

THE MAXIMS OF PTAHHOTEP

This text, one of the undisputed masterpieces of ancient Egyptian literature, dates possibly from as early as the late Sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom. Some scholarly opinions, however, prefer to see it as a Middle Kingdom composition dating from the Twelfth Dynasty. Although it was not intended to be a complete compendium of Old Kingdom thought and morality, it does nevertheless present a very good picture of the general attitudes and outlook of that period. The text was composed under the guise of an elderly vizier who was on the verge of retirement and desirous of handing his position on to his son who also bore the name Ptahhotep. In general, the text appears as a handbook of etiquette and proper conduct and is obviously addressed to members of the nobility and upper classes. The major purpose of the text was a very practical and pragmatic one, for it provides guidelines of conduct designed to aid the reader or hearer in getting ahead in life and in being successful, both personally and financially. At the same time, the text also has a certain moral value with its stress on Ma'at and the doing of what is right. It is also extremely optimistic in its general outlook, i.e., if one behaves in the right and proper fashion, all will be well. Due to the extreme difficulty of this text, modern translations of it show very wide variations in the interpretation of certain passages. There are four copies of the text in existence, only one of which, Papyrus Prisse in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, is complete. This version is the earliest of the four, being a copy produced during the Middle Kingdom.

Being the earliest, it is in all likelihood the most faithful reproduction of the original. The other copies show considerable variations from Papyrus Prisse, this being due perhaps to the fact that they were emended to make them more understandable to the Egyptians of the New Kingdom. In the following translation, I have for the most part followed the text of Papyrus Prisse, although in several instances I have inserted, where it seemed appropriate, lines from one of the other extant versions. There are several publications of the text, but the one which I have used in producing the following translation is that of Z. Žába, Les Maximes de Ptahhotep (Prague, 1956). The text has been translated several times, but those most easily accessible to the majority of readers will be that of Miriam Lichtheim (Ancient Egyptian Literature, vol. 1, [Berkeley, 1973], 61–80) and that of R. O. Faulkner in the earlier edition (1973) of this book. The edition of Žába also contains a French translation as well as translations of the other versions of the text.

V.A.T.

- 4,1 The beginning of the Instruction written by the hereditary noble, the prince, the father of the god,¹ the beloved of the god, the judge of the six law courts, the arbiter who causes contentment throughout the entire land, the mayor of the city, the vizier Ptahhotep, under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Isesi who lives for ever and eternity. The mayor of the city, the vizier Ptahhotep says:

“My Sovereign Lord:

Old age has arrived, infirmity has descended,

- 4,3 Misery has drawn nigh, and weakness increases.

One must take a nap like a child every day,

The eyes are blurred, the ears are deaf,

And vigor wanes because of weariness.

The mouth is silent and no longer speaks;

- 5,1 The memory is gone and cannot recall (even) yesterday.

The bones ache through frailty,

Pleasure has become repulsive, and all taste has vanished.

What old age does to men is totally despicable.

The nose becomes plugged and cannot breathe;

Even standing and sitting are a bother.

1. Father of the god: a priestly title designating a court official of significant rank.

5,3 Permit your humble servant to appoint a staff of old age.²
 Let my son be allowed to succeed to my position.³
 To that end I will instruct him in the decisions of the judges,
 The wisdom of those who have lived in earlier ages,
 Those who hearkened to the gods.⁴
 So may the same be done for you;
 May discord be banished from the people,
 And may the Two Banks⁵ serve you.”

Then the Majesty of the god said:
 5,5 “Before you retire, teach him / about what has been said in the past;
 Then he will be an example to the children of the nobles,
 When understanding and precision have entered into him.
 Instruct him, for no one is born wise.”

5,7 The beginning of the wise maxims spoken by the Hereditary Noble, the Prince, the father of the god, the beloved of the god, the eldest son of the king, / of his very body, the judge of the six law courts, the arbiter who causes contentment throughout the entire land, the mayor of the city, the Vizier Ptahhotep, to teach the ignorant about knowledge and about the principles of good conduct, things such as are profitable to him who will listen, but a source of sorrow to him who disregards them. Thus he spoke to his son, Ptahhotep the younger:

1. “Do not be haughty because of your knowledge,
 5,9 But take counsel / with the unlearned man as well as with the learned,
 For no one has ever attained perfection of competence,
 And there is no craftsman who has acquired (full) mastery.
 Good advice is rarer than emeralds,
 But yet it may be found even among women at the grindstones.

