

- 48 A.M. Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," in A. Loprieno, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1996), 191–241.
- 49 Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," 205.
- 50 G. Daressy, "Fragments de stèles de la XI^e dynastie," *ASAE* 8 (1907), 243–44.

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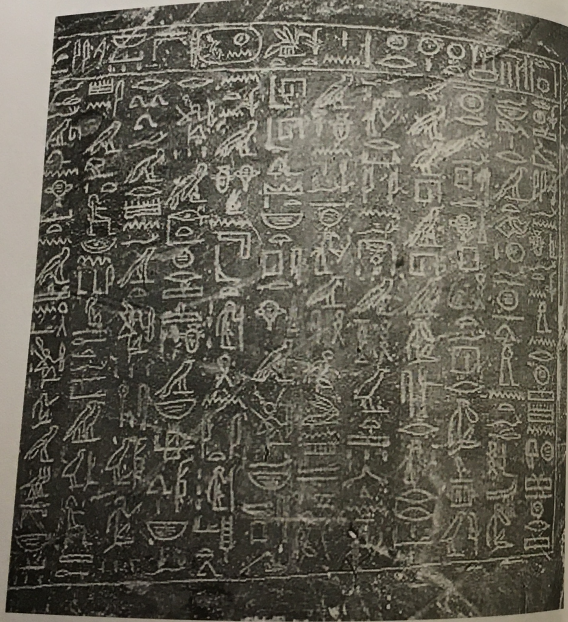
Self-Presentation in the Twelfth Dynasty*

Ronald Leprohon

The written¹ material on self-presentation² from the Twelfth Dynasty comprises largely short non-narrative phrases—the so-called epithets—that officials used to describe themselves, their qualities, circumstances, and behavior toward their fellow men.³ The locations of these phrases would indicate that they were meant to be read—or heard—by future passersby.⁴ The latter could be visitors in the funerary chapels of the great necropoleis of Elephantine, Assiut, Meir, Deir el-Bersheh, or Beni Hasan.⁵ The other major sites with this material were Abydos⁶ as well as mining and quarrying areas (Fig. 6.1).⁷ The proliferation of such texts in the Middle Kingdom allowed for a higher number of individuals heralding their personal virtues. From local magnates in their magnificent tombs to middle-ranking officials sent on royal missions or recounting their success at the court, this increase was a contrast from the Old Kingdom, when the majority of texts came from high court officials.

The location of the texts would presumably have influenced their composition. The ample space in the funerary chapels allowed the tomb owners to be more effusive, as lengthy narratives complemented their visual self-presentations. Obvious examples are the nomarch Amenemhat of Beni Hasan, who recounted his military exploits in Nubia at the side of King Senwosret I and the crown prince Ameni, the future Amenemhat II (*Urk.* VII, 14–16), and Khumhotep II, also of Beni Hasan, who proudly narrated his family's rise to power under the Twelfth Dynasty rulers (*Urk.* VII, 26–27).

On a single stela, however, the limited space forced individuals to carefully choose the way they were to be presented, usually in a single scene. Thus, they used status indicators such as dress, wigs, implements, furniture, and so forth, along with the relative placement of the figures within the tableau, to show their importance.⁸ The space for the written narrative itself was restricted and hence was often reduced to a few sentences accompanied by epithets that expanded the account. An example is the stela of the assistant seal bearer Sa-Hathor (BM 569), who recounted his various good works on behalf of Amenemhat II interspersed with self-laudatory phrases. Alternatively, the stela of the overseer of the inner



6.1. Graffito no. 43 from the Wadi Hammamat, reign of Amenemhat III (photograph by author)

palace (*imy-r ḥnwty*),⁹ Intef son of Senet (BM 572), mostly consists of epithets specific to his work, in between which are a few narrative sentences that add information about his longevity and his children's success in the royal palace.

A number of individuals left longer narratives that chronicled their achievements. A notable example is the soldier Khuwisobek (Manchester 3306), who described his exploits in Asia and Nubia and his consequent reward at the palace, as well as his rise in the military ranks.¹⁰ Another significant monument is the stela of the chief treasurer Iykhemofret (Berlin 1204), who recounted his early education at the palace, quoted a letter from Senwosret III charging him with a mission at Abydos, and told of his participation in the festival of Osiris there. Although succinct, his account remains the fullest description of the festival in Egyptian sources.¹¹

Self-presentation statements were often proclaimed to be true.¹² In his great tomb, the nomarch Amenemhat stated that he had "spoken with true words" (*ddf m mdt m3't; Urk. VII, 18:3*). Such claims were perhaps even more pertinent in funerary chapels, since the events recounted there were probably familiar to the local community. At Abydos, the steward Intef also claimed to "speak the truth" (*dd m3't; Louvre C 167*), while in the Sinai, the seal bearer Sobekhotep ended his self-presentation with an oath: "As the king lives for me, truthfully have I spoken" (*ḥnh n.i nsw dd.n.i m m3't; Sinai 405*). The placement of the last two texts is relevant. It is easy to dismiss such declarations as hyperbolic, but the fact that they are found close to temples—dedicated to Osiris and Hathor, respectively—must be taken into consideration. If the audiences for such texts were human as well as divine,¹³ the gods, as arbiters of human destiny,¹⁴ had to be taken seriously. As such it would have been improper to overstate one's qualities and good deeds.¹⁵ An example of this reverence is the early Nineteenth Dynasty chief sculptor Userhat, who began his list of good qualities with an invocation to the divine world: "Oh gods who are in the Thinite nome, (the very) lords of life on earth, who hate lies (*grg*) and wrongdoing (*isft*) and live upon Maat, I am a righteous one (*m3'c*)" (KRI I, 361:5–6).

