

EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD: "NEGATIVE CONFESSION," IN USE CA. 1550-50 BCE

Used in the Egyptian funeral rite for a millennium, the Book of the Dead- perhaps more properly translated as the Book of Going Forth into Day- Corresponds to the various steps to the Egyptian afterlife. Most commonly written in hieroglyphics, the Book of the Dead provides spells for the departed soul's journey. This selection, the "Negative Confession," represents the dead person's oath to the god Osiris, saying that he had not committed any of the forty-two sins that would bar his way to the afterlife. The rational path of the Book of the Dead reflects the Egyptian concept that the gods are not merely capricious beings unconcerned with the well-being of humanity.

Homage to thee, O Great God [Osiris], Lord of Double Maati, I have come to thee, O my Lord, I have brought myself hither that I may behold thy beauties. I know thee, and I know thy name, and I know the names of the two and forty gods who exist with thee in this Hall of Double Maati, who live as warders of sinners and who feed upon their blood on the day when the lives of men are taken into account in the presence of the god Un-nefer (Osiris): in truth, ["Lord o[Justice]"] is thy name. In truth, I have come to thee, and I have brought Maat to thee, and I have expelled wickedness for thee.

1. I have not done evil to mankind.
2. I have not oppressed the members of my family.
3. I have not wrought evil in the place of right and truth.
4. I have no knowledge of worthless men.
5. I have not wrought evil...
6. I have not brought forward my name for exaltation to honors.
7. I have not ill-treated servants.
8. I have not belittled a god.
9. I have not defrauded the oppressed one of his property...
10. I have not done that which is an abomination unto the gods...
11. I have made no man to suffer hunger.
12. I have made no one to weep.
13. I have done no murder.
14. I have not given the order for murder to be done for me.
15. I have not inflicted pain upon mankind...
16. I have not inflicted pain upon mankind...
17. I have not encroached upon the fields of others.
18. I have not added to the weight of the scales [to cheat the seller].
19. I have not misread the pointer of the scales (to cheat the buyer).
20. I have not carried away the milk from the mouths of children.
21. I have not driven away the cattle which were upon their pastures...
22. I have not turned back water at the time [when it should flow].
23. I have not cut a cutting in a canal of running water. ...
24. I have not driven off the cattle from the property of the gods.
25. I have not obstructed a god in his procession.
26. I am pure! I am pure! I am pure! I am pure!

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does this document lack "any positive sense of morality," addressing the nonperformance of evil rather than the active doing of good?
2. Should the pharaoh play an economic role, facilitating progress for his people in certain respects?