The Instruction of Amenemope

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Prologue

- Beginning of the teaching for life, The instructions for well-being, Every rule for relations with elders, For conduct toward magistrates;
- Knowing how to answer one who 5 speaks, To reply to one who sends a message.

So as to direct him on the paths of life, To make him prosper upon earth; To let his heart enter its shrine,¹

Steering clear of evil; 10

> To save him from the mouth of strangers,

To let (him) be praised in the mouth of people.

Made by the overseer of fields, experienced in his office,

The offspring of a scribe of Egypt,

The overseer of grains who controls 15 the measure,

> Who sets the harvest-dues for his lord. Who registers the islands of new land, In the great name of his majesty, Who records the markers on the borders of fields,

II.1 Who acts for the king in his listing of

> Who makes the land–register of Egypt; The scribe who determines the offerings for all the gods.

Who gives land-leases to the people,

The overseer of grains, [provider of] 5

> Who supplies the granary with grains; The truly silent in This of Ta-wer,

The justified in Ipu,

Who owns a tomb on the west of Senu,

Who has a chapel at Abydos, 10 Amenemope, the son of Kanakht, The justified in Ta-wer.² <For> his son, the youngest of his children,

The smallest of his family,

The devotee of Min-Kamutef, 15 The water-pourer of Wennofer, Who places Horus on his father's throne,

Who guards him in his noble shrine,

III.1 The guardian of the mother of god, Inspector of the black cattle of the terrace of Min,

> Who protects Min in his shrine: Hor-em-maakher is his true name,

5 The child of a nobleman of Ipu, The son of the sistrum-player of Shu and Tefnut,

> And chief songstress of Horus, Tawosre.

Chapter 1

He says:

Give your ears, hear the sayings,

Give your heart to understand them; 10 It profits to put them in your heart,^a Woe to him who neglects them! Let them rest in the casket of your belly,

May they be bolted in your heart;

When there rises a whirlwind of 15 words.

¹ The heart is viewed as the god who dwells in man. On this concept see Bonnet, RÄRG 225–228.

² Ipu and Senu are names for Akhmim (Panopolis); Ta-wer is the nome of Abydos. Amenemope identifies himself as a citizen of Akhmim who has built his tomb there and also owns a funerary monument at Abydos.

^a Prov 22:17–24:22

They'll be a mooring post for your tongue.

If you make your life with these in your heart,

You will find it a success;

IV.1 You will find my words a storehouse for life.

Your being will prosper upon earth.

Chapter 2

Beware of robbing a wretch,^b

5 Of attacking a cripple;

Don't stretch out your hand to touch an old man,

Nor open your mouth to an elder. Don't let yourself be sent on a mischievous errand.

Nor be friends with him who does it.

Don't raise an outcry against one who attacks you,

Nor answer him yourself.

He who does evil, the shore rejects him.

Its floodwater carries him away.
The northwind descends to end his hour.

15 It mingles with the thunderstorm.

The storm cloud is tall, the crocodiles are vicious.

You heated man, how are you now? He cries out, his voice reaches heaven, It is the Moon⁴ who declares his crime.

V.1 Steer, we will ferry the wicked,We do not act like his kind;Lift him up, give him your hand,Leave him <in> the hands of the god;

Fill his belly with bread of your own,That he be sated and weep.Another thing good in the heart of the god:

³ The meaning of \underline{t} 'i-r, which recurs in 15.13, is not clear and it has been variously rendered. See Grumach 1972:31.

To pause before speaking.

Chapter 3

Don't start a quarrel with a hotmouthed man,

Nor needle him with words.

Pause before a foe, bend before an attacker,

Sleep (on it) before speaking.

A storm that bursts like fire in straw,

Such is the heated man in his hour.
Withdraw from him, leave him alone,
The god knows how to answer him.
If you make your life with these
(words) in your heart,

Your children will observe them.

Chapter 4 c

As for the heated man in the temple,⁵ He is like a tree growing indoors; A moment lasts its growth of shoots. Its end comes about in the woodshed;

VI.5 It is floated far from its place,
The flame is its burial shroud.
The truly silent, who keeps apart,
He is like a tree grown in a meadow.
It greens, it doubles its yield,

It stands in front of its lord.Its fruit is sweet, its shade delightful,Its end comes in the garden.

Chapter 5

Do not falsify⁶ the temple rations,

Do not grasp and you'll find profit.
Do not remove a servant of the god,
So as to do favors to another.
Do not say: "Today is like tomorrow,"
How will this end?

VII.1 Comes tomorrow, today has vanished,

⁵ On this chapter see now Posener 1973:129–135.

^b Prov 22:22–23

⁴ The god Thoth.