The Composition of Self-Presentational Texts

Oral Component

That the narrators claimed to have "spoken" truthfully is significant. Many self-presentational texts begin their narrative sections or list of epithets with the phrase *ddf* (he says), possibly betraying an oral genesis for such compositions.¹⁶ This feature of the Twelfth Dynasty texts followed a long tradition seen in self-presentations from the Old Kingdom onward, and one that

would continue into the New Kingdom.¹⁷ The importance of the spoken word should perhaps not be surprising in a society where literacy was so low that the oral testimony of witnesses could actually confirm or overrule the value of written documents.¹⁸ This is emphasized by the nomarch Amenemhat, who proclaimed that he was “one who could make writing speak” (*di mdw drf*; II Bm 96).¹⁹

The highly formulaic composition of self-laudatory epithets found in ancient Egypt—including repetition, episodic organization of material, juxtaposition of contrasting notions, a tendency toward exaggeration, and the intermingling of longer narratives and short declarations mentioned earlier—is, in fact, characteristic of the stock phrases strategically employed by traditional storytellers.²⁰

Groupings of Epithets

The use of words that convey complementary notions is a device commonly found in epithets.²¹ For example, a man would claim to be “important in his office” (*wr m 3t;f*; I R) as well as “great in his rank” (*3 m s’h;f*; I H), while another boasted that he was “important for the king of Upper Egypt” (*wr n nsw*; I R 9, 14, 24) and “great for the king of Lower Egypt” (*3 n bty*; I H 14, 30, 32). An official could also “say” then “repeat,” as in “one who said what was good” (*dd nfr*; II Hc) and “repeated what was appreciated” (*whm mrrt*; II V). One notable juxtaposition is found in groupings where the nouns “mind” (*ib*), “heart” (*h3ty*), and “tongue” (*ns*) occur. An overseer of priests of Min described himself as “one who suppressed (his) desires” (*hrp-ib*; II Br 1) and was, thus, “free from lightness of tongue” (*sw m tsw n ns*; VI J); he followed this pair of epithets with a declaration that he was “sound of mind” (*wq3-ib*; IV 2), repeating the word *ib*. An overseer of masons claimed to be “excellent of speech” (*ikr st-ns*; I G 45) and “precise of heart” (*mty-h3ty*; I Ac 14), and finished that set of phrases by repeating the word *ib* in declaring to be “content” (*hrw-ib*; I Ak 18). The same association of words is found in the Instructions of Ptahhotep, where an official’s “perfect opportunity” (*sp;f nfr*; 527)²² was “due to the action of his mind and his tongue” (*m-3 n ib;f ns;f*; 528), and is well known from the Memphite Theology, where Ptah’s heart (*h3ty*) and tongue (*ns*) allowed him to create the gods.²³

Other groupings consist of pairs of epithets that convey a progression of ideas within a similar topic. One man asserted he was “guarded of speech” (*dns mhwt*; I Bh 1), which made him “efficient of words” (*mnh dd*; I Aa 45). Another declared that he was “knowledgeable, (indeed) one who had taught himself knowledge” (*rh sb; sw rh*; CII B1 3, 6 and II Dr 5, 10) yet kept on “consulting so as to cause that he be consulted” (*ndnd rdi nd.rw;f*; II D; 2, 4).

In other sequences, individuals announced they were “firm-footed” (*mn-rd*; I Z 7) or “firm of sandals” (*mn-tbw*; I Z 12, 13), which allowed them to “adhere to the road of the one who could advance him” (*mdd min n/w3t nt smnh sw*; II Bc 15, 20–21).

A remarkable sequence of phrases was formulated by—or for—the previously mentioned overseer of priests, whose graffito (Hammamat 199) contains three pairs of epithets. The first line of each pair contains an adjective preceding the noun *ib* followed by a second line that details the beneficial consequences of the original statement by stating that the individual was “free from” (*sw m*) a negative attribute. He first claimed to be “strong-minded regarding what was said to him” (*ndr-ib hr ddt n;f*; II Bk 1), which allowed him to be “free from an occasion of forgetfulness” (*sw m sp n mht*; VI J 16). Next he professed to be “clear-headed regarding what happened in his charge” (*shn-ib r shprt m-3;f*; I Au 1) and “(thus), free from an occasion of remissness” (*sw m sp n b3gy*; VI J 17). These statements are concluded with the pair of phrases mentioned earlier, “one who suppresses his desires” (*hrp-ib*; II Br 1), which enabled him to be “free from lightness of tongue” (*sw m tsw n ns*; VI J). Similar examples²⁴ include being “patient” (*w3h-ib*; I N 10–25), which kept someone from being overly “passionate” (*sw m prt-ib*; VI J 38), “free of improprieties” (*sw m rrit*; VI J 23),²⁵ or of “anxiety” (*sw m nhrhr*; VI J 12).²⁶ Being “generous” (*wsh-ib*; I T 6) helped an individual be “free of greed” (*sw m hns-ib*; VI J 33), while being “content” (*hrw-ib*; I Ak 8, 15) led to his being “free from passion” (*sw m prt-ib*; VI J 10).²⁷ Remembering that the ancient Egyptians recognized the *ib*-mind as the origin of proper conduct, these collections of epithets are striking.²⁸

A collection of epithets where both contrast and progression are found was employed by an overseer of the inner palace (Louvre C 170). He began the series with the pairing of “one who is firm of sandals” (*mn-tbw*; I Z 9–22), but who could also be “quiet of steps” (*hrw nmtwt*; I Ak 19–32).²⁹ He then declared himself to be “wise and splendid” (*s3i sbk*; I As 4), wisdom that allowed him to be “one who knew his proper standing” (*rh st rdwy;f(y)*; II B1 21)³⁰ and also to “adhere to the road of the one who could advance him” (*mdd w3t nt smnh sw*; II Bc 19). The phrases first used the nouns “sandals,” “steps,” and “feet,” then concluded with the phrase “adhering to a road,” certainly a noteworthy progression.

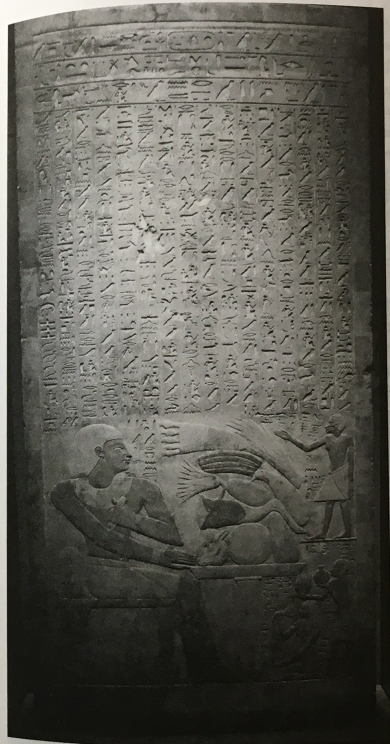
Self-presentations Describing Positions

The narratives in the funerary chapels of the nomarchs described in glowing terms their service to the crown and the good works they performed in their domains. After recounting various missions for the king, the great overlord

