



Ancient Egyptian didactic literature: The admonitions of Ipuwer

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The admonitions of Ipuwer

It is impossible to give a date for the composition of this document. The surviving papyrus (Papyrus Leiden 334) itself is a copy made during the New Kingdom. Ipuwer is generally supposed to have lived during the Middle Kingdom or the Second Intermediate Period, and the catastrophes he bewails to have taken place four centuries earlier during the First Intermediate Period.

On the other hand, Miriam Lichtheim, following S. Luria, contends that

the 'Admonitions of Ipuwer' has not only no bearing whatever on the long past First Intermediate Period, it also does not derive from any other historical situation. It is the last, fullest, most exaggerated and hence least successful, composition on the theme "order versus chaos."

M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Volume I, p.150

Fringe historians often compare the content of this papyrus with Exodus, the second book of the Bible [1]. Similarities between Egyptian texts and the Bible are easily found, and it is reasonable to assume Egyptian influence on the Hebrews, given their at times close contacts. But to conclude from such parallelisms that the Ipuwer Papyrus describes Egypt at the time of the Exodus, requires a leap of faith not everybody is willing to make.

Lacunae in the papyrus text are marked by [...].

I

[. .] *The door [keepers] say: "Let us go and plunder."*

The confectioners [. . .].

The washerman refuses to carry his load [. . .]

The bird [catchers] have drawn up in line of battle [. . . the inhabitants] of

► *the Nile overflows, yet none plough for it:* The collapse of the Old Kingdom civilisation is generally attributed to a repeated failure of the Nile to inundate the flood plain. A few consecutive crop failures can result in many subsequent years of suffering, as all the grain that is grown and which is to serve as seed, will be consumed as food.

*the Delta carry shields.
 The brewers [. . .] sad.
 A man regards his son as
 his enemy. Confusion [. .
 .] another. Come and
 conquer; judge [. . .] what
 was ordained for you in
 the time of Horus, in the
 age [of the Ennead . . .].
 The virtuous man goes in
 mourning because of what
 has happened in the land
 [. . .] goes [. . .] the tribes
 of the desert have become
 Egyptians everywhere.
 Indeed, the face is pale; [. .
 .] what the ancestors
 foretold has arrived at
 [fruition . . .] the land is
 full of confederates, and
 a man goes to plough with
 his shield.*

*Indeed, the meek say:
 ["He who is . . . of] face is
 as a well-born man."
 Indeed, [the face] is pale;
 the Bowman is ready,
 wrongdoing is
 everywhere, and there is
 no man of yesterday.
 Indeed, the plunderer [. .
 .] everywhere, and the
 servant takes what he
 finds.*

*Indeed, the Nile
 overflows, yet none
 plough for it. Everyone
 says: "We do not know
 what will happen
 throughout the land."
 Indeed, the women are
 barren and none
 conceive. Khnum fashions
 (men) no more because of
 the condition of the land.*

II

Indeed, poor men have become owners of wealth, and he who could not make sandals for himself is now a possessor of riches.

*Indeed, men's slaves, their hearts are **sad**, and magistrates do not fraternize with their people when they shout. Indeed, [hearts] are violent, pestilence is throughout the land, blood is everywhere, death is not lacking, and the mummy-cloth speaks even before one comes near it.*

Indeed, many dead are buried in the river; the stream is a sepulcher and the place of embalmment has become a stream.

*Indeed, noblemen are in distress, while the poor man is full of joy. Every town says: "**Let us suppress the powerful among us.**"*

Indeed, men are like ibises. Squalor is throughout the land, and there are none indeed whose clothes are white in these times.

Indeed, the land turns around as does a potter's wheel; the robber is a possessor of riches and [the rich man is become] a plunderer.

Indeed, trusty servants are [. . .]; the poor man [complains]: "How terrible! What am I to do?"

Indeed, the river is blood, yet men drink of it. Men shrink from human beings and thirst after water.

- ▶ *sad*: Lichtheim: *greedy*
- ▶ *Let us suppress the powerful among us*: John A. Wilson: *Let us banish many from us*. Lichtheim: *Let us expel our rulers*.



