10]

Twenty-eighth maxim

Do not be mindless; then your god will give you wealth.

Twenty-ninth maxim

Do not sit when another is standing – one older than you or greater in rank.

Thirtieth maxim

A good character is not reproached, but a bad character is blamed. Walk the right path every day; walk according to your rank. 'Who goes there?' they always ask. Rank makes the rules. A woman is asked about her husband, while a man is asked about his rank.

Thirty-first maxim

Do not insult someone involved in a brawl. If you are attacked, hold back: it will do you good when friendly relations are resumed. When trouble comes, you will find (your reticence) lifts you up and the stranger will stop. (However) deeds that are effective towards a stranger are very injurious to a brother.

Thirty-second maxim

Your people will acclaim you when you are joyful and weep [when you are sad]. When you are happy, the brave look to you. When you are lonely, you have your family.

Thirty-third maxim

Everything you say will be done if you are knowledgeable about writings. Study writings and commit them to memory; then all your words will be effective. Whatever job a scribe is given, he should consult writings. The overseer of the Treasury has no son; the overseer of the seal has no heir; the scribe is assessed for his hand: his office has no children. His companions are his concerns, his elders are his tasks.

Thirty-fourth maxim

Do not reveal your thoughts to a stranger lest he use your words against you. The bad things that come out of your mouth: he will repeat them and you will make enemies. A man may be ruined by his tongue. Be wary and you will do well.

Thirty-fifth maxim

A man's belly[11] is bigger than a granary and filled with every kind of answer. Choose the good one and say it, keeping the bad one shut up inside you. An aggressive answer leads to a beating, but speak sweetly and you will be loved. Never answer back!

Thirty-sixth maxim

He who sins by lying against god, the righteous judge: his fate comes and takes him away.

Thirty-seventh maxim

Make offerings to your god and beware lest you offend him. Do not question his images. Do not disturb him when he appears. Do not jostle him in order to carry him.[12] Do not interfere with the oracles. Be careful and help to protect him. Keep an eye out for signs of his anger and prostrate yourself in his name. He creates power in a million forms. He who magnifies him is (himself) magnified. The

god of this earth is the sun in the sky, while his images are upon earth. When incense is given to them as their daily bread, the lord of appearances is strengthened.

Thirty-eighth maxim

Double the food your mother gave you; support her as she supported you. She had a heavy burden in you, but she did not abandon you. When you were born at your due time, she was still yoked (to you). Her breast was in your mouth for three years as you grew and your excrement disgusted (her). But she did not say in disgust, ‘What shall I do?’ (Instead) she sent you to school and you were taught to write. She kept a look out for you every day with bread and beer at home.

Thirty-ninth maxim

When, as a young man, you take a wife and settle down in your (own) house, pay attention to your child. Educate him in every respect as your mother did. Do not give her cause to blame you, lest she raise her hands to god and he hears her cries.

Fortieth maxim

Do not eat bread while another stands by, without extending your hand to him. There is always bread: people do not last for ever.

Forty-first maxim

One man is powerful, another is lowly – but food is always there for the one who shares it. And the one who was powerful last year, this year he is a vagabond.

Forty-second maxim

Do not be greedy to fill your belly: you do not know your fate. If you end up in need, another may do you good.

Forty-third maxim

When last year’s water has ebbed away, this year’s arrives. Great lakes become dry places, while shoals turn into depths.

Forty-fourth maxim

Man does not have the sole answer: the lord of life confounds him.

Forty-fifth maxim

Know your place, be it lowly or exalted. It is not good to act up. Step according to rank.

Forty-sixth maxim

Do not intrude on a man in his house. Enter when you are called. He may say to you ‘Welcome!’ while deriding you in his thoughts.

Forty-seventh maxim

Give food to the despised, provisions to the uninvited guest. Do not rush to attack your attacker but leave him to god. Report him daily to god, tomorrow as today, and see what god does when he harms the one who harmed you.

Forty-eighth maxim

Do not enter a crowd when you find it in uproar and a fight (is) about to break out. Do not go anywhere near, but stay away from their violence lest you be brought before the court in a subsequent inquiry. Stay away from hostile people; control your emotions among brawlers. A stranger is not brought before the court, nor is a man who knows nothing bound in fetters.

Forty-ninth maxim

Do good to a loved one in order to cleanse him of his sins. You will be saved from his faults …

Fiftieth maxim

Do not control your wife in her house if you know she is efficient. Do not say to her, ‘Where is it? Fetch it!’ when she has put something in its proper place. Let

your eye observe in silence and you will see her skill. It is joyful when you are hand-in-hand with her. There are many who do not know this. If a man avoids strife at home, he will not encounter it (at all). Every man who sets up a house should set aside a hasty temper.