of the Oryx nome Amenemhat mentioned that all the taxes (*b3kw*) for the palace were in his charge, taxes he duly delivered on a yearly basis, boasting that there were never any arrears (*hrt-ʿ*) against him in any royal office (*b3*). This was accomplished because the entire nome was said to have worked steadily (*m nmtwt w3hwt*) for him, a nice juxtaposition of his diligence toward the palace compared to his own people's efforts on his behalf. Following this are a series of denials of any wrongdoings against a "citizen's daughter" (*s3t nds*), "widow" (*h3rt*), "farmer" (*ihwty*), "herdsman" (*mniw*), or an "overseer of five" (*imy-r diw*)—a variety of people with whom he may have come into contact on his estate.³¹ His subsequent claim that there were never any "unfortunate" (*m3r*) or even "hungry people" (*hkr*) in his time then cleverly serve as preliminary remarks to what follows, which is an account of the famine that swept through his area and his efforts to overcome the problem (Urk. VII, 15–16).

Such narratives of an official's work-related responsibilities are, unfortunately, rare in the ancient Egyptian records, especially on stelae and graffiti, where space was restricted. A few individuals did, however, give some indication of what their position entailed. Within the catalogue of his many good qualities (stela MMA 12.184, Fig. 6.2), the steward Mentuwofer, who worked in the royal palace, stated, "I provided clothing to the Treasury, with (its) accounting being directly in my charge in the palace" (*hrp.n.i. hbsw r pr-hd iw ip m-ʿ. i m pr-nsw*),³² which gives a glimpse of some of his duties. At times an official would also hint at some of his responsibilities. The vizier Mentuhotep suggested that he had to be "secretive concerning the affairs of the palace" (*h3p hr s3m ʿh*; II Bs 1) and be "one whose mouth was sealed concerning what he had heard" (*h3m r3.f hr s3mt.f*; II Cl 1).

Similarly, two other officials revealed some of their obligations within a series of self-laudatory epithets. As the man in charge of a section of the inner palace, Intef son of Senet stated that he was "one who ushered in the great ones of Upper Egypt" (*st3 wrw t3-s3mʿw*; II Fj 1) and "placed (them) on their bellies in the office of the member of the elite and vizier" (*rdi m-b3h hr hwt.sn m h3 n iry-pʿt t3ty*; II Bm 4).³³ There, he also "presented (cases) for judgment at the time a matter was heard" (*rdi m tp n m3ʿ-hrw hft s3m ht*; II Bm 4), which sometimes entailed "punishing the one who was remiss in his duty" (*ʿ3 skn knl hr wnw.t.f*; I H 63 and II Bu 1) and "giving explanations to" the quarrelsome man" (*shd n sntw*). He also stated that officials "stood or sat according to" my good will" (*hʿ.tw hms.tw hr nfrt.i*), which presumably meant he was in charge of protocol in that particular component of the palace. Further details emerge with his mention of "knowing the procedure of the rules" of (proper) behavior" (*r3 nmt hpw nw irt*; II Ae 7, II B1 45), which



6.2. Stela of the Steward Mentuwofer, reign of Senwosret I, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, no. 12.184 (photograph by author)

may have also necessitated "teaching how to judge between two men" (*sb3 m wqʿ s snw*; II Ae 7).

A herald of the entrance approach (*w3mw ʿrrt*)³⁷ claimed to have "said what was good" (*dd nfrt*; II Hc 71) "and then repeated what was desired" (*w3m mrrt*; II V 24). Although these are not original phrases, the repetition

of the verb *whm* (to repeat) within his title and an epithet is noteworthy. After mentioning that his efficiency occasioned the king to give him a task, he added that he “paid attention to business procedures” (*dd hr ssmw*; II Bm 6) and could be “loud of voice in a quiet place” (*k3i-hrw m st sgr*; I Az 4), surely a mark of his importance. He then concluded this portion of his self-presentation by claiming that he was “one to whom were reported the affairs of the Two Lands (*smi(w) n f hrt t3wy*; II Dy 13) and “who (subsequently) repeated (them) in a perfect way to the Lord of the Two Lands” (*whm nfrt n nb t3wy*; II V 25). These are attributes one might have expected from a *whmw*-herald.

Themes

Service to the King

With the advent of a new family led by Sehetepibre Amenemhat (I), a number of individuals recounted their role in the sometimes turbulent transition of power.³⁸ The nomarch Khnumhotep I went on a military expedition with the new king, at which time the latter is said to have “expelled him from the Two Banks” (*dr.n.f.sw m idbwy*; Urk. VII, 12), with the pronoun *sw* referring to an unnamed, and possibly Egyptian, enemy, while the hunter Kay mentions pursuing a refugee in the “Western Oasis,” presumably Dakhleh (Berlin 22820).³⁹ Additionally, General Nysumontu’s account of his military exploits (Louvre C 1) suggests an ongoing civil war into the reign of Senwosret I.⁴⁰

The officials at Amenemhat I’s court may also have felt a certain urgency to declare their allegiance to the new family. Thus, the lector priest Ihy,⁴¹ who held a number of cultic positions at the palace, claimed to be “foremost of position at the *sema*-throne of Horus” (*hnty-st r sm3 hr*; III S 8) and “in his lord’s mind every day” (*imy ib nb.f.r nb*; III A). Farther from the palace, the great overlord of the Hare nome Nehri (Hatnub 25) pronounced himself “friendly to the Residence and subject to the plan that had been said to him” (*hrw n hnw hr shr dd n.f*; I Ak5) as well as “a precise one for the king” (*mtr n nsw*; I Ac 1).⁴² While not all of these phrases were new, the unambiguous references to the new king and his palace are noteworthy.