Ibis

- ▶ *Indeed, the river is blood, yet men drink of it. Men shrink from human beings and thirst after water*: Why really, the River is blood. If one drinks of it, one rejects (it) as human and thirsts for water. (Wilson)
- ▶ *gates, columns and walls are burnt up*: doors, columns, and floor planks are burned up (Wilson)
- ▶ *crocodiles [are gluttoned] with the fish they have taken, for men go to them of their own accord*: crocodiles [sink] down because of what they have carried off, (for) men go to them of their own accord. (Wilson)
- ▶ *When the wise man speaks, [he flees without delay]*: Lichtheim: *"The word of the wise has fled without delay"*.

*Indeed, gates, columns
and walls are burnt up,
while the hall of the
palace stands firm and
endures.*

*Indeed, the ship of [the
southerners] has broken
up; towns are destroyed
and Upper Egypt has
become an empty waste.*

*Indeed, crocodiles [are
glutted] with the fish they
have taken, for men go to
them of their own accord;
it is the destruction of the
land. Men say: "Do not
walk here; behold, it is a
net." Behold, men tread
[the water] like fishes,
and the frightened man
cannot distinguish it
because of terror.*

*Indeed, men are few, and
he who places his brother
in the ground is
everywhere. When the
wise man speaks, [he flees
without delay].*

*Indeed, the well-born man
[. . .] through lack of
recognition, and the child
of his lady has become the
son of his maidservant.*

III

*Indeed, the desert is
throughout the land, the
nomes are laid waste, and
barbarians from abroad
have come to Egypt.*

*Indeed, men arrive [. . .]
and indeed, there are no
Egyptians anywhere.*

*Indeed, gold and lapis
lazuli, silver and
turquoise, carnelian and
amethyst, Ibheth-stone and
[. . .] are strung on the*

► *barbarians* : Lichtheim: *Foreign bowmen*. Egyptians saw themselves as the pinnacle of creation: their land was The Land, their people were The People. In this their attitude was similar to that of other ancient (and not so ancient) peoples.

► *from abroad have come to Egypt*: Times of weak central power opened opportunities for foreigners to infiltrate the country in even larger numbers than ordinarily: The Nubian Medjay during the First Intermediate Period, the Hyksos during the Second. Still, they probably numbered in the thousands rather than in

*necks of maidservants.
 Good things are
 throughout the land, (yet)
 housewives say: "Oh that
 we had something to eat!"
 Indeed, [. . .]
 noblewomen. Their bodies
 are in sad plight by
 reason of their rags, and
 their hearts sink when
 greeting [one another].
 Indeed, chests of ebony
 are broken up, and
 precious ssnDm-wood is
 cleft asunder in beds [. .
 .].
 Indeed, the builders [of
 pyramids have become]
 cultivators, and those who
 were in the sacred bark
 are now yoked [to it].
 None shall indeed sail
 northward to **Byblos**
 today; what shall we do
 for cedar trees for our
 mummies, and with the
 produce of which priests
 are buried and with the
 oil of which [chiefs] are
 embalmed as far as
Keftiu? They come no
 more; gold is lacking [. .
 .] and materials for every
 kind of craft have come to
 an end. The [. . .] of the
 palace is despoiled. How
 often do people of the
 oases come with their
 festival spices, mats, and
 skins, with fresh
 rdmt-plants, grease of
 birds . . . ?
 Indeed, Elephantine and
 Thinis [...] of Upper
 Egypt, (but) without
 paying taxes owing to
 civil strife. Lacking are
 grain, charcoal, irtyw-
 fruit, m'w-wood,
 nwt-wood, and
 brushwood. **The work of***

the hundred thousands.

- ▶ *Egyptians*: people (Wilson)
- ▶ *lapis lazuli*: Much coveted blue stone, imported from Asia.
- ▶ *Byblos*: This city on the Lebanese coast supplied cedar wood to the Egyptians since the Old Kingdom at least.
- ▶ *Keftiu*: Often identified as Crete.
- ▶ *The work of craftsmen and [. . .] are the profit of the palace*: Lichtheim: *The output of craftsmen is lacking ---*
- ▶ *truth*: Lichtheim: *gifts*

craftsmen and [. . .] are the profit of the palace. To what purpose is a treasury without its revenues? Happy indeed is the heart of the king when truth comes to him! And every foreign land [comes]! That is our fate and that is our happiness! What can we do about it? All is ruin! Indeed, laughter is perished and is [no longer] made; it is groaning that is throughout the land, mingled with complaints.

IV

Indeed, every dead person is as a well-born man. Those who were Egyptians [have become] foreigners and are thrust aside.