2. If you come up against an aggressive adversary (in court),
 5,11 One who has influence and is more excellent than you,
 Lower your arms and bend your back,
 For if you stand up to him, he will not give in to you.

2. “Staff of old age”: one who will assist the writer in carrying out his duties.

3. This line does not appear in Papyrus Prisse, but it provides an excellent explication of the previous line.

4. Or as an alternative reading: “those (who were) the servants of your ancestors.”

5. I.e., the two banks of the Nile.

You should disparage his belligerent speech

By not opposing him in his vehemence.

The result will be that he will be called boorish,

5,13 And your control of temper will have equaled / his babble.

3. If you come up against an aggressive adversary,

Your equal, one who is of your own social standing,

You will prove yourself more upright than he by remaining silent,

While he speaks vengefully.

The deliberation by the judges will be somber,

But your name will be vindicated in the decision of the magistrates.

6,1 4. If you come up against an aggressive adversary,

A man of low standing, one who is not your equal,

Do not assail him in accordance with his lowly estate.

Leave him be, and he will confound himself.

Do not answer him in order to vent your frustration;

Do not alleviate your anger at the expense of your adversary.

6,3 Wretched is he / who persecutes one who is inept.

Things will turn out in accordance with your will,

And you will defeat him through the censure of the magistrates.

5. If you are a ruler responsible for the concerns of the populace,

Search for every opportunity to do good,

So that there may be no shortcoming in your actions.

6,5 Great is Ma'at, and its foundation is firmly established;

It has not been shaken since the time of Osiris,

And he who violates the laws must be punished.

In the eyes of the covetous man it goes unnoticed

That wealth can be lost through dishonesty,

And that wrongdoing does not result in success.

6,7 He⁶ says, / 'I will procure (wealth) for myself.'

He does not say, 'I will procure (wealth) through my diligence.'

But in the long run it is Ma'at which endures,

And an (honest) man may state: 'This is my ancestral property.'

6. Do not stir up fear in people,

Or God will punish in equal measure.

6. I.e., the covetous man.

- A man may determine to live thereby,⁷
 But he will (eventually) be lacking in bread for his mouth.
- 6,9 A man may decide to become / rich,
 And he may say, 'I will snatch for myself whatever I see.'
 A man may decide to cheat another,
 But he will end up by giving (his gains) to a total stranger.
 It is not what men devise that comes to pass,
 But what God determines comes to pass.
 Live, therefore, contentedly,
 And let what they⁸ give come of its own accord.
- 6,11 7. If you should be one of those sitting (as guests)
 At the table of someone who is greater than you,
 Accept what he serves when it is placed in front of you.
 Look only at what is right in front of you,
 And do not stare at him constantly,⁹
 For to force yourself upon him is an irritation to his spirit.
 Do not speak to him until he invites you (to do so),
 For one never knows what may be annoying.
 You should speak only when he addresses you,
 And (then) what you say will be of interest.
 You should laugh only when he laughs,
 And (this) will be very pleasant to his heart.¹⁰
- 7,2 As for a nobleman when he is at the table,¹¹
 His demeanor is determined by his mood.¹²
 He will be generous to the one whom he favors,
 For such is the way once night has come.
 It is his mood which prompts him to be generous;¹³
 A nobleman may give, but an (ordinary) man should not presume upon
 him.

7. I.e., by causing others to fear him.

8. I.e., the gods.

9. "Constantly": lit. "with many glances," perhaps with the intention of trying to attract the attention of the host.

10. These two lines are not in Papyrus Prisse, but they complement the present context.

11. "At the table": lit. "behind his food."

12. "Determined by his mood": lit. "according as his *ka* commands."

13. Lit.: "It is the *ka* which stretches out his hands."

7,3 The eating of bread is under / the governance of God,¹⁴
And it is only a churl who complains about it.

