

## BOOK OF THE DEAD 125 "THE NEGATIVE CONFESSION"

**T**he most famous of all Book of the Dead chapters, Spell 125 contains the celebrated protestation of innocence by the deceased before an underworld tribunal of forty-two gods, corresponding to the like-numbered *nomes*, or provinces, of Egypt. The duality of the "Two Truths" also reflects geographical, not ethical, considerations, as the goddesses correspond to the dual nature of the Egyptian kingdom, with two regions (Upper and Lower Egypt), royal titles, tutelary deities, insignia, etc. Although Spell 125 does not specifically mention the weighing of the heart before this tribunal and its overseer Osiris, god of the dead,<sup>1</sup> the accompanying vignette regularly depicts this psychostasis. The address by the deceased serves as a preamble to this pivotal event, purifying him from all misdeeds (literally, "things protected against/excluded") that he may in fact have done. Since the list of infractions includes seemingly unavoidable actions such as winking, impatience, aggressiveness, and wading in flowing water, as well as all forms of sexual activity, this "ethical code" is not absolute but reflects restrictions and abstinence preparatory for entrance into a sacred space and state.

1. Though surely indicated by "that day of the reckoning of characters in the presence of Wennefer" and by the placing of "the scale in its proper position in the Land of Silence."

Following two declarations of innocence, the reciter defends his knowledge of religious mysteries in response to hostile questions posed by the constituent elements of the judgment hall itself. While cryptic, these responses detail ritual enactments of the mysteries of Osiris, slain by the severed leg of Seth, discovered in Phoenician Byblos, interred, shattered, and scattered. The concluding rubric provides instructions for utilizing Spell 125 in ritual mysticism by the living. Attested from the Eighteenth Dynasty onward, Spell 125 survives well into the Hellenistic period, when it appears in a Demotic funerary papyrus written in the reign of Nero and in Greek translation as an initiatory recitation for priestly induction.

The primary manuscripts appear in Charles Maystre, *Les déclarations d'innocence* (Livre des Morts, chapitre 125), *Recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire* 8, Cairo, 1937; and Edouard Naville, *Das ägyptische Tottenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie* (Berlin, 1886), 275–335 and plates CXXXIII–CXXXIX. Translations are found in J. A. Wilson, "The Protestation of Guiltlessness," in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1969), 34–36; P. Barguet, *Le Livre des Morts des anciens Égyptiens*, LAPO 1 (Paris, 1967), 157–64; T. G. Allen, *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day*, SAOC 37 (Chicago, 1974), 97–101; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, II (Berkeley, 1976), 124–32; E. Hornung, *Das Totenbuch der Ägypter* (Zurich, 1979), 233–45 and 491–93; R. O. Faulkner, *The Book of the Dead* (London, 1985), 29–34; and Gloria Rosati, *Libro dei Morti, Testi del Vicino Oriente antico* 1.2 (Brescia, 1991), 88–96. For the Demotic version, see Franz Lexa, *Das demotische Totenbuch der Pariser Nationalbibliothek* (Milan, 1977; repr. of Leipzig, 1910). For the Greek translation, see Reinhold Merkelbach, "Ein ägyptischer Priestereid," ZPE 2 (1968): 7–30; and Die Unschuldserklärungen und Berichten im ägyptischen Totenbuch, in *der römischen Elegie und im antiken Rome* (Giessen, 1987). This translation was first prepared for W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, eds., *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2 (2000), 59–64, and appears courtesy of Brill Press.

The translation is derived from multiple manuscripts that display no standardized line numbering. Sections of text that are highlighted in the manuscripts by the use of red ink (rubrics) are here indicated by spellings in all capital letters. Minor variants are indicated by {}.

R.K.R.