Indeed, hair [has fallen out] for everybody, and the man of rank can no longer be distinguished from him who is nobody. Indeed, [. . .] because of noise; noise is not [. . .] in years of noise, and there is no end [of] noise. Indeed, great and small [say]: "I wish I might die." Little children say: "He should not have caused [me] to live." Indeed, the children of princes are dashed against walls, and the children of the neck are laid out on the high ground. Indeed, those who were in the place of embalmment

► *Indeed, every dead person is as a well-born man. Those who were Egyptians [have become] foreigners and are thrust aside.: Lichtheim: Those who were people are strangers whom one shows the way.*

► *...the children of the neck (i.e. holding onto the neck of the carrying grown-up):*

The (once) prayed-for children (Wilson)

► *on the high ground: burial ground above the flood plain.*

► *were in the place of embalmment: Lichtheim: were entombed*

► *crafts: work (Wilson)*

► *corn-rubbers: Lichtheim: grindstones*

► *rafts: Lichtheim: Boards*

► *Load them with vessels filled with [. . . Let] them know the palanquin.: Lichtheim: She is loaded down with jars filled with ---. [No longer] does she know the palanquin,*

► *trees are felled and branches are stripped off: the wholesale destruction of trees causes serious fuel problems, as witnessed nowadays in the Sahel region of sub-saharan Africa*

are laid out *on the high ground*, and the secrets of the embalmers are thrown down because of it.

Indeed, that has perished which yesterday was seen, and the land is left over to its weakness like the cutting of flax.

Indeed, the Delta in its entirety will not be hidden, and Lower Egypt puts trust in trodden roads. What can one do? No [. . .] exist anywhere, and men say: "Perdition to the secret place!"

Behold, it is in the hands of those who do not know it like those who know it. The desert dwellers are skilled in the *crafts* of the Delta.

Indeed, citizens are put to the *corn-rubbers*, and those who used to don fine linen are beaten with . . .

Those who used never to see the day have gone out unhindered; those who were on their husbands' beds, let them lie on *rafts*.

I say: "It is too heavy for me," concerning rafts bearing myrrh. *Load them with vessels filled with [. . .*

. Let] them know the palanquin. As for the butler, he is ruined. There are no remedies for it; noblewomen suffer like maidservants, minstrels are at the looms within the weaving-rooms, and what they sing to the Songstress-goddess is mourning. Talkers [. . .] *corn-rubbers.*

Indeed, all female slaves are free with their tongues, and when their

mistress speaks, it is
irksome to the
maidservants.
Indeed, trees are felled
and branches are stripped
off.

V

*I have separated him and
his household slaves, and
men will say when they
hear it: "Cakes are
lacking for most children;
there is no food [. . .].
What is the taste of it like
today?"*
Indeed, magnates are
hungry and perishing,
followers are followed [. .
.] because of complaints.
Indeed, the hot-tempered
man says: "If I knew
where God is, then I
would serve Him."

Indeed, [Right] pervades
the land in name, but what
men do in trusting to it is
Wrong.

Indeed, runners are
fighting over the spoil [of
] the robber, and all his
property is carried off.
Indeed, all animals, their
hearts weep; cattle moan
because of the state of the
land.

Indeed, the children of
princes are dashed
against walls, and the
children of the neck are
laid out on the high
ground. Khnum groans
because of his weariness.
Indeed, terror kills; the
frightened man opposes
what is done against your
enemies. Moreover, the
few are pleased, while the

▶ *I have separated him and his
household slaves: Lichtheim: And the
servant abandons his household*

▶ *Cakes are lacking for most children:
Lichtheim: Gone is the gain of
abundance of children.*

▶ *If I knew where God is, then I would
serve Him: implying that he doesn't do so
now.*

▶ *runners are fighting over the spoil [of
] the robber: Lichtheim: one runs and
fights for the goods [of a man]. He is
robbed;*

▶ *the ways are [. . .], the roads are
watched: the ways [are not] guarded
roads (Wilson)*

*rest are . . . Is it by
following the crocodile
and cleaving it asunder?
Is it by slaying the lion
roasted on the fire? [Is it]
by sprinkling for Ptah
and taking [. . .]? Why do
you give to him? There is
no reaching him. It is
misery which you give to
him.*

*Indeed, slaves . . .
throughout the land, and
the strong man sends to
everyone; a man strikes
his maternal brother.
What is it that has been
done? I speak to a ruined
man.*