8. If you are a man entrusted with responsibility,
One whom one nobleman sends to another,
Be meticulous in your duty when he sends you,
And deliver his message exactly as he dictates it.
Resist (doing) anything offensive by (making) a comment
Which could cause one nobleman to be annoyed with the other.
Observe the truth; do not surpass it,¹⁵
Although one should not repeat an angry speech.

7,5 Do not speak against any person, be he great or small,
For this serves only to arouse the temper.¹⁶

9. If you engage in agriculture, and (your) field prospers,
And God causes it to increase under your hand,
Do not talk (about it) incessantly around your neighborhood,
For it is important that one should practice the discretion appropriate to
the prudent man.¹⁷

It is the man of integrity who is the possessor of (true) wealth,
And in the court he conquers like a crocodile.¹⁸
Do not praise him who has no children,
Neither speak ill nor boast about it,
For it is common that a father may be in misery,
And as for a mother who has given birth, another may be happier than
she.

7,7 It is the lone man / of whom God takes care,
And the head of a family may pray for someone to succeed him.¹⁹

14. These lines are probably not intended as any kind of profound statement. The writer's meaning appears to be something like, "Be satisfied if you are invited to eat, and don't complain if you are not given the royal treatment."

15. I.e., say only what you were told to say, nothing more.

16. "This serves only to arouse the temper": lit. "This is an abomination of the *ka*."

17. The meaning of these lines seems to be something like this: If your harvest is especially prosperous, do not boast about it to your less fortunate neighbors, for a man should be discreet enough to show respect for the feelings of those who have been less fortunate.

18. The comparison of the upright man to a crocodile is a positive comment: he is protected by his own integrity as surely as a crocodile can defend himself.

19. The meaning of these lines is not absolutely clear, but the writer seems here to be

10. If you are humble and the servant of a well-to-do man,
 Let all your behavior be flawless before God.
 If you should learn that he was once of low estate,
 Do not be disdainful toward him
 Because you have learned about his past.
 Respect him in accordance with what he has made of himself,
 For wealth does not come of its own accord,
 But it is the ordinance of the gods for one whom they favor.
 As for his possessions, he has gathered them himself,
 But it is God who has made him respectable
 And watches over him even when he sleeps.

7,9

11. Follow your heart as long as you live,
 And do not work beyond what is allocated (to you).
 Do not waste the time of following the heart,
 For wasting time is an annoyance of the spirit.
 Do not lose the hours of daylight
 Beyond (what is necessary for) keeping your household in order.
 When wealth has been amassed, follow your heart,
 For wealth brings no advantage when it is a burden.

12. If you are a well-to-do man
 And beget a son who pleases / God;²⁰
 If he is upright and follows your disposition,
 If he listens to your teachings,
 If his conduct is worthy within your household,²¹
 And if he manages your property well,
 Then do every good thing for him,
 For he is your son, begotten of your very being;
 Do not withhold your love from him.²²
 But one's offspring may cause grief;

7,11

warning his reader not to regard childlessness as either a disgrace or a blessing, for the childless man may sometimes be more fortunate than the one who has a large family.

20. The expression "who pleases God" means here probably no more than "who behaves in a decent manner."

21. These two lines are not in Papyrus Prisse, but they fit the context admirably.

22. Lit. "Do not separate your heart from him."

If he goes wrong and disregards your counsel,
 If he does not do as you instruct him²³
 But disobeys everything said (to him),
 If his mouth prattles on with vile talk,
 Then reject him, for he is not your son,
 And for certain he was not born to you.²⁴
 Punish him for all his talk,
 For he who has extended his arm against you is hateful to the gods.
 8,1 Surely evil was fated for him from the womb,
 For he whom the gods guide is one who cannot err,
 And he whom they leave stranded is unable to cross the river.

13. If you are in the audience chamber,
 8,3 Stand and sit / in accordance with your position
 Which was given to you on the first day.
 Do not exceed (your duty), for it will result in your being turned back.
 Be attentive to him who enters bearing a report,
 For he who has been summoned has complete freedom.
 8,5 The audience chamber / tends toward strict etiquette,
 And all its affairs follow (specific) rules of conduct.
 It is God who promotes one's position,
 And that men should force their way is not done.