WHAT IS SAID WHEN ARRIVING AT THIS HALL OF TWO TRUTHS, PURGING NN OF ALL MISDEEDS THAT HE HAS DONE AND SEEING THE FACES OF THE GODS.<sup>2</sup>

Recitation by NN: "Hail to you, great god, Lord of the Two Truths! I have come before you, my lord, just so that you might bring me so that I might see your beauty. I know you and I know your name and the names of the forty-two gods who are with you in this Hall of the Two Truths, who live on those who preserve evil, who swallow their blood on that day of the reckoning of characters in the presence of Wennefer.<sup>3</sup> Behold, The Two Daughters, His Two Eyes, {Lord} of Truth is your name. Behold, I have come before you bringing to you Truth, having repelled for you falsehood.

I have not committed wrongdoing against anyone.

I have not mistreated cattle.<sup>4</sup>

I have not done injustice in the place of Truth.

I do not know that which should not be.

I have not done evil.

I have not daily made labors in excess of what should be done for me.

My name has not reached the bark of the Governor (i.e., Re).<sup>5</sup>

I have not debased a god.<sup>6</sup>

I have not deprived an orphan.

I have not done that which the gods abominate.

I have not slandered a servant to his superior.

I have not caused pain.<sup>7</sup>

I have not caused weeping.

I have not killed.

I have not commanded to kill.

I have not made suffering for anyone.

I have not diminished the offering loaves in the temples.

I have not damaged the offering cakes of the gods.

2. Variants: "Spell for descending to the Hall of the Two Truths {and learning what is in it} by NN."

3. "The Perfect Being," an epithet of Osiris, now surviving as the surname Onofrio.

4. Common variant: "I have not mistreated associates."

5. Variant: "Governor of slaves."

6. Variant: "I have not debased a deed of the king in my time."

7. Common variant: "I have not caused hunger."

I have not stolen the cakes of the blessed dead.  
 I have not copulated.<sup>8</sup>  
 I have not been lascivious.<sup>9</sup>  
 I have not added to nor have I subtracted from the offering measure.  
 I have not subtracted from the aroura measure.<sup>10</sup>  
 I have not encroached upon fields.<sup>11</sup>  
 I have not added to the weight of the balance.  
 I have not tampered with the plummet of the scales.  
 I have not taken milk from the mouths of children.  
 I have not deprived the flocks of their pasturage.  
 I have not snared birds of the branches of the gods.  
 I have not trapped fish in their marshes.  
 I have not diverted water in its season.  
 I have not erected a dam against flowing water.  
 I have not extinguished a fire at its critical moment.  
 I have not neglected the days concerning their meat offerings.  
 I have not driven away the cattle of the god's property.  
 I have not stopped a god in his procession.  
 I am pure, I am pure, I am pure, I am pure!

My purity is the purity of that great phoenix that is in Heracleopolis, because I am indeed that nose of the Lord of breath, who vivifies all the subjects on that day of filling the Eye of Horus in Heliopolis in the second month of winter, last day, in the presence of the Lord of this land. I am one who has seen the filling of the Eye of Horus in Heliopolis. Evil shall not happen against me in this land or in this Hall of the Two Truths because I know the names of the gods who are in it, the followers of the great god.<sup>12</sup>

O Wide-of-Stride, who has come forth from Heliopolis, I have not committed wrongdoing.

O Embracer-of-Fire, who has come forth from Egyptian Babylon, I have not robbed.