*Indeed, **the ways are [. . .
.], the roads are watched;**
men sit in the bushes until
the benighted traveler
comes in order to plunder
his burden, and what is
upon him is taken away.
He is belabored with
blows of a stick and
murdered.*

*Indeed, that has perished
which yesterday was seen,
and the land is left over to
its weakness like the
cutting of flax,
commoners coming and
going in dissolution [. . .].*

VI

*Would that there were an
end of men, without
conception, without birth!
Then would the land be
quiet from noise and
tumult be no more.
Indeed, [men eat]
herbage and wash [it]
down with water; neither
fruit nor herbage can be*

► *spice, and oil:* Lichtheim: *Unanointed with oil*

► *the private council-chamber, its writings are taken away and the mysteries which were [in it] are laid bare* the writings of the augurs enclosure are read. The place of secrets which was (so formerly) is (now) laid bare (Wilson)

► *magic spells are divulged:* Anybody who knew magic spells could use them, though overuse seems to have made them ineffective. ([Magic](#) has always shunned

found [for] the birds, and [. . .] is taken away from the mouth of the pig. No face is bright which you have [. . .] for me through hunger.

*Indeed, everywhere barley has perished and men are stripped of clothes, **spice, and oil**; everyone says: "There is none." The storehouse is empty and its keeper is stretched on the ground; a happy state of affairs! .*

. .

Would that I had raised my voice at that moment, that it might have saved me from the pain in which I am.

*Indeed, **the private council-chamber, its writings are taken away and the mysteries which were [in it] are laid bare.***

*Indeed, **magic spells are divulged; smw- and shnw-spells are frustrated because they are remembered** by men.*

Indeed, public offices are opened and their inventories are taken away; the serf has become an owner of serfs.

Indeed, [scribes] are killed and their writings are taken away. Woe is me because of the misery of this time!

*Indeed, the writings of the scribes of the cadaster are destroyed, and **the corn of Egypt is common property.***

Indeed, the laws of the council chamber are thrown out; indeed, men walk on them in public places, and poor men

the light of day and becomes ineffectual when scrutinized with a critical mind.

Strangely, this has never prevented people from believing in it).

► **smw- and shnw spells:** Go-spells and Enfold-spells (Wilson)

► **because they are remembered:** Lichtheim: *through being repeated*

► **the corn of Egypt is common property:** Wilson: *The grain-sustenance of Egypt is (now) a come-and-get-it.*

Corn in the ancient Egyptian context refers to wheat and/or barley. The storage of surplus grain and its redistribution was one of the corner stones of the Egyptian [economy](#). Egypt was not a welfare state, distributing free grain.

► **has attained to the state of:** Lichtheim: *comes to the place*

► **Nine Gods:** The *ennead*, the totality of the gods of a locality, not necessarily amounting to exactly nine gods.

► **House of Thirty:** Tribunal, cf. *Hail Eater of entrails who came forth from the House of Thirty, I have not committed perjury.* from the Book of the Dead transl. by Allen and Faulkner

► **the children of magnates are ejected into the streets:** Lichtheim: *there is much hatred in the streets*

break them up in the streets.

*Indeed, the poor man **has attained to the state of the Nine Gods**, and the erstwhile procedure of the **House of the Thirty** is divulged.*

*Indeed, the great council-chamber is a popular resort, and poor men come and go to the **Great Mansions**.*

*Indeed, **the children of magnates are ejected into the streets**; the wise man agrees and the fool says "no," and it is pleasing in the sight of him who knows nothing about it.*

Indeed, those who were in the place of embalmment are laid out on the high ground, and the secrets of the embalmers are thrown down because of it.

VII

Behold, the fire has gone up on high, and its burning goes forth against the enemies of the land.

*Behold, things have been done which have not happened for a long time past; the king has been **deposed by the rabble**.*

*Behold, he who was buried as a **falcon** [is devoid] of biers, and what the **pyramid** concealed has become empty.*

*Behold, it has befallen that the land has been deprived of the kingship by a few **lawless men**.*

Behold, men have fallen

▶ *deposed by the rabble*: Lichtheim: *robbed by beggars*

▶ *Falcon*: the pharaoh, son of Horus

▶ *pyramid*: pyramids were built from the third dynasty to the Middle Kingdom.

▶ *lawless men*: Lichtheim: *people who ignore custom*. Essentially, Egyptian [law](#) was customary law.