Indeed, full devotion to the king—close proximity to whom was recognized as the key to success⁴³—was a theme that pervaded the self-presentation epithets throughout the period.⁴⁴ An official claimed to be a “true servant” (*b3k m3*; IV Q), “who was in his lord’s mind” (*imy ib n nb.f*; III A) and who in fact “regularly acted according to what was in his (lord’s) mind” (*irr ml ntt m ib.f*; II F 190). He was “pleasant to his lord’s house” (*bnr n pr nb.f*; I W4) and “did what was beneficial to the Palace” (*ir 3ht n pr-nsw*; II F 118). He also ensured that he was “vigilant of his duties” (*rs-hrwt.f*; I Aj 14), “steadfast

in his office” (*kni m i3t.f*; I Bb 17), “precise of heart regarding what had been commanded to him” (*mtr-h3ty hr wdt n.f*; I Ac 9), and, generally, “precise in his lord’s house” (*mtr m pr nb.f*; I Ac 5). This diligence led him to be “effective of speech within his lord’s mind” (*3h-dd hry-ib n nb.f*; I C 4), which allowed him to be “efficient of counsels” (*mnh ndwt-r3*; I Aa 50), with advice that his lord knew to be “excellent” (*rh.n nb.f ikr shr.f*; II Bl 71) and which was, perhaps, even offered “at his lord’s side” (*mnh r-gs nb.f*; I Aa 39). He also “knew his proper place in the Palace” (*rh st rd(wy).f(y) m pr-nsw*; II Bl 17–20, 23–24) and was “disciplined regarding a royal mission” (*s3k-ib hr wpt-nsw*; II Cy 6). He always made sure he “adhered to the road of the one who advanced him” (*mdd w3t nt smnh sw*; II Bc 24) and never considered “neglecting the governance of the ceremonial palace or the instructions of the *Setep-sa*-(royal service) committee” (*m thi tp-rd n c’h tpt-r3 n stp-s3*; VII L 8).⁴⁵

Such qualities resulted in an official being “unique in his lord’s mind” (*wc m ib n nb.f*; I P 21) as one “whose excellence his lord/the Lord of the Two Lands had observed” (*ptr.n nb.f/nb t3wy ikr.f*; II Aq 2–3) and “whose lord had caused him to be appreciated” (*rdi.n nb.f mr.tw.f*; II Bm 104). Indeed, he was “one whom the king exalted after he saw the officials of the *Setep-sa*-committee” (*k3i nsw m3.f srw nw stp-s3*; Sinai 115) and “one who was (actually) known in his lord’s house” (*nty rhw m pr n nb.f*; II Bl 70). A further, and more personal, result would be to become “one whose name his lord knew” (*rh.n nb.f rn.f*; II Bl 80) and possibly even be “hailed by name” (*nd-hr rn*; IV Aw 4) by the king. And the ultimate goal was then to be one whom the king “promoted before multitudes” (*tn.n nb.f hnt hhw*; II Gk 7) or before “his peers” (*stn.n.f hnty mityw.f*; II Fk 4). Officials also claimed to have been “one whose plenty⁴⁶ the Lord of the Two Lands furnished, and the love of whom advanced his position” (*rdi.n nb t3wy 3w.f shnt.n mrwt.f st.f*; II Ev 19) or “his office” (*shnt nb.f i3t.f*; II Ev 6).⁴⁷ Such praise meant access to the inner circles, where one could boast of being “wide of stride” (*wsh-nmtwt*; I T 3) and “truly unhindered” (*wstn m3*; II Y 1).

Efficiency at Work

Competence was not limited to serving at the palace. An official could boast of his skills by declaring to have “performed a job according to its (proper) purpose” (*tr i3t mi iry.s*; II F 3) or, generally, “successfully” (*ir ht n tp-nfr*; II F 84–86). His “ideas” or “advice” (*shr*) were always “important” (*3*; I H 66), “excellent” (*ikr*; I G 52–56), or “efficient” (*mnh*; I Aa). He was a veritable “possessor of (good) advice” (*nb shrw*; IV Ac 41) and proud enough to have come up with his ideas himself (*km3 shr.f*; II Fz 1)⁴⁸ that he could claim to be “one about whom it is regularly said, ‘His advice was useful’” (*ddd r.f mnh shr.f*; Sinai 101A, 143, 405).

Personal Qualities

Individuals also wished to be remembered for personal qualities. They presented themselves as “amiable” (*im3*; I E) and “great of kindness” (*C3-im3*; I H 36), a kindness they consistently “possessed” (*nb im3*; II Ac 2, 5, 7). They were “friendly to commoners” (*hmms n ndsw*; IV Ak), in fact “kindly disposed to everyone” (*3ms-ib n rmt nb*; I B 2), all of whom they “welcomed” (*tr ilw(y) n bw nb*; II F 119). They also claimed to “know kindness when the right time (lit., ‘his opportunity’) came” (*rh sfn n iw n sp.f*; II Bl 51) and could even “silence weeping with the perfect remark” (*sgr rmiw m hnw nfr*; II Fe 2).

Their kindness led to acts of generosity, which was defined as being “long of hand” (*3w-drt*; I A), “broad-hearted” (*wsh-ib*; I T 6), and “free from indifference” (*sw m hbs-hr*; VI J 33). They “regularly gave things to the one <in> poverty” (*dd ht n nty <m> smw*; II Bm 11), “always looked after the afflicted” (*m33 r ind*; II Au 3), “fed commoners” (*sⁿnh rhyt*; II Dg 13), “nourished the young” (*sd nhn*; II Fy 4), and were veritable “fathers to orphans” (*tr n nmh*; IV H). They also made sure to “rescue the one who was nothing” (*nhm iwry sw*; II Bh 13) and “protect the unfortunate” (*nh m3r*; II Bi).

General assistance to people was summed up as doing “what everyone always appreciated” (*tr mrr bw-nb*; II F 137). Specific instances could be when someone “calmed fear” (*swd3 snd*; II Dq 1) or “unraveled what had been knotted” (*wh^t tsst*; II W5), that is, solved people’s problems. An official made sure he was “patient in order to hear words” (*w3h-ib r sgm mdwt*; I N 17), to which he “truly listened” (*sⁿmw r wn-m3*; II Fo 7). He would never be “partial to the owner of bribes” (*tm nm^t n nb db3w*; VI L 4)⁵⁰ since he only “evaluated a man according to his speech” (*st3 s r tpt-r3.f*; II Cz 2). The result of this was that he “always caused two fellows to leave satisfied with what had come from his mouth” (*dd pr snw htp(.w) m prw n r3.f*; II Bm 95).