Fifty-first maxim

Do not go after a woman. Do not let her steal your heart.

Fifty-second maxim

Do not answer back an angry superior, but let him have his way. Speak sweetly when he speaks bitterly: it is the remedy to soothe his temper. Fighting talk merely raises the stakes and your boldness will collapse … Do not cause yourself heartache. You will soon be back in good humour when the hour of rage has passed. If your words calm the mind, the mind will accept them. Seek peace and quiet and submit to their benefits.

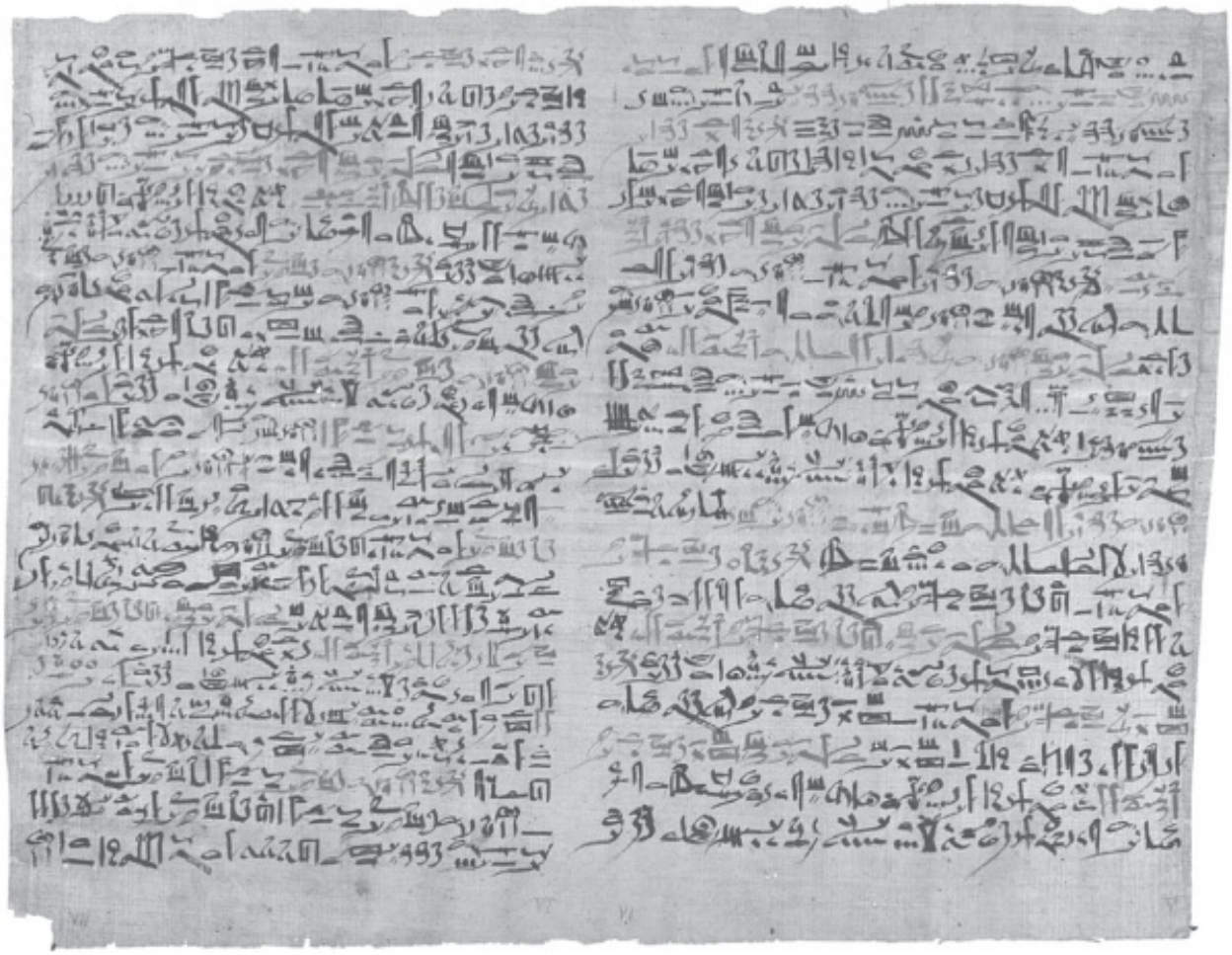
Fifty-third maxim

Be friendly with your local policeman. Do not make him angry with you. Give him food from your house. Do not rebuff his requests, but say to him, ‘Welcome, welcome here!’ No blame will attach to the one who does this. [Do not say,] ‘Oh, there is no bread; there is nothing to eat!’ … For he will discover your grain when the taxes are collected … You enter the village … and you leave again safely because of him.