▶ *Uraeus*: The snake symbol of the ruler, worn on pharaonic [headdresses](#).

▶ *the [. . .] of Re*: Lichtheim: *Stolen*] is the crown of Re

▶ *Serpent*: Wilson: (guardian-)serpent

▶ *he who could not build a room for himself is now a possessor of walls*: Lichtheim: *He who did not build a hut is an owner of coffers*.

*into rebellion against the
Uraeus, the [. . .] of Re,
even she who makes the
Two Lands content.*

*Behold, the secret of the
land whose limits were
unknown is divulged, and
the Residence is thrown
down in a moment.*

*Behold, Egypt is fallen to
pouring of water, and he
who poured water on the
ground has carried off
the strong man in misery.*

*Behold, the Serpent is
taken from its hole, and
the secrets of the Kings of
Upper and Lower Egypt
are divulged.*

*Behold, the Residence is
afraid because of want,
and [men go about]
unopposed to stir up
strife.*

*Behold, the land has
knotted itself up with
confederacies, and the
coward takes the brave
man's property.*

*Behold, the Serpent [. . .]
the dead: he who could
not make a sarcophagus
for himself is now the
possessor of a tomb.*

*Behold, the possessors of
tombs are ejected on to
the high ground, while he
who could not make a
coffin for himself is now
[the possessor] of a
treasury.*

*Behold, this has happened
[to] men; he who could
not build a room for
himself is now a possessor
of walls.*

*Behold, the magistrates of
the land are driven out
throughout the land: [. . .]
are driven out from the
palaces.*

Behold, noble ladies are now on rafts, and magnates are in the labor establishment, while he who could not sleep even on walls is now the possessor of a bed.

Behold, the possessor of wealth now spends the night thirsty, while he who once begged his dregs for himself is now the possessor of overflowing bowls.

Behold, the possessors of robes are now in rags, while he who could not weave for himself is now a possessor of fine linen. Behold, he who could not build a boat for himself is now the possessor of a fleet; their erstwhile owner looks at them, but they are not his.

Behold, he who had no shade is now the possessor of shade, while the erstwhile possessors of shade are now in the full blast of the storm. Behold, he who was ignorant of the lyre is now the possessor of a harp, while he who never sang for himself now vaunts the Songstress-goddess.

Behold, those who possessed vessel-stands of copper [. . .] not one of the jars thereof has been adorned.

VIII

Behold, he who slept wifeless through want [finds] riches, while he

► *Behold, noble ladies are now on rafts, and magnates are in the labor establishment, while he who could not sleep even on walls is now the possessor of a bed: Wilson: Behold, nobles' ladies are (now) gleaners, and nobles are in the workhouse. (But) he who never (even) slept on a plank is (now) the owner of a bed.*

Bedsteads were expensive furniture. Most people would have slept on the floor.

► *shade: Lichtheim: shelter*

► *Songstress-goddess: goddess of music (Wilson)*

► *vessel-stands: Most vessels had rounded bottoms and were placed on circular vessel-stands to prevent them from falling over. Lichtheim: offering-tables*



Limestone pot stand, 12th dynasty.

Source: [Petrie Museum website](#)

► *wifeless through want: Founding a household, which seems to have been almost synonymous with getting married*

whom he never saw stands making dole.

Behold, he who had no property is now a possessor of wealth, and the magnate praises him.

*Behold, **the poor of the land have become rich**, and the [erstwhile owner] of property is one who has nothing.*

*Behold, **serving-men** have become masters of butlers, and he who was once a messenger now sends someone else.*

Behold, he who had no loaf is now the owner of a barn, and his storehouse is provided with the goods of another.

Behold, he whose hair is fallen out and who had no oil has now become the possessors of jars of sweet myrrh.

Behold, she who had no box is now the owner of a coffer, and she who had to look at her face in the water is now the owner of a mirror.

Behold, [. . .].

Behold, a man is happy eating his food. Consume your goods in gladness and unhindered, for it is good for a man to eat his food; God commands it for him whom He has favored [. . .].

[Behold, he who did not know] his god now offers to him with incense of another [who is] not known [to him].

[Behold,] great ladies, once possessors of riches, now give their children for beds.

Behold, a man [to whom

required a modicum of wealth.

▶ *riches:* Lichtheim: *noblewoman*

▶ *the poor of the land have become rich:* In reality the poor do not become rich during social upheaval.