8. Variant: "I have not copulated with a boy."

9. Variant: "I have not been lascivious in the sanctuary of my local god."

10. Variant: "I have not subtracted from the palm-measure (1/7 of a cubit)."

11. Variant: "I have not falsified the half-aroura of field."

12. Variant: "Then you (Osiris) will protect NN from these gods who are with you in the Hall of the Two Truths."

- O Beaky,<sup>13</sup> who has come forth from Hermopolis, I have not been envious.  
 O Swallower-of-Shadows, who has come forth from the cavern, I have not stolen.  
 O Rough-of-Face, who has come forth from the Memphite necropolis, I have not killed people.  
 O Twin-Lions, who has come forth from heaven, I have not damaged the offering measure.  
 O He-Whose-Eyes-Are-Flint, who has come forth from Letopolis, I have not committed crookedness.  
 O Firey-One, who has come forth backwards, I have not stolen a god's property.  
 O Smasher-of-Bones, who has come forth from Heracleopolis, I have not told lies.  
 O Sender-of-Flames, who has come forth from Memphis, I have not seized food.  
 O Cavern-Dweller, who has come forth from the West, I have not been sullen.  
 O White-Toothed-One, who has come forth from the Faiyum, I have not transgressed.<sup>14</sup>  
 O Eater-of-Blood,<sup>15</sup> who has come forth from the slaughtering-block, I have not slain sacred cattle.  
 O Eater-of-Entrails, who has come forth from the Court of Thirty, I have not committed usury.<sup>16</sup>  
 O Lord-of-Truth, who has come forth from The Place of the Two Truths, I have not robbed bread-rations.  
 O Wanderer, who has come forth from Bubastis, I have not eaves-dropped.<sup>17</sup>  
 O Pale-One, who has come forth from Heliopolis, I have not blabbered.<sup>18</sup>

13. An epithet of Thoth, the long-beaked ibis.

14. Address to the crocodile Sobek. Variants conclude: "regarding the property of Osiris" or "against another."

15. Used to signify "cannibal" in Coptic.

16. Translated variously "extorted," "profiteered," or "practiced usury," the infraction (*h<sub>n</sub>wy.t*) is perhaps related to "greed" (*h<sub>n</sub>t*). Faulkner's "perjury" derives from the Demotic substitution: "I did not commit falsehood [. . .]."

17. Variant concludes: "on another in his house."

18. Lit. "The speech/mouth of NN has not run on."

- O Doubly-Evil-Viper, who has come forth from Busiris, I have not disputed except concerning my own property.
- O *Wamemti*-Viper, who has come forth from the place of execution, I have not copulated with a man's wife.<sup>19</sup>
- O He-Who-Sees-That-Which-He-Has-Brought-Away, who has come forth from the House of Min, I have not been lascivious.
- O Chief-of-the-Nobles, who has come forth from Kom el-Hîsn, I have not caused terror.
- O Wrecker, who has come forth from Xoïs, I have not transgressed.
- O Disturber, who has come forth from the sanctuary, I have not been hot-tempered.<sup>20</sup>
- O Child, who has come forth from the Heliopolitan Nome, I have not turned a deaf ear to words of truth.
- O Proclaimer-of-Speech, who has come forth from Wensi, I have not made disturbance.
- O Bastet, who has come forth from the shrine, I have not winked.<sup>21</sup>
- O He-Whose-Face-Is-Behind-Him, who has come forth from the pit, I have not masturbated; I have not copulated with a catamite.<sup>22</sup>
- O Hot-Footed-One, who has come forth from the dusk, I have not dissembled.<sup>23</sup>
- O Dark-One, who has come forth from the darkness, I have not reviled.
- O He-Who-Brings-Away-His-Offering, who has come forth from Sais, I have not been aggressive.<sup>24</sup>
- O Lord-of-Faces, who has come forth from the Heroonopolite Nome, I have not been impatient.<sup>25</sup>
- O Accuser, who has come forth from Wetenet, I have not transgressed my nature; I have not washed out a god.<sup>26</sup>

19. For this passage, see M. Heerma van Voss, "Drie Egyptische Goboden," in M. A. Beek, et al., eds., *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae Francisco Mario Theodoro De Liagre Böhl Dedicatae* (Leiden 1973), 185–87.

20. Variant: "My speech has not been heated."

21. Variant adds: "at another."

22. For this passage, see Heerma van Voss 1973, 185–87.

23. Lit. "I have not swallowed my heart." In medical texts, "swallowing the heart" is a physiological designation for "fainting."

24. Elsewhere always a positive designation of a warrior: "champion."

25. Lit. "my heart has not been hasty."

26. Faulkner understands: "I have not washed out (the picture of) a god."

O Lord-of-Horns, who has come forth from Siut, I have not been verbose in matters.

O Nefertum, who has come forth from Memphis, I have not sinned; I have not done wrong.

O He-Who-Is-Not-Abandoned, who has come forth from Busiris, I have not reviled the king.

