

Egyptian Mortuary Texts

Introduction: Written by priests, ancient Egyptian mortuary texts were inscribed on the tomb walls to appeal to the gods to permit the deceased to proceed to the afterlife. These three mortuary texts—the first for the pharaoh Teti and the other two from standard texts—date from the Old (2575-2150 BCE), Middle (1975-1640 BCE) and New Kingdoms (1520-1075 BCE). Over the course of Egyptian history, access afterlife became ever more widespread—first for pharaohs and their immediate families, then for high officials and aristocrats, and finally for all Egyptians. Indeed, the fact that mortuary texts became standardized indicates that access to the afterlife was becoming available to ever more Egyptians over the two millennia of the various kingdoms of ancient Egyptian history.

A PYRAMID TEXT

Oho! Oho! Rise up, O Teti!
Take your head,
Collect your bones,
Gather your limbs,
Shake the earth from your flesh!
Take your bread that rots not,
Your beer that sours not,
Stand at the gates that bar the common people!
The gatekeeper comes out to you,
He grasps your hand,
Takes you into heaven, to your father Geb,¹
He rejoices at your coming,
Gives you his hands,
Kisses you, caresses you,
Sers you before the spirits, the imperishable
stars.
The hidden ones worship you,
The great ones surround you,
The watchers wait on you.
Barley is threshed for you,
Emmen is reaped for you,

¹The god of Earth and father of Osiris, the god of resurrection and king of the dead.

²The deities who accompany Re as he sails daily across the sky (note 9).

Your monthly feasts are made with it,
Your half-month feasts are made with it,
As ordered done for you by Geb, your father,
Rise up, O Teti, you shall not die!

A COFFIN TEXT

Words spoken by Him-whose-names-are-hidden,
the All-Lord, as he speaks before those who si-
lence the storm, in the sailing of the court:²

Hail in peace! I repeat to you the good deeds
which my own heart did for me from within the
serpent-coil,³ in order to silence strife. I did four
good deeds within the portal of lightland:

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

I made the great inundation,⁴ that the humble
might benefit by it like the great. This is one of
the deeds.

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

³The serpent-dragon Apophis, a mythic symbol of the lurking dangers in the world.

⁴The annual flooding of the Nile.

I made that their hearts are not disposed to forget the West,⁵ in order that sacred offerings be made to the gods of the nomes.⁶ This is one of the deeds.

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

The Dead Speaks

I⁷ shall shine and be seen every day as a dignitary of the All-Lord, having given satisfaction to the Weary-hearted.⁸

I shall sail rightly in my bark,⁹ I am lord of eternity in the crossing of the sky.

I am not afraid in my limbs, for Hu and Hike¹⁰ overthrow for me that evil being.

I shall see lightland, I shall dwell in it. I shall judge the poor and the wealthy.

I shall do the same for the evil-doers; for mine is life, I am its lord, and the scepter will not be taken from me.

I have spent a million years with the Weary-hearted, the son of Geb, dwelling with him in one place; while hills became towns and towns hills, for dwelling destroys dwelling.

I am lord of the flame who lives on truth; lord of eternity, maker of joy, against whom that worm shall not rebel.

I am he who is in his shrine, master of action who destroys the storm; who drives off the serpents of many names when he goes from his shrine.

Lord of the winds who announces the northwind, rich in names in the mouth of the Ennead.¹¹

Lord of lightland, maker of light, who lights the sky with his beauty.

I am he in his name! Make way for me, that I may see Nun¹² and Amun!¹³ For I am that equipped spirit who passes by the guards.¹⁴ They do not speak for fear of Him-whose-name-is-hidden, who is in my body. I know him, I do not ignore him! I am equipped and effective in opening his portal!

As for any person who knows this spell, he will be like Re in the eastern sky, like Osiris in the netherworld. He will go down to the circle of fire, without the flame touching him ever!

THE NEGATIVE CONFESSION

(1) To be said on reaching the Hall of the Two Truths¹⁵ so as to purge N of any sins committed and to see the face of every god:

Hail to you, Great God, Lord of the Two Truths!

I have come to you, my Lord,

I was brought to see your beauty.

I know you, I know the names of the forty-two gods,

Who are with you in the Hall of the Two Truths.

Who live by warding off evildoers,

Who drink of their blood,

On that day of judging characters before Wennofer.¹⁶

Lo, your name is "He-of-Two-Daughters,"

⁵The Land of the Resurrected Dead.

⁶The forty-two religious and administrative districts into which Egypt was divided. Note that the dead person is being judged by forty-two deities.

⁷The dead person now becomes the speaker, assuming the identity of Re.

⁸One of Osiris's titles. One must first satisfy Osiris before joining Re.

⁹Re sails across the sky in a bark, or boat.

¹⁰Personifications of effective speech and magic, they are probably a reference to this magical spell, which has been uttered at entombment and carved in the coffin.

¹¹The company of Egypt's nine chief deities.

¹²The watery void outside of the temporal and spatial

boundaries of creation from which the creator emerged, Nun was personified as the god of the Abyss.

¹³A primeval god who existed as a force before creation, he became the chief god of Thebes. He rose to preeminence in Egypt when the princes of Thebes reunited Egypt after the Second Intermediate Period.

¹⁴The guards to the Land of the West.

¹⁵Ma'at takes a dual form here in Isis, goddess of Right, and Nephthys, goddess of Truth. Isis was the sister and wife of Osiris. It was she who brought the dead and dismembered Osiris back to life, thereby assuring his status as god of resurrection and king of the Underworld. Nephthys, also Osiris's sister, had assisted in his resurrection.

¹⁶One of Osiris's names.

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(And) "He-of-Ma'at's-Two-Eyes."

Lo, I come before you,
Bringing Ma'at to you,
Having repelled evil for you.

I have not done crimes against people,
I have not mistreated cattle,
I have not sinned in the Place of Truth.¹⁷

I have not known what should not be
known,¹⁸

I have not done any harm.

I did not begin a day by exacting more than
my due,

My name did not reach the bark of the
mighty ruler.¹⁹

I have not blasphemed a god,

I have not robbed the poor.

I have not done what the god abhors,

I have not maligned a servant to his master.

I have not caused pain,

I have not caused tears.

I have not killed,

I have not ordered to kill,

I have not made anyone suffer.

I have not damaged the offerings in the
temples,

I have not depleted the loaves of the gods,

I have not stolen the cakes of the dead.²⁰

I have not copulated nor defiled myself.²¹

I have not increased nor reduced the
measure, . . .

I have not cheated in the fields.

I have not added to the weight of the balance,

* I have not falsified the plummet of the scales.

I have not taken milk from the mouth of
children,

I have not deprived cattle of their pasture.

I have not snared birds in the reeds of the
gods,

I have not caught fish in their ponds.

I have not held back water in its season,

I have not dammed a flowing stream,

I have not quenched a needed fire.

I have not neglected the days of meat
offerings,

I have not detained cattle belonging to the
god,

I have not stopped a god in his procession.

I am pure, I am pure,

I am pure, I am pure! . . .

No evil shall befall me in this land,

In this Hall of the Two Truths;

For I know the names of the gods in it,

The followers of the great God!

¹⁷He has not sinned in any holy place.

¹⁸Secrets of the gods.

¹⁹As he sails across the sky in his bark, Re has not heard of any misdeeds by the deceased.

Questions:

What in these texts indicate the increasing popularization of mortuary texts, that is, their availability to widening strata of ancient Egyptians?

What can we learn from these texts about how Egyptians were expected to live their mortal lives?

²⁰Food to accompany the dead on their journey.

²¹Presumably, in a holy place.