14. If you are with the people,
 Gain for yourself supporters who are trustworthy.
 8,7 One who is trustworthy / is one who will not spread talk around the
 community;
 He will himself become an official
 And a man of means due to his (good) performance.
 As for your good reputation, you should not talk about it;
 8,9 Provide for your body, but turn your attention / toward the people,²⁵
 And men will boast on your behalf without you being aware of it.
 But as for him whose heart obeys his stomach,
 He invites scorn for himself instead of respect.
 His heart is morose and his body wretched.

23. This line is not in Papyrus Prisse.

24. These two lines are lacking in Papyrus Prisse.

25. "Turn your attention toward the people": lit. "your face toward the people."

8,11 Great of heart are those whom God has established,
But he who listens to his stomach is his own worst enemy.²⁶

15. State your business without concealing (anything),
Proffer your opinion in the council of your lord.
If he can speak fluently and easily,²⁷

8,13 It will not be difficult for an agent to give his account,
And no one will answer, 'What does he know of it?'
Even an official whose property has fared poorly,
If he thinks about reproaching him concerning it,
Will be silent saying (only), 'I have no comment.'²⁸

16. If you are a leader,
9,1 Take responsibility in / the matters entrusted to you,
And you will accomplish things of note.
But think on the days which are still to come,
Lest some misdeed should arise to destroy your favorable position,
9,3 For an occasion of hatred is (like) the entrance of a crocodile.

17. If you are a man of authority,
Be patient when you are listening to the words of a petitioner;
Do not dismiss him until he has completely unburdened himself
9,5 Of what he had planned / to say to you.
A man who has been wronged desires to express his frustrations
Even more than the accomplishment of the (justice) for which he came;
But concerning him who dismisses petitions
Men say, 'Why ever did he reject it?'
9,7 Not everything about which he has petitioned will be done,
But a sympathetic hearing is a means of calming the heart.

18. If you desire that friendship should endure
In a house which you enter
9,9 As a lord, as a brother, or as / a friend:
In any place which you enter,
Avoid approaching the women,
For there is nothing good in any situation where such is done.

26. "His own worst enemy": lit. "belongs to the enemy."

27. "If he speaks fluently and easily": lit. "if his mouth overflows when he speaks."

28. Lit. "I have spoken."

It is never prudent to become overly familiar with them,²⁹
 9,11 For countless men have thus been diverted / from their own best
 interests.
 One may be deceived by an exquisite body,³⁰
 But then it (suddenly) turns to misery.³¹
 (All it takes is) a trifling moment like a dream,
 And one comes to destruction through having known them.
 Pricking the jealousy of a rival is a nasty piece of business;
 9,13 A man may perish because of so doing, if the heart / becomes ensnared.³²
 As for him who is ruined through becoming embroiled with them,
 No venture will ever be successful in his hand.

19. If you desire that your way of life be blameless,
 Keep yourself far from every evil.
 Guard yourself against the blemish of greediness,
 10,1 For it is a grave affliction of an incurable disease,
 And those who fall into it cannot recover.
 It creates dissention among fathers, mothers,
 10,3 And maternal brothers;
 It embitters beloved friends;
 It alienates a trustworthy man from his lord;³³
 It isolates a wife from her husband.
 It is an embracing of every evil;
 It is a combining of everything which is hateful.
 That man will endure who is meticulous in uprightness
 And who walks in accordance with his proper station;³⁴
 10,5 He will make a testament thereby; ~
 But for the greedy there will be no tomb.

20. Do not be selfish in the division (of an estate)
 By lusting for more than your rightful share.

29. "To become too familiar with them": lit. "to reveal them."

30. "A delicate body": lit. "a body of *faïence*."

31. These two lines are not in Papyrus Prisse, but their suitability to the context virtually demand their inclusion at this point.

32. The sense of these lines is very obscure, and any translation can only be regarded as tentative.

33. These two lines are absent from Papyrus Prisse.

34. Lit. "in accordance with his stride."

Do not be selfish with respect to your relatives,
 10,7 For greater is the claim of / the good-natured man than that of the
 assertive.

He who forsakes his relatives is (truly) poor,
 For he lacks the compassion to respond to their entreaties.³⁵
 Even a little of what one yearns for
 Can calm a distressed man.