▶ *serving-men:* Lichtheim: *cooks*

is given] a noble lady as wife, her father protects him, and he who has not [. . .] killing him.

Behold, the children of magistrates are [. . . the calves] of cattle [are given over] to the plunderers.

Behold, *priests transgress with the cattle of the poor* [. . .].

Behold, he who could not slaughter for himself now slaughters bulls, and he who did not know how to carve now sees [. . .].

Behold, *priests transgress with geese, which are given [to] the gods instead of oxen.*

Behold, maidservants [. . .] offer ducks; noblewomen [. . .].

Behold, noblewomen flee; the overseers of [. . .] and their [children] are cast down through fear of death.

[Behold,] the chiefs of the land flee; there is no purpose for them because of want. The lord of [. . .].

▶ *priests transgress with the cattle of the poor* [. . .]: Lichtheim: *the serfs eat beef, The paupers* -----

▶ *priests transgress*: Lichtheim: *serfs eat*

▶ *geese, which are given [to] the gods instead of oxen*: Shortchanging and stealing from the gods was a mortal sin. I have not purloined offerings ([Negative confessions](#))

IX

[Behold,] those who once owned beds are now on the ground, while he who once slept in squalor now lays out a skin-mat for himself.

Behold, noblewomen go hungry, while the *priests* are sated with what has been prepared for them.

Behold, no offices are in their right place, like a

▶ *priests*: king's men (Wilson)
 ▶ *everyone fetches for himself those that are branded with his name*: Wilson: *Every man takes for himself and brands (them) with his name.*

*herd running at random
without a herdsman.*

*Behold, cattle stray and
there is none to collect
them, but everyone
fetches for himself those
that are branded with his
name.*

*Behold, a man is slain
beside his brother, who
runs away and abandons
him to save his own skin.
Behold, he who had no
yoke of oxen is now the
owner of a herd, and he
who could find for himself
no ploughman is now the
owner of cattle.*

*Behold, he who had no
grain is now the owner of
granaries, and he who
had to fetch loan-corn for
himself is now one who
issues it.*

*Behold, he who had no
dependents is now an
owner of serfs, and he
who was [a magnate] now
performs his own errands.
Behold, the strong men of
the land, the condition of
the people is not reported
[to them]. All is ruin!*

*Behold, no craftsmen
work, for the enemies of
the land have
impoverished its
craftsmen.*

*[Behold, he who once
recorded] the harvest
now knows nothing about
it, while he who never
ploughed [for himself is
now the owner of corn;
the reaping] takes place
but is not reported. The
scribe [sits in his office],
but his hands [are idle] in
it.*

*Destroyed is [. . .] in that
time, and a man looks [on*

*his friend as] an
adversary. The infirm
man brings coolness [to
what is hot . . .] fear [. . .
. .]. Poor men [. . . the
land] is not bright
because of it.*

X

*Destroyed is [. . .] their
food is taken from them [. . .
. . through] fear of his
terror. The commoner
begs [. . .] messenger, but
not [. . .] time. He is
captured laden with goods
and [all his property] is
taken away. [. . .] men
pass by his door [. . .] the
outside of the wall, a
shed, and rooms
containing falcons. It is
the common man who will
be vigilant, the day
having dawned on him
without his dreading it.
Men run because of [. . .
for] the temple of the
head, strained through a
woven cloth within the
house. What they make
are tents, just like the
desert folk.
Destroyed is the doing of
that for which men are
sent by retainers in the
service of their masters;
they have no readiness.
Behold, they are five men,
and they say: "Go on the
road you know, for we
have arrived."
Lower Egypt weeps; the
king's storehouse is the
common property of
everyone, and the entire
palace is without its
revenues. To it belong*

*emmer and barley, fowl
and fish; to it belong
white cloth and fine linen,
copper and oil; to it
belong carpet and mat, [. . .]
flowers and
wheat-sheaf and all good
revenues . . . If the . . . it
in the palace were
delayed, men would be
devoid [of . . .].*

*Destroy the enemies of
the august Residence,
splendid of magistrates [. . .]
in it like [. . .]; indeed,
the Governor of the City
goes unescorted.*

*Destroy [the enemies of
the august Residence,]
splendid [. . .]. [Destroy
the enemies of] that
erstwhile august
Residence, manifold of
laws [. . .]. [Destroy the
enemies of] that erstwhile
august [Residence . . .].
Destroy the enemies of
that erstwhile august
Residence [. . .] none can
stand [. . .].*

*Destroy the enemies of
that erstwhile august
Residence, manifold of
offices; indeed [. . .].
Remember to immerse [. . .]
him who is in pain when
he is sick in his body;
show respect [. . .]
because of his god that he
may guard the utterance
[. . .] his children who are
witnesses of the surging
of the flood.*

XI

*Remember to [.]. . . .
shrine, to fumigate with
incense and to offer water*

► *Remember:* The things to remember are the duties of the priests, first among them the pharaoh as High Priest, to their

in a jar in the early morning.