Self-Presentations and Instructional Literature

The relationship between self-presentation texts and instructional literature has been much discussed.⁵⁰ Although they were separate genres and intended for different audiences, the similarities between the vocabulary used in epithets and Ptahhotep’s maxims are striking.⁵¹

The king began his instructions to Ptahhotep by recommending that the vizier “first and foremost teach him⁵² to speak” (*sb3 rk sw r mdt hr h3r*; 37). Such advice had certainly been taken to heart by Middle Kingdom officials, who claimed to be “good at listening and excellent at speaking” (*nfr-sdm ikr-^dd*; I G 61–62). Indeed, a man would “know the outcome of his words” (*rh prw n mdw.f*; II Bl 31, 53), and he would be “respected for the excellence of his utterances” (*mhy hr ikr mdw.f*; II Ay 1). At the court he would be “precise

of words on the day of serving, and could speak a phrase at its (proper) time” (*k3-mdw hrw msbb dd ts r h3w.f*; I L 3, II Bm 44). Ptahhotep went on to describe his instructions as “teaching the ignorant to be knowledgeable according to the principles⁵³ of perfect speech” (*sb3 hmw r rh r tp-hsb n mdt nfr*; 47–48), which would be “beneficial to the one who will listen” (*m 3ht n sdm.ty.f*; 49). This passage finds a parallel in Intef son of Senet’s description of himself as “one who is knowledgeable for the one who doesn’t know and who teaches a man what will be beneficial to him” (*rh n nty n rh.f sb3 s 3h.t(y).s(y) n.f*; II Bl 2 and II Dr 4).⁵⁴

In their inscriptions men described themselves as being “self-contained,” which they expressed by claiming to be *s3k-ib* (II Cy), a phrase that echoes Ptahhotep’s dictum to “gather every heart toward excellence” (*s3k ib nb r bw ikr*; 364), or having “self-control” (*d3r-ib*; II Go), also found in Ptahhotep (*rmn.n d3r ib.k h^tsw.f*; 67). Officials wished to be remembered as “trustworthy” (*kf3-ib*; I Bc), a presumably common phrase since Ptahhotep used it a number of times.⁵⁵ They also claimed to be “patient” (*w3h-ib*; I N), as Ptahhotep reiterated when he urged his charges to “be patient when you speak” (*w3h ib.k tr n mdwy.k*; 624). Another desired personal quality was to be “one who is without greed” (*iwry sw-n-ib.f*; VI C 15), a transgression mentioned a number of times by Ptahhotep,⁵⁶ or “without falsehood” (*sw m grg*; VI J 45), a phrase found verbatim in Ptahhotep (532).

In social or professional contexts, a man knew to “bend down to great ones” (*h3m n wrw*; II Ce 5) or “bend his back” (*hms s3.f*; II Cm 1), that is, bow, which Ptahhotep taught his son by enjoining him to “bend your arms and bow” (*h3m swy.k(y) hms s3.k*; 62) and “bow down to your superior” (*hms s3.k hry-tp.k*; 441). In a culture where information may have been delivered orally, it is interesting to see an epithet used to profess precise communication. The phrase “the one who reports his affairs without forgetting” (*smi ssm.f nn sw-ib*; II Dy 10) is mirrored by Ptahhotep’s advice to “report your business without forgetfulness” (*smi ssm.k nn sw-ib*; 249).⁵⁷

Interestingly, a number of laudatory epithets contradict some of Ptahhotep’s directives. Although Ptahhotep declared that “no one is born wise” (*nn msy s3.w*; 41), one individual asserted that he “had been born as one who is (already) wise and who can act” (*ms.n.tw.i m s33.f tr.f*; I Ar 4), while others bragged about having “come out of the womb (already) wise” (*pr m ht s3.w*; II Ak 25) or “knowledgeable” (*pr m ht iw.f m rh*; II Ak 24). Similarly, while Ptahhotep warned that “no one can know what will happen when planning for tomorrow” (*n rh.n.tw hprt s3.f dw3w*; 343), one individual boasted that he was “one who knew tomorrow before it had come” (*rh dw3w n iwt.f*; II Bl 41).

Conclusions

Amiable and helpful, well spoken and knowledgeable, diligent in his work, and dedicated to the crown to the point of obsequiousness, the Middle Kingdom official was proud of his accomplishments and of belonging to the upper registers of society. His self-presentation walked a fine line between braggadocio and humility, as he wished his contemporaries and future generations to remember him well. His entreaty to posterity could have been spoken by the magic snake in the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor: "Cause my reputation to be good in your city. Look here, it is my (only) request from you" (*imi rn.i nfr(.w) m niwt.k mk hrt.i pw im.k*).⁵⁸

Notes

- * I wish to thank the anonymous referees, whose suggestions made this chapter better (and significantly shorter).
- 1 This chapter deals mostly with the written documents. For the pictorial record, see the recent studies in M. Hartwig, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art* (Oxford, 2014). For an iconographic study on one specific tomb from the period, see J. Kamrin, *The Cosmos of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan* (London, 1999).
 - 2 For the term *self-presentation* rather than (*auto*)*biography*, see L. Morenz, "Tomb Inscriptions: The Case of the 'I' Versus Autobiography in Ancient Egypt," *Human Affairs: A Postdisciplinary Journal for Humanities & Social Sciences* 13 (2003), 179–96.
 - 3 The *locus classicus* for the epithets dating from the Old to the late Middle Kingdoms remains J. Janssen, *De traditionele Egyptische Autobiografie voor het Nieuwe Rijk*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1946). The Middle Kingdom examples have been studied by D. Doxey, *Egyptian Non-Royal Epitaphs in the Middle Kingdom: A Social and Historical Analysis* (Leiden, 1998). See also B. van de Walle, "Biographie," in W. Helck and E. Otto, eds., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, I (Wiesbaden, 1974), 815–822; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom: A Study and an Anthology* (Göttingen, 1988); O. Perdu, "Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies," in J.M. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1995), 2243–54; P. Vernus, *Essai sur la conscience de l'histoire dans l'Égypte pharaonique* (Paris, 1995); A. Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," in A. Loprieno, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (Leiden, 1996), 191–241; S.-A. Naguib, "Mémoire de soi: Autobiographie et identité en ancienne Égypte," in E. Wardini, ed., *Built on Solid Rock: Studies in Honour of Professor Ebbe Egede Knudsen on the Occasion of His 65th birthday, April 11th 1997* (Oslo, 1997), 216–25; A. Gnirs, "Biographies," in D. Redford, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, I (New York, 2001), 184–89.