21. If you are well-to-do and establish your household,
 10,9 Be gracious to your wife in accordance with what is fair.
 Feed her well, put clothes on her back;
 Ointment is the balm for her body.
 Rejoice her heart all the days of your life,
 For she is a profitable field for her lord.
 Do not condemn her,

10,11 But keep her far away from power; control her,
 For her eye is quick and sharp.³⁶ Watch her (carefully),
 For thus you will cause her to remain long in your house.
 If you are too strict with her, there will be tears.
 She offers sexual favors in return for her upkeep,
 And what she asks is that her desire be fulfilled.

11,1 22. Gratify your friends with what has come into your possession,³⁷
 For what has come to you is a boon from God.
 As for him who fails to gratify his friends,
 People will say that he is a selfish individual.

No one knows what will come to pass when he considers tomorrow,
 11,3 And the righteous individual is he by whom men are sustained.
 If deeds deserving of praise are done,
 One's friends say, 'Well done!'
 One cannot bring satisfaction to an (entire) town,
 But one can bring happiness (to) friends when there is need.

35. The interpretation of these lines is made difficult due both to the obscurity of the meaning of the expressions involved and to the grammatical structure. I offer here a suggestion as to their possible significance.

36. "Quick and sharp": lit. "her storm."

37. I.e., share your material good fortune with your friends.

- 11,5 23. Do not repeat slander,
 And do not listen to it,
 For it is but the prattling of a churlish man.
 Repeat only what is seen, not what is heard,
 Or forget it and say nothing at all,
- 11,7 For he who is listening to you³⁸ can discern / what is trustworthy.
 When taxation³⁹ is ordered and is carried out,
 There arises against the tax collector (the same) resentment as against the
 decree itself.
 Slander is like a nightmare;
 Divorce yourself from it.
- 11,9 24. If you are a man / of trust,
 One who sits in the council of his lord,
 Direct your attention toward excellence.
 Your silence will be more profitable than babbling,
 So speak only when you know that you are qualified (to do so).
- 11,11 It is (only) the proficient who should speak in council,
 For speech is more difficult than any craft,
 And only the competent can endow it with authority.
25. If you are influential, you should establish respect for yourself
 Through knowledge and through courtesies in speech.
- 11,13 Do not be domineering / except in official matters,
 For the aggressive man meets with trouble.
 Do not be arrogant, lest you⁴⁰ be brought low;
 Do not be silent, but yet be cautious of causing offence
- 12,2 When you answer a speech angrily.

38. Lit. "he who is in front of you."

39. The sense of these two lines is very obscure. The term *twt*, rendered here as "taxation," can mean "theft," "gathering up," "seizure," etc. The fact that such is actually ordered, however, seems to imply some kind of official seizure, and hence my suggestion of rendering *twt* as "taxation." The sense of the passage within the context, however, is still unclear. Perhaps the author is suggesting that the one who repeats slander, although he is not actually responsible for the deed under discussion, is resented as much as the tax collector who is doing no more than carrying out his duty the law.

40. The text has the third person singular pronoun here, but the second person is obviously more appropriate.

- Turn away your face and control yourself,
 For the flames of the quick-tempered spread quickly;
 But the affable man, when offended, treads carefully.
- 12,4 One who is dour throughout the whole day
 Will never have a happy moment,
 And he who is frivolous throughout the whole day
 Will never establish a household for himself.
 He who aims for full control
 Is like the one who guides the helm at the time of landing,
 But another moors (the boat);
- 12,6 But he who obeys his heart will keep (everything) in order.⁴¹
26. Do not attempt to upstage an important official;⁴²
 Do not irritate one who is laden (with responsibility),
 For it may happen that he will be annoyed at the one who opposes him,
 While his mood⁴³ will be lightened by one who is loyal to him.
- 12,8 He / and the god⁴⁴ are the ones who bestow favors,
 And what he wishes is what should be done for him.
 His face will be kindly toward you even after anger,
 And (your) well-being depends upon his mood.
 There is hostility with an enemy,
 But it is good will which increases favor.
27. Inform an official of what is beneficial to him,
 12,10 And see to it that he is accepted by the people.
 Cause his wisdom to be recognized by his lord,
 And there will be abundance for you from his generosity.
 A person of good disposition⁴⁵ is for your good,
 For your back will be clothed by it.
- 12,12 His approval⁴⁶ will be upon you / for the support of your household
 Under your noble master to whom you are loyal.
 Support him thus,