^c Ps 1:3–4

⁶ The verb '*šg* recurs in 7.17, 18.12, and 18.15. I follow Griffith in taking it to mean "overlay," "falsify," "disguise."

The deep has become the water's edge. Crocodiles are bared, hippopotami stranded,

The fish crowded together.⁷

- Jackals are sated, birds are in feast,
 The fishnets have been drained.⁸
 But all the silent in the temple,
 They say: "Re's blessing is great."
 Cling to the silent, then you find life.
- 10 Your being will prosper upon earth.

Chapter 6

Do not move the markers on the borders of fields, ^d

Nor shift the position of the measuring-cord.

Do not be greedy for a cubit of land,

15 Nor encroach on the boundaries of a widow.

The trodden furrow worn down by time.

He who disguises it in the fields, When he has snared (it) by false oaths, He will be caught by the might of the Moon.

- VIII.1 Recognize him who does this on earth: He is an oppressor of the weak, A foe bent on destroying your being, The taking of life is in his eye.
- His house is an enemy to the town, His storage bins will be destroyed His wealth will be seized from his children's hands,

His possessions will be given to another.

Beware of destroying the borders of fields,

Lest a terror carry you away;One pleases god with the might of the lord

When one discerns the borders of fields.⁹

Desire your being to be sound, Beware of the Lord of All;

Do not erase another's furrow,It profits you to keep it sound.Plow your fields and you'll find what you need,

You'll receive bread from your threshing-floor.

Better is a bushel given you by the god,

- 20 Than five thousand through wrongdoing.
- IX.1 They stay not a day in bin and barn,They make no food for the beer jar,A moment is their stay in the granary,Comes morning they have vanished.
- 5 Better is poverty in the hand of the god,

Than wealth in the storehouse; Better is bread with a happy heart Than wealth with vexation.

Chapter 7

- Do not set your heart on wealth,
 There is no ignoring Fate and Destiny;
 Do not let your heart go straying,
 Every man comes to his hour.

 e Do not strain to seek increase,
- 15 What you have, let it suffice you.

 If riches come to you by theft,

 They will not stay the night with you.

 Comes day they are not in your house
 Their place is seen but they're not
 there;
- 20 Earth opened its mouth, leveled them, swallowed them.
- X.1 And made them sink into *dat*. They made a hole as big as their size,

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⁷ So with Grumach 1972:50.

⁸ The theme is the reversal of fortune; see the "Instruction of Any," text 1.46, n. 14 (above).

^d Prov 22:8: 23:10

⁹ Some translators take *wpt* as a participle referring to god: "He who determines the borders of fields." But then the meaning of the couplet is poor. I have followed Griffith.

e Prov 23:4-5

And sank into the netherworld; They made themselves wings like geese,

And flew away to the sky.^e
Do not rejoice in wealth from theft,
Nor complain of being poor.
If the leading archer presses forward,
His company abandons him;

10 The boat of the greedy is left (in) the mud.

While the bark of the silent sails with the Wind.

You shall pray to the Aten when he rises,

Saying: "Grant me well-being and health";

He will give you your needs for this life.

15 And you will be safe from fear.

Chapter 8

Set your goodness before people, Then you are greeted by all; One welcomes the Uraeus,

20 One spits upon Apopis. Guard your tongue from harmful speech,

XI.1 Then you will be loved by others.
You will find your place in the hor

You will find your place in the house of god,

You will share in the offerings of your lord.

When you're revered and your coffin conceals you

5 You will be safe from the power of god. 10

Do not shout "crime" against a man, When the cause of (his) flight is hidden.

Whether you hear something good or evil,

Do it outside where it is not heard.

10 Put the good remark on your tongue,

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While the bad is concealed in your belly.

Chapter 9

Do not befriend the heated man, Nor approach him for conversation.

15 Keep your tongue from answering your superior,

And take care not to insult him. Let him not cast his speech to catch you,

Nor give free rein to your answer. Converse with a man of your own measure,

20 And take care not to offend him.

XII.1 Swift is the speech of one who is angered,

More than wind over water.

He tears down, he builds up with his tongue,

When he makes his hurtful speech.

5 He gives an answer worthy of a beating,

For its weight is harm. He hauls freight like all the world, But his load is falsehood.

He is the ferry-man of snaring words,

He goes and comes with quarrels.
When he eats and drinks inside,
His answer is (heard) outside.
The day he is charged with his crime is misfortune for his children.

15 If only Khnum came to him,
The Potter to the heated man,
So as to knead the faulty heart.
He is like a young wolf in the
farmyard,

He turns one eye against the other,

XIII.1 He causes brothers to quarrel.