Remember [to bring] fat r-geese, trp-geese, and ducks and to offer god's offerings to the gods.

Remember to chew natron and to prepare white bread; a man [should do it] on the day of wetting the head.

Remember to erect flagstaffs and to carve offering stones, the priest cleansing the chapels and the temple being plastered (white) like milk; to make pleasant the odor of the horizon and to provide bread-offerings.

Remember to observe regulations, to fix dates correctly, and to remove him who enters on the priestly office in impurity of body, for that is doing it wrongfully, it is destruction of the heart [. . .] the day which precedes eternity, the months [. . .] years are known.

Remember to slaughter oxen [. . .].

Remember to go forth purged [. . .] who calls to you; to put r-geese on the fire [. . .] to open the jar [. . .] the shore of the waters [. . .] of women [. . .] clothing [.] to give praise . . . in order to appease you.

[. . .] lack of people; come [. . .] Re who commands [. . .] worshipping him [. . .] West until [. . .] are diminished [. . .].

Behold, why does he seek to fashion [men . . .]? The

gods. In accordance with the magical thinking of the day (and which still persists among many believers) the meticulous fulfilment of duties brings with it the favour of the gods and thus the well-being of the pious.

▶ *ducks*: sat-geese (Wilson)

▶ *natron*: used for cleaning teeth, cf.

[Personal hygiene and cosmetics](#)

▶ *horizon*: Lichtheim: *sanctuary*

▶ *impurity of body*: Priest had to observe a number of rules, like removing hair, wearing white sandals made of reeds etc.

▶ *he*: the creator god

frightened man is not distinguished from the violent one.

XII

He brings coolness upon heat; men say: "He is the herdsman of mankind, and there is no evil in his heart." Though his herds are few, yet he spends a day to collect them, their hearts being on fire. Would that he had perceived their nature in the first generation; then he would have imposed obstacles, he would have stretched out his arm against them, he would have destroyed their herds and their heritage. Men desire the giving of birth, but sadness supervenes, with needy people on all sides. So it is, and it will not pass away while the gods who are in the midst of it exist. Seed goes forth into mortal women, but none are found on the road. Combat has gone forth, and he who should be a redresser of evils is one who commits them; neither do men act as pilot in their hour of duty. Where is he today? Is he asleep? Behold, his power is not seen. If we had been fed, I would not have found you, I would not have been summoned in vain; "Aggression against it means pain of heart" is a saying on the lips of

- ▶ *herdsman*: The metaphor of divine herdsman or shepherd is frequently used in Egyptian literature.
- ▶ *their nature*: The evil in man was either unintentional or it came into being shortly after creation.
- ▶ *their herds*: Wilson: *the seed thereof*. Re would have destroyed his flawed creation had he known at the beginning.
- ▶ *heritage*: Lichtheim: *heirs*

everyone. Today he who is afraid . . . a myriad of people; [. . .] did not see [. . .] against the enemies of [. . .] at his outer chamber; who enter the temple [. . .] weeping for him [. . .] that one who confounds what he has said . . . The land has not fallen [. . .] the statues are burned and their tombs destroyed [. . .] he sees the day of [. . .]. He who could not make for himself [. . .] between sky and ground is afraid of everybody.

. . . if he does it . . . what you dislike taking. Authority, knowledge, and truth are with you, yet confusion is what you set throughout the land, also the noise of tumult. Behold, one deals harm to another, for men conform to what you have commanded. If three men travel on the road, they are found to be only two, for the many kill the few.