41. The meaning of these last four lines is extremely obscure.

42. Lit. "Do not oppose yourself (i.e., set yourself in opposition) at the moment of a great one."

43. Lit. "his *ka*."

44. By the term "the god" the writer may mean the king.

45. Or, "a (certain) amount of favor."

46. "Approval": lit. "acceptance."

And he will also provide excellent support for you.
 Moreover, affection for you will endure
 In the hearts⁴⁷ of those who respect you.
 Behold, he who is gracious to listen is highly esteemed.⁴⁸

13,1 28. If you should function as a noble official of the court,
 Appointed to settle disputes among the populace,
 Nurture (in yourself) ignorance of partiality.⁴⁹
 When you speak, do not incline toward one side.

13,3 Be careful lest / someone voice his opinion
 (To) the magistrates: 'He turns the matter upside down.'
 Then your action will turn into censure (of yourself).

29. If you feel merciful concerning a misdeed which has happened
 13,5 And feel favorable toward someone / because of his honesty,
 Pass over it and do not recall it,
 Since he was silent before you from the very first.⁵⁰

30. If you are wealthy after having been destitute,
 13,7 And have amassed riches / after poverty
 In a town where people know about you,
 Do not boast of what has come to you in the past,
 And do not be too confident in your possessions
 Which have come to you as gifts of the god.⁵¹

13,9 (Thus) you will not lag / behind another like you
 To whom the same thing has happened.⁵²

31. Bow respectfully to him who is superior to you,
 Your senior from the royal palace;

47. Lit. "in the bellies."

48. "Highly esteemed": lit. "a *ka*." The term *ka* in this text appears to have a very wide range of meanings, denoting in general a person of highly positive character.

49. This line is unintelligible. I offer this translation as a tentative suggestion.

50. The significance of this particular maxim is uncertain. I take it to mean that, if a judge is inclined to be merciful to a wrongdoer because he has been honest in admitting his wrong, then the judge should pardon him, especially if he does not try to defend himself.

51. The god: i.e., the king.

52. The place of these last two lines within this maxim is not totally clear, but it appears that the author is warning one who has gained wealth after poverty that he should not be overly confident lest he relax his diligence and let another surpass him.

- Then your household will be firm in its possessions,
 13,11 And your rewards (will come) / at their proper time.
 But wretched is he who opposes a superior,
 For one enjoys life (only) during the time when he is kindly disposed,
 And the arm bared to salute him will not break.
- 14,1 Do not despoil / the house of neighbors,
 Do not steal the property of one who is close to you,
 Lest he complain against you until you be brought to trial.
 A plaintiff is lacking in compassion,⁵³
- 14,3 And if he learns of it, he will prosecute.
 Wretched is he who stirs up adversity in his own neighborhood.
32. Do not fornicate with an effeminate boy.
 14,5 Be well assured that / such debasement will only arouse his lust,⁵⁴
 And (the desire) which is in his body will not be cooled.
 Let darkness never come for the performance of such lewdness,
 So that he may be quiet after he has satisfied his desire.
- 14,7 33. If you are investigating / the character of a colleague,
 Do not make inquiry of someone who is close to him.
 Conduct your business with him alone
 Until you are no more ambiguous about his personality.
 After a while you will become familiar with him.
- 14,9 Examine his heart / at the time of speaking (with him).
 If he talks too freely about what he has seen,⁵⁵
 Or if he does something at which you are taken aback,
 Nevertheless, be amiable with him and remain silent.
 Do not turn your face away (from him),
 But be cautious about revealing anything to him.
- 14,11 Do not / answer him with an act of hostility,
 Do not withdraw from him, and do not assail him.
 He will eventually get what he deserves,⁵⁶
 For there is no escape for anyone from him who has determined his fate.

53. "Compassion": lit. "heart."