NOTES

1. Alan Gardiner, ‘A Didactic Passage Re-examined’, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 45 (1959), p. 12.
2. Literally, ‘another is inebriated’.
3. Literally, ‘valley’.
4. Literally, ‘all ills will be far from you’.
5. Literally, ‘find’.
6. Literally, ‘comes back great’.
7. Literally, ‘how to bear himself when he makes a response’.
8. A metaphor for children.
9. Literally, ‘my mother’s father has a house that will endure’.
10. i.e. ‘there’s no place like home’.

11. The belly was identified as the seat of raw emotions.
12. i.e. during a procession of the god's image.



Cursive writing on the Edwin Smith Papyrus (Wikimedia Commons)

Gazetteer of Places

NAME USED IN TEXT	ANCIENT / CLASSICAL NAME	MODERN NAME	REMARKS
Abydos	Abdju	el-Araba el-Madfuna	
Ain	Ain	?	In the 3rd province of Lower Egypt
Andjet	Andjet	?	
Anty-province	–	–	18th province of Upper Egypt
Aphroditopolis	Per-nebtepih	Atfih	Capital of the 22nd province of Upper Egypt
Aruna	Aruna	–	SW of Megiddo (Israel)
Asyut	Sauty/Lykopolis	Asyut	Capital of Upper Pomegranate-tree-province
Athribis	Hutheryib	Tell Atrib	Capital of Kemwer-province
Avaris	Hut-waret	Tell el-Dabca	
Bahariya	Djesdjes	Bahariya	Northernmost of the oases
Biaset	Biaset	?	
Bubastis	Bast	Tell Basta	Capital of the 18th province of Lower Egypt
Busiris	Djedet/Per-usirbanebdjedet	Abusir	Capital of the 9th province of Lower Egypt
Buto	Per-wadjet	Tell el-Fara’in	
Coptos	Gebtu	Qift	Capital of the 5th province of Upper Egypt
Crag, great of victories	–	Tehna	
Crocodilopolis	Shedet/Hut-sobek	Medinet el-Fayum	Capital of the Fayum

Diospolis Inferior	Sema-behdet	–	Near Tell el-Balamun
Djed-Sneferu	Djed-Sneferu	?	
Djefti	Djefti	?	Near Megiddo (Israel)
Elephantine	Abu	Elephantine	Egypt’s southern border
Gaza	Gaza	Gaza	
Gebelein	Inerty/Per-hathor	Gebelein	
Hare-province	–	–	15th province of Upper Egypt
Harpoon-province	–	–	7th province of Lower Egypt
Heliopolis	Iunu	Tell Hisn	Capital of the 13th province of Lower Egypt
Herakleopolis	Henen-nesut	Ihnasya el-Medina	Capital of Upper Oleander-province
Herenkeru	Herenkeru	?	Near Megiddo (Israel)
Hermopolis	Khmun	el-Ashmunein	Capital of Hare-province
Hermopolis Parva	Ba’h	el-Baqliya	Capital of the 15th province of Lower Egypt
Herwer	Herwer	Hur	
Hesbu-province	–	–	11th province of Lower Egypt
Horizon-of-the-Orb	Akhetaten	Amarna	
Hu	Diospolis Parva	Hiw	
Hut-benu	Hut-benu	?	In 18th province of Upper Egypt
Hut-nesut	Hut-nesut	Kom el-Ahmar Sawaris	
Imau	Imau	?	
Input-province	–	–	17th province of Upper Egypt
Inuges	Inuges	?	Near Megiddo (Israel)
Irtjet	Irtjet	–	Polity in Lower Nubia
Irtjetj	Irtjetj	–	Polity in Lower Nubia
Iseopolis	Hebyt	Behbeit el-Hagar	
Itj-tawy	Itj-tawy	–	Near Lisht
Kadesh	Kadesh	Tell Neby Mend	In Syria