XIII

*Does a herdsman desire death? Then may you command reply to be made, because it means that one loves, another detests; it means **that their existences are few** everywhere; it means that you have acted so as to bring those things to pass. You have told lies, and the land is a weed which destroys men, and none can count on life. All*

▶ *that their existences are few:*

Lichtheim: *reducing their numbers*

▶ *Is he brave and saves himself? It means he will live: Lichtheim: . If he is brave he may save himself. Such is his life!*

▶ *net is drawn in and birds are tied up: [Bird netting](#) was to some a leisure activity, to others a necessity.*

▶ *build pyramids: an activity which had completely ceased by the New Kingdom.*

*these years are strife, and
a man is murdered on his
housetop even though he
was vigilant in his gate
lodge. Is he brave and
saves himself? It means
he will live.*

*When men send a servant
for humble folk, he goes
on the road until he sees
the flood; the road is
washed out and he stands
worried. What is on him is
taken away, he is
belabored with blows of a
stick and wrongfully
slain. Oh that you could
taste a little of the misery
of it! Then you would say
[. . .] from someone else
as a wall, over and above
[. . .] hot . . . years . . . [. .
.].*

*[It is indeed good] when
ships fare upstream [. . . .
. . .] robbing them.*

*It is indeed good [. . .]. [It
is indeed] good when the
net is drawn in and birds
are tied up [. . .].*

*It is [indeed] good [. . .]
dignities for them, and the
roads are passable.*

*It is indeed good when the
hands of men build
pyramids, when ponds are
dug and plantations of the
trees of the gods are
made.*

*It is indeed good when
men are drunk; they drink
myt and their hearts are
happy.*

XIV

*It is indeed good when
shouting is in men's
mouths, when the*

- ▶ *well-provided within: firm-bellied (Wilson)*
- ▶ *The Medjay are pleased with Egypt:*

*magnates of districts
stand looking on at the
shouting in their houses,
clad in a cloak, cleansed
in front and well-provided
within.*

*It is indeed good when
beds are prepared and the
headrests of magistrates
are safely secured. Every
man's need is satisfied
with a couch in the shade,
and a door is now shut on
him who once slept in the
bushes.*

*It is indeed good when
fine linen is spread out on
New Year's Day [. . .] on
the bank; when fine linen
is spread out and cloaks
are on the ground. The
overseer of [. . .] the
trees, the poor [. . . .] in
their midst like Asiatics [.
. . .]. Men [. . .] the state
thereof; they have come
to an end of themselves;
none can be found to
stand up and protect
themselves [. . .].*

*Everyone fights for his
sister and saves his own
skin. Is it Nubians? Then
will we guard ourselves;
warriors are made many
in order to ward off
foreigners. Is it Libyans?
Then we will turn away.
*The Medjay are pleased
with Egypt.**

The Madjoi fortunately are with Egypt.
(Wilson); The Medjai are content with
Egypt." (Lichtheim)

XV

*How comes it that every
man kills his brother? The
troops whom we
marshaled for ourselves
have turned into
*foreigners and have taken**

► *foreigners and have taken to
ravaging: Wilson: barbarians,
beginning to destroy that from which
they took their being. [Foreigners](#) were
seen as agents of chaos.*

► *What the plebs have tasted [. . .]
without giving Egypt over [to] the sand:*

to ravaging. What has come to pass through it is informing the Asiatics of the state of the land; all the desert folk are possessed with the fear of it. What the plebs have tasted [. . .] without giving Egypt over [to] the sand. It is strong [. . .] speak about you after years [. . .] devastate itself, it is the threshing floor which nourishes their houses [. . .] to nourish his children [. . .] said by the troops [.] fish [. . .] gum, lotus leaves [. . .] excess of food.

Lichtheim: *The experience of the people is that they say: "Egypt will not be given over <to> sand!"*

XVI

What Ipuwer said when he addressed the Majesty of the Lord of All: [. . .] all herds. It means that ignorance of it is what is pleasing to the heart. You have done what was good in their hearts and you have nourished the people with it. They cover their faces through fear of the morrow.

That is how a man grows old before he dies, while his son is a lad of understanding; he does not open [his] mouth to speak to you, but you seize him in the doom of death [. . .] weep [. . .] go [. . .] after you, that the land may be [. . .] on every side.

XVII

*If men call to [. . .] weep
[. . .] them, who break
into the tombs and burn
the statues [. . .] the
corpses of the nobles [. . .
. . .] of directing work.*

[1] Influenced by the revisionist historians of the second half of the 20th century who could not find any archaeological proofs for the historicity of the earlier Bible stories, their value as historical records came to be doubted. Before that time most Egyptologists, having grown up in the Christian West, accepted these accounts as being, at least in part, historically correct.



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