O He-Who-Has-Acted-According-to-His-Heart, who has come forth from Antaeopolis, I have not waded in water.<sup>27</sup>

O Surging-One, who has come forth from the Abyss, I have not raised my voice.

O Commander-of-the-Subjects, who has come forth from his shrine, I have not reviled a god.

O Provider-of-Goodness, who has come forth from the Harpoon Nome, I have not been puffed up.

O Nehebkau, who has come forth from Thebes, I have not made distinctions on my behalf.

O Serpent-Whose-Head-Is-Erect, who has come forth from the cavern, my possessions have not increased except by my own property.

O Serpent-Who-Has-Brought-Away-His-Portion, who has come forth from the Land of Silence, I have not debased the god in my town.”

#### RECITATION BY NN:

“Hail to you, you gods.<sup>28</sup> I know you; I know your names. I shall not fall to your slaughter. You will not report my misdeed to this god in whose following you are. No fault of mine will come forth concerning you. You will speak Truth concerning me in the presence of the Lord of All, because I have done Truth in Egypt. I have not cursed a god. No fault of mine has come forth concerning a king who was in his reign.

Hail to you gods who are in this Hall of the Two Truths, who have no lies in their bodies, who live on Truth in Heliopolis, who swallow their putrifaction<sup>29</sup> in the presence of Horus who is in his Aten-disk. May you save me from Babai, who lives on the entrails of the great ones on that day of the great reckoning. Behold me; I have come before you without falsehood of mine, without guilt of mine, without evil of mine, without a witness against

27. Variant: “in flowing water.”

28. Variant adds: “who are in this Hall of the Two Truths.”

29. Variant: “who swallow/consume Truth.”

me, without anyone against whom I have done anything.<sup>30</sup> As I live on Truth, so I consume Truth. I have done what people say and that on account of which the gods are pleased. I have contented the god with that which he loves.<sup>31</sup> I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, and a boat to the boatless. I have made divine offerings for the gods, invocation-offerings for the blessed dead. Save me, then. Protect me, then. You will not report against me in the presence of the great god. I am pure of mouth, pure of hands, one to whom 'Welcome!' is said at seeing him, because I have heard that speech<sup>32</sup> said by the Donkey and the Cat in the house of the One of the Gaping Mouth,<sup>33</sup> I being a witness before him<sup>34</sup> when he gave a shriek. I have seen the splitting of the perseia tree within the Memphite necropolis.<sup>35</sup> I am one who provides assistance in the presence of the gods, who knows the requirements of their bodies. I have come here specifically to testify to Truth, to place the scale in its proper position in the Land of Silence. O he who is high upon his standard, Lord of the *atef*-crown, who has made his name as Lord of Breath,<sup>36</sup> may you save me from your messengers, who inflict bloody injury,<sup>37</sup> who create punishment, who are without compassion, because I have done Truth for the Lord of Truth, since I am pure, my front clean, my back cleansed, my middle as a pool of Truth. There is no limb of mine lacking in purity. As I have washed in the pool of the South, so I have rested in the city of the North, in the field of grasshoppers in which the crew of Re bathes in that second hour of night and third of day, which soothes the hearts of the gods when they pass by it by night or day."

"Let him come," so they say regarding me.

"Who are you?" so they say regarding me.

"What is your name?" so they say regarding me.

30. Variant: "for I have not done anything against him."

31. Variant: "the gods with that which they love."

32. Variant: "great word/speech."

33. A reference to the punishment of Seth in donkey form by the cat goddess Mafdet; see J. F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts* (Leiden, 1978), 38, no. 59.

34. Variant: "He-Whose-Face-Is-Behind-Him being my witness."

35. A reference to Re's victory against Apep described in Book of the Dead 17.

36. Epithets of Osiris.

37. See R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago, 1993), 170.



"I am the stalk of the papyrus plant, He-Who-is-in-the-Moringa-tree is my name."<sup>38</sup>

"By what have you passed?" so they say regarding me.

"By the city north of the moringa tree I passed."<sup>39</sup>

"What did you see there?"

"It was the calf and the thigh."

"What did you say to them?"