Karnak	Ipet-sut	Karnak	
Kedu	Qode	–	Region N of Aleppo (Turkey)
Kemwer-province	–	–	10th province of Lower Egypt
Khentnefer	Khentnefer	?	In 1st province of Lower Egypt
Kheraha	Babylon	Old Cairo	
Kom Abu Billo	Per-hathor-mefek/Terenuthis	Kom Abu Billo	
Kom el-Hisn	Imu	Kom el-Hisn	Capital of the 3rd province of Lower Egypt
Kush	Kush	–	Kingdom in Upper Nubia
Lahun	Rehenet	Lahun	
Leontopolis	Taremu	Tell el-Muqdam	Capital of Hesbu-province
Letopolis	Khem	Ausim	Capital of the 2nd province of Lower Egypt
Luxor	Ipet-resyt	Luxor	
Megiddo	Megiddo	Tell el-Mutasellim	In Israel
Meidum	Mer-atum	Meidum	
Mekher	Mekher	–	Polity in Lower Nubia
Memphis	Men-nefer/Inebu-hedj	Mit Rahina	Capital of White-walls-province
Mendes	Per-banebdjedet	Tell el-Rub’a	Capital of the 16th province of Lower Egypt
Mesed	Mesed	?	N of Athribis
Mest	Mest	Tell Umm Harb?	
Metenut-province	–	–	22nd province of Upper Egypt
Mittani	Naharin	–	Kingdom in Syria/N Iraq
Mountain-bull-province	–	–	6th province of Lower Egypt
Napata	Napata	Gebel Barkal	
Nebsyt	Nebsyt	?	Farm, probably in the Fayum
Nedjefet	Nedjefet	?	
Nedyt	Nedyt	?	Mythical location in the Osiris myth

Nefrusi	Nefrusi	?	S of Hermopolis
Neith-province	–	–	4th/5th province of Lower Egypt
Nekheb	Eileithyiaspolis	Elkab	
Nekhen	Hierakonpolis	Kom el-Ahmar	
Oxyrhynchus	Per-medjed	el-Bahnasa	Capital of Waseb-province
Peqer	Peqer	Umm el-Qa’ab	Area of the Abydos necropolis
Per-djed-ken	Per-djed-ken	?	In northern Upper Egypt
Per-gerer	Per-gerer	?	In the eastern Delta
Per-hapy	Per-hapy	Atar el-Nabi	S of Heliopolis
Per-hathor	Per-hathor	?	In the Delta
Per-herishef-neb-henen-nesut	Per-herishef-neb-henen-nesut	?	In the Delta
Per-inebwy	Per-inebwy	?	
In the western Delta	Per-manu	?	In the western Delta
Per-nub	Per-nub	?	In the western Delta
Per-peg	Per-peg	?	In the 1st province of Lower Egypt, NW of Herakleopolis
Per-sekhem-kheperra	Per-sekhem-kheperra	?	Royal estate near Lahun
Per-sekhmet-nebetrehesawy	Per-sekhmet-nebetrehesawy	?	Fortress in the 2nd province of Lower Egypt
Per-sekhmet-nebetsat	Per-sekhmet-nebetsat	?	Fortress in the 2nd province of Lower Egypt
Per-sopdu	Per-sopdu	Saft el-Henna	Capital of the 20th province of Lower Egypt
Punt	Punt	–	Coastal Sudan/Eritrea
Rosetjau	Rosetjau	Giza	
Sais	Sau	Sa el-Hagar	Capital of the 4th/5th province of Lower Egypt
Saka	Saka	el-Qes	
Sakhbu	Sakhbu	?	Near Letopolis
Satju	Satju	–	Polity in Lower Nubia
Sebennytos	Tjebnetjer	Samannud	

Sedjefa-tawy	Sedjefa-tawy	?	N of Thebes
Sehedj	Sehedj	?	Near Meidum
Semna	Heh	Semna	
Senmut	Senmut	?	Unknown location in Nubia
Sharuhen	Sharuhen	Tell el-Farah or Tell el-Ajjul	In Israel
Taanach	Taanach	–	SE of Megiddo (Israel)
Ta-at-en-tjar	Ta-at-en-tjar	?	In the Delta
Tanis	Djanet	San el-Hagar	Capital of the 19th province of Lower Egypt
Tawedjay	Ankyronpolis	el-Hiba	Capital of Anty-province
Tawer-province	–	–	8th province of Upper Egypt
Tentaa	Tentaa	?	In Upper Egypt or Lower Nubia
Teres	Teres	?	Polity in Lower Nubia
Thebes	Waset	Thebes/Luxor	
Tjaru	Tjaru	Tell el-Hebua	
Tjebu	Antaeopolis	Qau el-Kebir	Capital of Wadjet-province
Tjeknesh	Tjeknesh	?	N of Oxyrhynchus
Tjemeh-land	Tjemeh-land	–	Polity in SE Libya
Tura	Ainu	Tura	Quarries S of Cairo
Upper Oleander-province	–	–	20th province of Upper Egypt
Upper Pomegranate-tree-province	–	–	13th province of Upper Egypt
Wadjet-province	–	–	10th province of Upper Egypt
Waseb-province	–	–	19th province of Upper Egypt
Wawat	Wawat	–	Lower Nubia
Wenes	Wenes	?	
Wenu	Wenu	el-Ashmunein	Part of Hermopolis
Weryt	Weryt	?	
Wetjenet	Wetjenet	?	