54. Lit. "will be water on his heart," i.e., will stimulate his desires all the more.

55. Lit. "if what he has seen goes out from him."

56. Lit. "His time (of reckoning) will not fail to come."

34. Be generous as long as you live,
 14,13 For what goes out from the storehouse does not go back in,
 And men are eager for bread which is freely given.
 He whose stomach is empty is an accuser,
 And (such) an opponent becomes a bringer of woe;
 15,2 Do not make of him a friend.
 Compassion is a man's monument
 Throughout the years which follow his tenure of office.
35. Acknowledge your assistants when you have wealth,
 And do not be of mean disposition toward your friends.
 15,4 Such is (like) a riverbank which floods; it is greater / than one's wealth.
 The property of one man may (pass) to another,
 But the integrity of a gentleman is always beneficial to him,
 And a good character will be his monument.
36. Punish soundly and reprimand thoroughly,
 For the restraint of evil will reinforce morality.
 15,6 As for a court case which is not concerned with criminal action,
 Let him who has the complaint act as prosecutor.⁵⁷
37. If you take to wife one who is silly and frivolous,⁵⁸
 Of light-hearted disposition, and known to her townsmen,
 She may continue in her ways⁵⁹ when at any moment it strikes her fancy.
 Do not send her away, but allow her to eat (from your table).⁶⁰
 15,8 A light-hearted woman / (at least) provides amusement.⁶¹
38. If you give heed to these things which I have spoken to you,
 All your affairs will be successful.

57. The meaning of these two lines is somewhat ambiguous, but it appears that the writer is advising one who is a judge to avoid involvement in civil disputes until an actual complaint is laid.

58. The meaning of the Egyptian term *špnt*, translated here as "frivolous," is totally unknown. Its translation here as "frivolous" is a guess based on the context of the passage.

59. The Egyptian phrase *iw.s m hpwy* presents no obvious solution, and several translations have been suggested by various scholars.

60. I.e., continue to support her as your wife.

61. "Amusement": suggested translation of the unknown term *ḫḫ*.

- If their truth is effected,⁶² this will be (proof of) their worth,
 And the remembrance of them will continue on in the speech of men
 Because of the goodness of their precepts.
 Men will cling to every word,
 And they will never perish in this land for ever.
 They have been recorded and spoken for good,
 And noblemen will utter decrees in accordance with them.
- 15,11 This (treatise) is a means of teaching a man to speak to / posterity.
 Let him who would be a recognized authority⁶³ give heed to it.
 It is good to speak to posterity,
 And it is the duty of posterity to give heed to it.⁶⁴
 If a noble action is done by one who is in authority,
 He will be of good reputation for ever,
 And all his wisdom will be for everlasting.
 The learned man takes care for his *ba*
- 15,13 By assuring that it will be content with him / on earth.
 The learned man can be recognized by what he has learned,
 And the nobleman by his good actions;
 His heart controls his tongue,
- 16,1 And precise are / his lips when he speaks.
 His eyes see,
 And his ears are pleased through hearing of the repute of his son
 Who acts in accordance with Ma'at and who is free from falsehood.
39. Hearing is beneficial to a son who willingly hears,
 For when what is heard takes root in⁶⁵ the hearer,
- 16,4 He who has heard will become / one (worthy himself of being) heard.
 It is good to hear and it is good to speak,
 But he who can hear possesses what is advantageous.
 Hearing is beneficial to the hearer;
 Hearing is better than everything,
 For (through it) good affection comes into being.

62. The writer means, I suspect, the truth or Ma'at inherent in the maxims which he has laid down and which he hopes his hearers will put into effect.

63. "A respected authority": lit. "a master who is heard" or "a master of hearing."

64. This line is a free rendition of the Egyptian *ntf sꜣm.f st* ("It belongs to it [posterity] to hear it.")

65. "Takes root in": lit. "enters into."