He runs before every wind like clouds,
He dims the radiance of the sun;
He flips his tail like the crocodile's
young,

5 He draws himself up so as to strike.

e Prov 23:4–5

^{10 &}quot;Power" here in the sense of "wrath."

^f Prov 23:24–25

His lips are sweet, his tongue is bitter, A fire burns in his belly. Don't leap to join such a one, Lest a terror carry you away.

Chapter 10

Don't force yourself to greet the heated man

For then you injure your own heart; Do not say "greetings" to him falsely, While there is terror in your belly.

Do not speak falsely to a man,
The god abhors it;

Do not sever your heart from your tongue,

That all your strivings may succeed. You will be weighty before the others,

XIV.1 And secure in the hand of the god. God hates the falsifier of words, He greatly abhors the dissembler.

Chapter 11

Do not covet a poor man's goods, Nor hunger for his bread;

A poor man's goods are a block in the throat,

It makes the gullet vomit.

He who makes gain by lying oaths,

His heart is misled by his belly;
 Where there is fraud success is feeble,
 The bad spoils the good.¹¹

You will be guilty before your superior,

And confused in your account;

15 Your pleas will be answered by a curse,

Your prostrations by a beating.

The big mouthful of bread — you swallow, you vomit it,

And you are emptied of your gain.^g

Observe the overseer¹² of the poor,

XV.1 When the stick attains him;
All his people are bound in chains,
And he is led to the executioner.
If you are released before your
superior,

5 You are yet hateful to your subordinates;

Steer away from the poor man on the road.

Look at him and keep clear of his goods.

Chapter 12

Do not desire a noble's wealth,

Nor make free with a big mouthful of bread;

If he sets you to manage his property, Shun his, and yours will prosper. Do not converse¹³ with a heated man, So as to befriend a hostile man.

If you are sent to transport straw,Stay away from its container.If a man is observed on a fraudulent errand,

He will not be sent on another occasion.

Chapter 13

Do not cheat a man <through> pen on scroll,

The god abhors it;

XVI.1 Do not bear witness with false words, So as to brush aside a man by your tongue.

> Do not assess a man who has nothing, And thus falsify your pen.

5 If you find a large debt against a poor man.

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Assuming wh to be transitive. The usual rendering, "good and bad fail," is not satisfactory.

^g Prov 23:6–8

¹² The meaning of *hy* is not well established; the word recurs in 24.17 where the meaning "overseer," or "superior," is suitable. But here a negative connotation such as "oppressor" seems called for.

¹³ See note 3.

Make it into three parts;
Forgive two, let one stand,
You will find it a path of life.
After sleep, when you wake in the
morning,

10 You will find it as good news.

Better is praise with the love of men
Than wealth in the storehouse;
Better is bread with a happy heart
Than wealth with vexation.

15 *Chapter 14*

Do not recall yourself to a man,
Nor strain to seek his hand.
If he says to you: "Here is a gift.
No have-not will refuse it," 14
Don't blink at him, nor bow your head,
Nor turn aside your gaze.
Salute him with your mouth, say,
"Greetings,"

XVII.1 He will desist, and you succeed.

Do not rebuff him in his approach,
Another time he'll be taken away.

Chapter 15

Do the good and you will prosper,
Do not dip your pen to injure a man.
The finger of the scribe is the beak of
the Ibis,

Beyere of brushing it saids

Beware of brushing it aside. The Ape dwells in the House of Khmun, 15

His eye encircles the Two Lands;When he sees one who cheats with his finger,

He carries his livelihood off in the flood.

The verb b " (or b") recurs in 21.2, 27.1, and 27.5. The meaning assigned in Wb. 1:446 "beachten, berücksichtigen," does not appear suitable here. The four occurrences in Amenemope suggest "rebuff," "refuse," as well as "pass up," "let pass."

¹⁵ The ibis and the ape are the images or Thoth.

The scribe who cheats with his finger, His son will not be enrolled.

15 If you make your life with these (words) in your heart,
Your children will observe them.

Chapter 16

Do not move the scales nor alter the weights,

Nor diminish the fractions of the measure:

Do not desire a measure of the fields,Nor neglect those of the treasury.The Ape sits by the balance,

XVIII.1 His heart is in the plummet; Where is a god as great as Thoth, Who invented these things and made them?

Do not make for yourself deficient weights,

They are rich in grief through the might of god.
If you see someone who cheats,
Keep your distance from him.
Do not covet copper,
Disdain beautiful linen;

What good is one dressed in finery, If he cheats before the god? Faience disguised as gold, Comes day, it turns to lead.