White-walls	Inebu-hedj	Mit Rahina	Royal citadel of Memphis
White-walls-province	–	–	1st province of Lower Egypt
Xois	?	Sakha	Capital of the 6th province of Lower Egypt
Yam	Yam	–	Kingdom on the Upper Nile
Yanoam	Yanoam	Tel Bet Yerah	On the S shore of the Sea of Galilee (Israel)
Yehem	Yehem	–	SW of Megiddo (Israel)
Yeredj	Yurza	–	SE of Sharuhen (Israel)

Glossary of Deities

NAME	DESCRIPTION	CULT CENTRE
Amun	Creator god	Thebes
Amun-Ra	Combination of Amun and Ra; supreme god from New Kingdom onwards	Karnak
Anubis	Jackal-god of mummification	Countrywide
Aten, *see* Orb		
Atum	Creator god, identified with the setting sun	Countrywide
Bastet	Cat-goddess	Bubastis
Geb	Earth god, son of Shu and Tefnut	Heliopolis
Hathor	Cow-goddess, divine mother and protectress	Western Thebes
Heqet	Frog-goddess of fertility and childbirth	Herwer near Hermopolis
Herishef	Ram-god	Herakleopolis
Horakhty	Falcon-god, identified with the midday sun	Countrywide
Horus	Falcon-god of kingship	Countrywide
Isis	Mother goddess, sister-wife of Osiris	Countrywide
Kamutef	Epithet of Amun as creator and fertility god	Luxor
Khentikhety	Falcon-god	Athribis
Khepri	Scarab-god, identified with the rising sun	Countrywide
Khnum	Ram-god who created people on his potter’s wheel	Elephantine
Khonsu	Moon god, son of Amun and Mut	Thebes
Khuyet	Divine consort of Khentikhety	Athribis
Meskhenet	Goddess of childbirth	Countrywide
Min	Fertility god, protector of the Eastern Desert	Coptos

Montu	Falcon-god of war	Thebes
Mut	Mother goddess, consort of Amun	Thebes
Nehemetawy	Divine consort of Thoth	Hermopolis
Neith	War goddess	Sais
Nephthys	Protector goddess, sister of Isis	Countrywide
Nepri	God of the ripening grain	Countrywide
Nut	Sky goddess, sister of Geb	Countrywide
Orb	God of the visible sun, Akhenaten's sole god	Horizon-of-the-Orb
Orion	Star god	Countrywide
Osiris	God of the dead	Abydos, countrywide
Osiris-foremost-of-the-westerners	God of the dead, associated with the necropolis	Abydos
Osiris-Hemag	Local form of Osiris	Sais
Ptah	Creator god, god of craftsmen	Memphis
Ptah-Sokar	God of regeneration	Memphis
Ptah-south-of-his-wall	Creator god, city god of Memphis	Memphis
Ra	Sun god, creator and patron of kingship	Heliopolis, countrywide
Ra-Horakhty	Falcon-god, identified with the midday sun	Countrywide
Sekhmet	Lioness-goddess of war and pestilence	Countrywide
Seth	God of confusion, murderer of his brother Osiris	Ombos, countrywide
Shesmu	God of the wine- and oil-press	Countrywide
Shu	God of heat and light, son of Atum	Countrywide
Sirius	Star goddess, associated with the New Year	Countrywide
Sokar	Earth and funerary god	Memphis
South-of-his-wall	Epithet of Ptah as city god of Memphis	Memphis
Tefnut	Goddess of moisture, sister-wife of Shu	Countrywide
Thoth	Ibis- and baboon-god of writing	Hermopolis
Wennefer	Epithet of Osiris	Abydos

Wepwawet	Jackal-god, ‘opener of the ways’ to the afterlife	Abydos

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Dead person drinking the waters at Amenti, after a fresco from the tomb of Pachedu, Thebes, Egypt, *c*. 1152 BC, in the Ragab Papyrus Institute Cairo (Photograph: Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive)

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