- 4 Cf. the Abydos stela of the steward of counting barley, Ankhren (Queen's College (Oxford) 1113; P. Smither and A. Dakin, "Stelae in the Queen's College, Oxford," *JEA* 25 [1939], 163–65, no. 4), where the Appeal to the Living begins with the phrase, "Oh you who (still) live on earth, every scribe, every lector priest, and every *wab*-priest who will read aloud (*sd*) this stela (of mine)." On the question of the audience for such texts in the Middle Kingdom, see Doxey, *Non-Royal Epitaphs*, 6–7. That stelae were, indeed, read can be surmised from the fact that some were copied by later visitors. For a Middle Kingdom copy of sections of the earlier stela of the vizier Mentuhotep (CG 20539), see R.J. Leprohon, "The Stela of Sehetepibre (CG 20538): Borrowings and Innovation," in D. Silverman, W.K. Simpson, J. Wegner, eds., *Archaism and Innovation: Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt* (New Haven, 2009), 277–92. For a New Kingdom copy of the same stela, see B. Russo, "La stela di Kares (CGC 34003): semplice copia o voluta ripresa della grande stela di Mentuhotep (CGC 20539)?" in P. Minà, ed., *Immagines nell'Egitto antico: per i novant'anni di Sergio Donadoni. Atti del IX Convegno Internazionale Colloqui di Egitologia e Papirologia in onore del Prof. Sergio Donadoni* (Palermo, 2004), 235–41.
- 5 For Elephantine, see *Urk.* VII, 1–9. For other sites, see F.L.I. Griffith, *The Inscriptions of Siût and Dêr Rifeh* (London, 1889); A.M. Blackman, M.R. Apted, eds., *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, 6 vols. (London, 1914–53); P.E. Newberry, *El Bersheh*, 2 vols. (London, 1893–94). The latter site is currently being investigated by the Egyptology Department at Leuven University; for a bibliography, see the project's website, <http://www.dayralbarsha.com>. For Beni Hasan, see P.E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan*, 4 vols. (London, 1893–97) and A. Shedid, *Die Felsgräber von Beni Hassan in Mittelägypten* (Mainz, 1994).
- 6 These comprise the majority of the texts. They were mostly inscribed on stelae left at the site, in the hope of spiritually participating in the festival of Osiris. The major collections of these stelae are in Berlin, Cairo, Leiden, London, and Paris, and published, respectively, in: G. Roeder, ed., *Ägyptische Inschriften aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin* (Leipzig, 1913); H. Lange and H. Schäfer, *Grab- und Denksteine des Mittleren Reiches im Museum von Kairo*, 4 vols. (Cairo 1902, 1908, 1925); P. Boeser, ed., *Beschreibung der ägyptischen Sammlung des niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1905–1909); E.A.W. Budge, ed., *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae etc. in the British Museum*, especially vols. 2–4, (London, 1912–13); A. Gayet, *Stèles de la douzième dynastie* (Paris, 1889). Excellent photographs of a good number of the stelae can be found in W.K. Simpson, *The Terrace of the Great God at Abydos: The Offering Chapels of Dynasties 12 and 13* (New Haven, 1974).

- 7 The major sites are Hatnub, Wadi Hammamat, Wadi el-Hudi, and the Sinai. These are published, respectively, in: R. Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub* (Leipzig, 1928); J. Couyat and P. Montet, *Les Inscriptions hiéroglyphiques et hiératiques du Ouâdi Hammâmât* (Cairo, 1912); G. Goyon, *Nouvelles inscriptions rupestres du Ouâdi Hammamat* (Paris, 1957); A. Sadek, *The Amethyst Mining Inscriptions of Wadi El-Hudi*, 2 vols. (Warminster, 1980, 1985); A.H. Gardiner and J. Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai* (London, 1955). The texts found in the Eastern Desert near the Gulf of Suez, published by M. Abd el-Raziq, G. Castel, P. Tallet, and V. Ghina, eds., *Les Inscriptions d'Ayn Soukbnâ* (Cairo, 2002), mostly consist of titles and short narratives describing the official's mission.
- 8 W. Grajetzki, *Two Treasurers of the Late Middle Kingdom* (Oxford, 2001), 77; Leprohon, "Ideology and Propaganda," in Hartwig, *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, 316–17.
- 9 On the *hwtw*, see G. Pagliari, "Function and Significance of Ancient Egyptian Royal Palaces from the Middle Kingdom to the Saite Period: A Lexicographical Study and its Possible Connection with the Archaeological Evidence" (University of Birmingham PhD Diss., Birmingham, Rome, 2012), 266–67.
- 10 J. Garstang, *El Arâbab* (London, 1900), pl. 5; T. Peet, *The Stela of Sebek-khu* (Manchester, 1914); J. Baines, "The Stela of Khusobek: Private and Royal Military Narrative and Values," in J. Osing and G. Dreyer, eds., *Form und Mass: Beiträge zur Literatur, Sprache und Kunst des alten Ägypten* (Wiesbaden, 1987), 43–61. Other examples include stelae BM 574, Leiden V4, Louvre C 3, etc.; such narratives have been designated "historical autobiographies" by Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," 204; and Gnirs, "Biographies," 185.
- 11 M.-C. Lavier, "Les mystères d'Osiris à Abydos d'après les stèles du Moyen Empire et du Nouvel Empire," in S. Schoske, ed., *Akten des vierten Internationalen Ägyptologen Kongresses München 1985*, III (Hamburg, 1989), 289–95.
- 12 Gnirs, "Biographies," 185; C. Eyre, "The Semna Stelae: Quotation, Genre, and Functions of Literature," in S. Israelit-Groll, ed., *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim* (Jerusalem, 1990), 152–53; Perdu, "Autobiographies," 2244; L. Coulon, "Vérité et rhétorique dans les autobiographies égyptiennes de la Première Période Intermédiaire," *BIFAO* 97 (1997), 109–38.
- 13 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*, 2.
- 14 J. Griffiths, "Intimations in Egyptian Non-royal Biography of a Belief in Divine Impact on Human Affairs," in J. Baines, T.G.H. James, A. Leahy, and A.F. Shore, eds., *Pyramid Studies and Other Essays Presented to I.E.S. Edwards* (London, 1988), 92–102.