"I have seen rejoicing in the lands of the Phoenicians."

"What did they give to you?"

"It was a firebrand and a column of faience."

"What did you do with them?"

"I buried them on the bank of the lake of Two Truths in the evening meal rite."

"What did you find there on the bank of the Two Truths?"

"It was a scepter of flint, whose name is Breath-Giver."

"What did you do with the firebrand and column of faience after you had buried them?"

"I lamented over them. I dug them up. I extinguished the fire. I broke the column and threw it in the lake."

"Come, then, enter by this portal of the Hall of the Two Truths, since you know us."

"I shall not let you enter by me," so say the door-posts of this portal, "unless you have said my name."

"'Plummet of Truthfulness' is your name."

"I shall not let you enter by me," so says the right door-leaf of this portal, "unless you have said my name."

"'Scale-pan which bears Truth' is your name."

"I shall not let you enter by me," so says the left door-leaf of this portal, "unless you have said my name."

"'Scale-pan of wine' is your name."

"I shall not let you enter by me," so says the threshold of this portal, "unless you have said my name."

"'Ox of Geb' is your name."

38. Epithet of Osiris.

39. For the following Osirian mysteries, see Ritner 1993, 150, n. 678.

"I shall not open for you," so says the bolt of this portal, "unless you have said my name."

" 'Toe of his mother' is your name."

"I shall not open for you," so says the hasp of this portal, "unless you have said my name."

" 'Living Eye of Sobek, Lord of Bakhu' is your name."

"I shall not open for you, I shall not let you enter by me," so says the door-keeper of this portal, "unless you have said my name."

" 'Breast of Shu which he placed as protection for Osiris' is your name."

"We shall not let you pass by us," so say the cross-timbers of this portal, "unless you have said our name."

" 'Children of Renenutet' is your name."

"You know us. Pass, then, by us."

"You shall not tread upon me," so says the floor of this Hall of the Two Truths."

"Why, then, since I am pure?"

"Because we do not know the names of your feet with which you would tread upon us. Say it to me then."

" 'He who is inducted into the presence of Min' is the name of my right foot.

" 'Flower of Nephthys'<sup>40</sup> is the name of my left foot."

"Tread, then, upon us. You know us."

"I shall not announce you," so says the door-keeper of this hall, "unless you have said my name."

" 'He who perceives hearts, who examines bodies' is your name."

"To which god on duty shall I announce you, then?"

"Tell it to the Interpreter of the Two Lands."

"Who is the Interpreter of the Two Lands?"

"It is Thoth."

"Come," so says Thoth, "Why have you come?"

"I have come here expressly to report."

"What is your condition?"

"I am pure from all misdeeds. I excluded myself from the strife of those who are in their days. I am not among them."

"To whom, then, shall I announce you?"

40. Variant: "He who opens heaven for Hathor."

"To him whose roof is of fire, with its walls of living uraei, and the floor of whose house is in flood."

"Who is he?"

"He is Osiris."

"Proceed, then. Behold, you are announced. Your bread is the Eye of Horus; your beer is the Eye of Horus; your invocation offerings on earth are the Eye of Horus," so says he regarding me.

What should be done when being present in the Hall of Two Truths. A man should say this spell when pure and clean, dressed in clothing, shod in white sandals, painted with black eye-paint, anointed with the finest myrrh-oil, and having offered fresh meat, fowl, incense, bread, beer, and vegetables. Now make for yourself this image<sup>41</sup> in drawing upon pure ground with Nubian ochre, overlaid with soil on which neither pig nor goats have trod. As for the one for whom this book is done, he will flourish and his children will flourish. He will be a confidant of the king and his entourage. There shall be given to him a cake, a jug of beer, a loaf and a large portion of meat from upon the altar of the great god. He cannot be turned back from any portal of the West. He will be ushered in with the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt. He will be a follower of Osiris.<sup>42</sup> Truly effective, millions of times.

41. Presumably the corresponding vignette of the weighing of the heart.

42. Variant adds: "He goes forth in any transformation that he desires, being a living *ba*-spirit forever and ever."