- 16,6 How good it is / that a son should accept what his father says,
 For ripe old age will come upon him thereby.
 He who listens is favored of God,
 But he who is hated of God does not listen.
- 16,8 It is the heart which causes / its possessor to be
 One who hears or who does not hear.
 The 'life, prosperity, and health' of a man are his heart.
 A hearer is one who gives heed to what is said,
 And he who is willing to listen is one who does what has been said.
- 16,10 How good it is when a son heeds / his father,
 And how joyful is he by whom it may be said:
 'My son is pleasing, for he is skilled in obedience.'
 As for him who heeds what is said to him, he will be self-sufficient
- 16,12 And respected by / his father;
 He will be remembered in the mouths of the living,
 Both those who are on the earth and those who will be.
40. If a nobleman takes to heart what is said by his father,
 16,14 Never will fail / any endeavor of his.
 Educate your son as a listener,
 One who will be esteemed in the hearts of the nobles,
 One who guides his speech in accordance with what is said to him,
- 17,2 One who acknowledges him who is to be obeyed.
 It is such a son who is superior and whose actions are distinguished,
 But error is ingrained into him who does not listen.
 The education of a wise man (leads) to his success,
- 17,4 But as for the fool, he will labor (in vain).
41. As for the fool who will not listen,
 He never accomplishes anything,
 For he discerns knowledge in ignorance
- 17,6 And something beneficial in that which is baneful.
 He does everything that is loathsome,
 So that men are furious with him day after day.
 He thrives on that whereby others die,
 And the falsification of speech is his food and drink.
- 17,8 His disposition is known to the authorities;
 (He is) a picture of living death day after day.

Men disregard his stupid deeds
Because of the many griefs which fall upon him every day.

- 17,10 42. A son who listens is a (true) follower of Horus,
For his fortune is good because he has listened.
He will attain ripe old age and will be honored,
And he will speak likewise to his own children,
17,12 Handing on / the instruction of his father,
For every man teaches according as he acts.
He will converse in the presence of (his) children,
And they in turn will speak to their children.
18,1 Build (their) character, do not instill (in them) anything offensive.
Strengthen Ma'at, and your children will live.
As for the first one who succumbs to evil,
Men will gossip about what they have seen,
18,4 For such is the way of the world;
And they will gossip about what they hear,
For such also is the way of the world.
Take heed of everyone, and try to keep people quiet;⁶⁶
18,7 Wealth does not amount to much / otherwise.⁶⁷
43. Do not say something and then go back on it,⁶⁸
Do not put one thing in the place of another.
Beware of relaxing self-restraint (?) within yourself;
Give way to the speech of a wise man,
18,10 And listen well, if you wish / to be secure
In the speech of those who hear when you speak.
(First) attain to the status of an expert,
And then you will be able to speak with complete success,
And your every undertaking will be in order.
45. Suppress your impulses and control your mouth,
18,13 And then your advice will be (welcomed) by the officials.

66. I.e., try avoid letting people have anything to talk about.

67. The meaning of these last six lines is somewhat obscure, and I have taken certain liberties in the translation in order to convey what I believe is the actual sense of the text.

68. Lit. "Do not take a word; do not bring it back."

Be totally precise to your master;
 Behave so that men may say to him, 'He is the son of so-and-so,'⁶⁹
 And that those who hear it may say,
 'Fortunate is he who begat him.'

19,2 Be painstaking / all the time that you are speaking,
 So that you may say things of importance.
 Then the officials who are listening will say:
 'How excellent are the words of his mouth!'

45. Behave so that your master may say of you,
 19,4 'How well he was brought up by / his father
 By whom he was begotten of his body.
 (Surely) he spoke to him while he was still completely within the womb,
 For what he has accomplished is more than what he was told.'
 Behold, a good son who is given by God
 Is one who exceeds what was told him by his master.
 He will perform Ma'at,
 19,6 For his heart will have controlled his actions.

As you now take over my position, your body being firm and hale,⁷⁰
 And the king being pleased with all that has come to pass,
 May you enjoy (many) years of life.
 What I have accomplished on earth is not insignificant;
 I enjoyed one hundred and ten years of life
 19,8 Given to me by / the king
 And honors surpassing those of my predecessors.
 (All of this came to pass) because of my doing Ma'at for the king until
 (I reached) the state of veneration."

It has been transcribed from beginning to end as it was found in writing.

69. I.e., conduct yourself and your responsibilities in such a way so as to gain recognition.

70. These closing lines are addressed by the old vizier to his son who is now succeeding to his post.