- 15 Fully realizing that someone like Weni the Elder had clearly exaggerated what he portrayed as humble beginnings in his self-presentation, as the rediscovery of his Abydos mastaba has shown; see J. Richards, "Text and Context in Late Old Kingdom Egypt: The Archaeology and Historiography of Weni the Elder," *JARCE* 39 (2002), 75–102.
- 16 Van de Walle, "Biographie," 816, 820; Eyre, "The Semna Stelae," 147, 152–53; Perdu, "Autobiographies," 2243; Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," 196; R.J. Leprohon, "Remarks on Private Epithets Found in the Middle Kingdom Wadi Hammamat Graffiti," *JSSSEA* 28 (2001), 127–28; R.B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection* (London, 2002), 50–51, 55–57, 142–43, etc. In the context of Chinese storytelling, this has been described as "the oral communication of 'telling' and 'listening'"; see V. Børdahl, *The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling* (Richmond, 1996), 241.
- 17 H.G. Fischer, "Occurrences of *in*, Agential and Dative," *GM* 107 (1989), 71, and fig. 1. A few examples from various periods include *Urk.* I, 9:13, 18:9, 49:17; Berlin 24032; Cairo CG 20500; J. Clère and J. Vandier, *Textes de la Première Période Intermédiaire et de la XIe dynastie*, Brussels, 1948, nos. 14, 15, 17; BM 101, 202; Cairo CG 20026, 20040; Leiden V4, V6; Louvre C 3, C 11; Hatnub 24, 49; Sinai 53, 86; Wadi el-Hudi 14, 143; Wadi Hammamat 43, 87; *Urk.* IV, 1:16, 2:8, 30:7; and *KRI* I, 290:5, 299:13, etc.
- 18 See Pap. Berlin 9010 (= N. Strudwick, *Texts from the Pyramid Age* [Atlanta, 2005], 186–87, no. 103), where the court would only accept the authenticity of a legal document if witnesses could testify orally to its veracity; see A. Théodoridès, "The Concept of Law in Ancient Egypt," in J. Harris, ed., *The Legacy of Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1971), 299. On literacy, see J. Baines, "Literacy and Ancient Egyptian Society," *Man* 18 (1983), 572–99; J. Baines and C. Eyre, "Four Notes on Literacy," *GM* 61 (1983), 65–96; Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture*, 15, 66–67.
- 19 Unless otherwise noted, the numbers in the brackets following epithets will refer to Janssen's catalogue in *De traditioneele Egyptische Autobiografie*.
- 20 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982), 38–42; A. Lord, "Perspectives on Recent Work on the Oral Traditional Formula," *Oral Tradition* 1 (1986), 480–82; A. Lord, "Characteristics of Orality," *Oral Tradition* 2 (1987), 57; Eyre, "The Semna Stelae," 162; C. Bryan, *A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in Its Literary and Cultural Settings* (Oxford, 1993), 73, 126–51; Gnirs, "Biographies," 185; B. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (Leiden, 2003), 44; C. Thomas and C. Conant, *The Trojan War* (Norman, Oklahoma, 2007), 63. On parataxis, see E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, 1963), 180; Børdahl, *The Oral Tradition*, 241; M. Moeser, *The Anecdote in Mark: The Classical World and the Rabbin* (London, 2002), 189–90.

- 21 Doxey, *Non-Royal Epithets*, 167.
- 22 The numbers following the quotes from Ptahhotep's Instructions are those found in Z. Žába, *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague, 1956).
- 23 Shabako Stone col. 53, K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen Das "Denkmal memphitischer Theologie": Der Schabakostein des Britischen Museums* (Leipzig, 1928), 50–56.
- 24 Doxey, *Non-Royal Epithets*, 69–70.
- 25 For *rrt*, see R. Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch II: Mittleres Reich und Zweite Zwischenzeit* (Mainz, 2006), 1503.
- 26 For *nhrh*, see Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch II*, 1309.
- 27 The reverse could also be case; although the phrase *hrw-lb* precedes here, being "free from passion" may have led to being "content." I owe this observation to a reviewer.
- 28 M. Lichtheim, "Autobiography as Self-Exploration," in Anonymous, ed., *Sesto Congresso internazionale di egittologia: Atti I* (Turin, 1992), 409–14. On the *hity* as part of the body and the *ib* as the "interior," see R. Nyord, "Taking Phenomenology to Heart: Some Heuristic Remarks on Studying Ancient Egyptian Embodied Experience," in R. Nyord and A. Kjelby, eds., "Being in Ancient Egypt": *Thoughts on Agency, Materiality and Cognition: Proceedings of the Seminar Held in Copenhagen, September 29–30, 2006* (Oxford, 2009), 63–74.
- 29 The same pairing is seen in the stela of Amunwoser (*JEA* 51 [1965], 63–68); Manchester 3306; Sinai 33, 35, 71, and 118; and Wadi el-Hudi 16 and 21.
- 30 Lit., "the place of his feet."
- 31 Noticeably, such specific groups of people are mostly absent in epithets found on stelae or graffiti, perhaps because high- or middle-level court officials would not have dealt with them on a regular basis. For a useful summary of various classes of people in this period, see W. Grajetzki, *The Middle Kingdom of Ancient Egypt* (London, 2006), 142–61.
- 32 K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke zum Gebrauch in akademischen Unterricht* (Leipzig, 1924), 79:9–10.
- 33 On this passage, see G. van den Boorn, *The Duties of the Vizier: Civil Administration in the Early New Kingdom* (London, 1988), 35, n. 149.
- 34 Lit., "enlightening."
- 35 Lit., "under."
- 36 On the noun *hp* meaning "a rule to be observed" rather than simply "law," see M. Bontty, "Concerning *hp*," *JSSSEA* 27 (1997), 1–8; B. Menu, "La règle fiscale comme source du droit," *Recherches sur l'histoire juridique, économique et sociale de l'ancienne Égypte*, II (Cairo, 1998), 21–25; P. Vernus, "The Royal Command (*wd-nsw*): A Basic Deed of Executive Power," in J.C. Moreno García, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Administration* (Leiden, 2013), 272.

- 37 For the *rrt*, see Pagliari, "Function and Significance of Ancient Egyptian Royal Palaces," 260–62.
- 38 R.J. Leprohon, "The Programmatic Use of the Royal Titulary in the Twelfth Dynasty," *JARCE* 33 (1996), 167; J.P. Allen, "The High Officials of the Early Middle Kingdom," in N. Strudwick and J. Taylor, eds., *The Theban Necropolis: Past, Present and Future* (London, 2003), 14–29; L. Postel, *Protocole des souverains égyptiens et dogme monarchique au début du Moyen Empire* (Turnhout, 2004), 266–67; H. Willems, "The First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom," in A. Lloyd, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2010), 90–91.
- 39 R. Anthes, "Eine Polizeistreife des Mittleren Reiches an die westliche Oase," *ZAS* 65 (1930), 108–14; for the dating of the stela to the reign of Amenemhat I, see R. Freed, "A Private Stela from Naga ed-Der and Relief Style of the Reign of Amenemhet I," in W.K. Simpson and W. Davis, eds., *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan* (Boston, 1981), 76.
- 40 C. Obsomer, *Sésostris Ier: Étude chronologique et historique du règne* (Brussels, 1995), 54–81; for archaeological evidence of the war, see C. Barbotin, "II: Guerre civile et guerre étrangère d'après la stèle de Nysoumontou (Louvre C1)," *RdE* 56 (2005), 193–94.
- 41 C. Firth and B. Gunn, *Excavations at Saqqara: Teti Pyramid Cemeteries*, II (Cairo, 1926), 280–88, pl. 83.
- 42 For the dating of the Hatnub graffiti, see H. Willems, "The Nomarchs of the Hare Nome and Early Middle Kingdom History," *JÉOL* 28 (1984), 80–102; L. Gestermann, "Die Datierung der Nomarchen von Hermopolis aus dem frühen Mittleren Reich—ein Phantomdebatte?" *ZAS* 135 (2008), 1–15.
- 43 Such allegiance became codified in the so-called Loyalist Instructions, for which see G. Posener, *L'Enseignement loyaliste: Sagesse égyptienne du Moyen Empire* (Geneva, 1976); see also A. Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption: On Rich and Poor in The Eloquent Peasant," in A. Gnirs, ed., *Reading the Eloquent Peasant: Proceedings of the International Conference on The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant at the University of California, Los Angeles, March 27–30, 1997* (Göttingen, 2000), 149.
- 44 Such epithets formed part of what has been designated "encomiastic autobiographies"; see Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," 205; Gnirs, "Biographies," 186–87.
- 45 On *stp-s3*, see O. Goelet, "The Term *stp-s3* in the Old Kingdom and Its Later Development," *JARCE* 23 (1986), 85–98; G. Shaw, "The Meaning of the Phrase *m hm n stp-s3*," *JEA* 96 (2010), 175–90. For *h* and *stp-s3*, see Pagliari, "Function and Significance of Ancient Egyptian Royal Palaces," 233–44 and 246–48, respectively.

- 46 On *fbw*, see E. Blumenthal, *Untersuchungen zum ägyptischen Königtum des Mittleren Reiches, I: Die Phraseologie* (Berlin, 1970), 373.
- 47 For a comprehensive study on phrases used to describe promotions, see M. Trapani, *La Dévolution des fonctions en Égypte pharaonique: Étude critique de la documentation disponible* (London, 2015).
- 48 Lit., "one who created his (own) ideas."
- 49 For a discussion of this expression in its social context, see the cogent remarks by Gnirs, "The Language of Corruption," 134–35.
- 50 H. Brunner, "Zitate aus Lebenslehren," in E. Hornung and O. Keel, eds., *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren* (Freiburg, 1979), 105–77; J. Assmann, "Schrift, Tod und Identität: Das Grab als Vorschule der Literatur im alten Ägypten," in A. Assmann, Ch. Hardmeier, eds., *Schrift und Gedächtnis: Beiträge zur Archäologie der Literarischen Kommunikation* (Munich, 1983), 64–93; Eyre, "The Semna Stelae"; R. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt* (Norman, 1991), 17, 24; Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," 207–09; M. Lichtheim, "Didactic Literature," in A. Loprieno, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Leiden, 1996), 244–47; Doxey, *Non-Royal Epitaphs*, 5–7; Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture*, 111–12; F. Junge, *Die Lehre Ptahhoteps und die Tugenden der ägyptischen Welt* (Göttingen, 2003); K. Jansen-Winkel, "Lebenslehre und Biographie," *ZÄS* 131 (2004), 59–72; and N. Lazaridis, "Ethics," in E. Froom and W. Wendrich, eds., *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Los Angeles, 2008), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4q20j8mw>.
- 51 On the transmission of texts, see, e.g., J. Kahl, *Siu-Theben: zur Wertschätzung von Traditionen im alten Ägypten* (Leiden, 1999), 28–52; and Eyre, "The Semna Stelae," 155–58.
- 52 His son.
- 53 On *tp-hsb* as precise rules of protocol, see L. Coulon, "La rhétorique et ses fictions: Pouvoirs et duplicité du discours à travers la littérature égyptienne du Moyen et du Nouvel Empire," *BIEAO* 99 (1999), 103–32.
- 54 Ptahhotep reiterated this maxim when he also urged his son to "teach a great man what will be beneficial to him" (*sb3 wr r 3ht n.f*; Ptahhotep 399). Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 40–41, makes the point that oral societies needed to repeat information time and again for the knowledge to properly sink in; for this reason, learned people were highly valued.
- 55 Ptahhotep Maxims 233, 234, and 433.
- 56 Ptahhotep 91, 300, 315, 316, and 318.
- 57 Additional Middle Kingdom phrases that warned against "forgetfulness" (*mht*, VI C 16, VI J 16 and 36) can be paralleled by Ptahhotep's admonition to not be "forgetful concerning what has been said to you, and beware of the occasion of forgetfulness" (*m m ib.k hr ddt n.k s3w.tl hr sp n mht-ib*,

153–54). However, this particular passage is from an Eighteenth Dynasty manuscript of Ptahhotep (L2 [Pap. BM 10509]), so may perhaps be a New Kingdom addition. For the dating of Pap. BM 10509, see Eyre, "The Semna Stelae," 156, n. 77; Junge, *Die Lehre Ptahhoteps*, 10–14.

- 58 A. Blackman, *Middle Egyptian Stories* (Brussels, 1932), 46:14–15.