Chapter 17

15 Beware of disguising the measure, So as to falsify its fractions; Do not force it to overflow, Nor let its belly be empty. Measure according to its true size,

Your hand clearing exactly.Do not make a bushel of twice its size,For then you are headed for the abyss.The bushel is the Eye of Re,

XIX.1 It abhors him who trims;
A measurer who indulges in cheating,
His Eye seals (the verdict) against him.
Do not accept a farmer's dues

5 And then assess him so as to injure him;

Do not conspire with the measurer, So as to defraud the share of the Residence.

Greater is the might of the threshing floor

Than an oath by the great throne.

10 *Chapter 18*

Do not lie down in fear of tomorrow: "Comes day, how will tomorrow be?" Man ignores how tomorrow will be; God is ever in his perfection,

- 15 Man is ever in his failure. 16
 The words men say are one thing,
 The deeds of the god are another.
 Do not say: "I have done no wrong,"
 And then strain to seek a quarrel;
- The wrong belongs to the god,
 He seals (the verdict) with his finger.
 There is no perfection before the god,
 But there is failure before him;¹⁷
- XX.1 If one strains to seek perfection, In a moment he has marred it. Keep firm your heart, steady your heart,
- Do not steer with your tongue;

 If a man's tongue is the boat's rudder,
 The Lord of All is yet its pilot.

Chapter 19

Do not go to court before an official In order to falsify your words;

Do not vacillate in your answers,When your witnesses accuse.Do not strain <with> oaths by your lord,

¹⁶ Lit., "the god," and "the man." Amenemope says "god" and "the god," interchangeably. The presence or absence of the definite article seems to be a matter of style.

¹⁷ I emend *mn* to *wn*; otherwise the sentence contradicts all that has gone before.

<With> speeches at the hearing; Tell the truth before the official,

Lest he lay a hand on you.
If another day you come before him,
He will incline to all you say;
He will relate your speech to the
Council of Thirty,
It will be observed on another

20 Chapter 20

occasion.

Do not confound a man in the law court,

In order to brush aside one who is right.

XXI.1 Do not incline to the well–dressed man.

And rebuff the one in rags.

Don't accept the gift of a powerful man,

And deprive the weak for his sake.

- Maat is a great gift of god,
 He gives it to whom he wishes.
 The might of him who resembles him,
 It saves the poor from his tormentor.
 Do not make for yourself false documents,
- They are a deadly provocation; They (mean) the great restraining oath, 18

They (mean) a hearing by the herald. Don't falsify the oracles in the scrolls, ¹⁹

And thus disturb the plans of god;

Don't use for yourself the might of god,

As if there were no Fate and Destiny. Hand over property to its owners, Thus do you seek life for yourself; Don't raise your desire in their house,

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¹⁸ On the oath $s\underline{d}f$ ' tr see Baer 1964:179–180.

¹⁹ The passage was explained by Posener 1963a.

20 Or your bones belong to the execution-block.

Chapter 21

XXII.1 Do not say: "Find me a strong superior,

For a man in your town has injured me";

Do not say: "Find me a protector, For one who hates me has injured me."

5 Indeed you do not know the plans of god,

And should not weep for tomorrow; Settle in the arms of the god, Your silence will overthrow them.²⁰ The crocodile that makes no sound,²¹

10 Dread of it is ancient.

Do not empty your belly to everyone, And thus destroy respect of you; Broadcast not your words to others, Nor join with one who bares his heart.

15 Better is one whose speech is in his belly

Than he who tells it to cause harm. One does not run to reach success, One does not move to spoil it.

Chapter 22

Do not provoke your adversary, So as to <make> him tell his thoughts; Do not leap to come before him,

XXIII.1 When you do not see his doings.
First gain insight from his answer,
Then keep still and you'll succeed.
Leave it to him to empty his belly,

Know how to sleep, he'll be found out. Grasp his legs, 22 do not harm him, Be wary of him, do not ignore him. Indeed you do not know the plans of god,

And should not weep for tomorrow;

²¹ On this passage see Posener 1968.

Settle in the arms of the god, Your silence will overthrow them.

Chapter 23

Do not eat in the presence of an official

And then set your mouth before <him>;

15 If you are sated pretend to chew,
Content yourself with your saliva.²³
Look at the bowl that is before you,
And let it serve your needs.
An official is great in his office,

20 As a well is rich in drawings of water.

Chapter 24

Do not listen to an official's reply indoors

XXIV.1 In order to repeat it to another outside.

Do not let your word be carried outside,

Lest your heart be aggrieved. The heart of man is a gift²⁴ of god,

5 Beware of neglecting it.
The man at the side of an official,
His name should not be known.

Chapter 25

Do not laugh at a blind man, Nor tease a dwarf,²⁵

Nor cause hardship for the lame.

Don't tease a man who is in the hand of the god, ²⁶

Nor be angry with him for his failings. Man is clay and straw,

 $^{^{20}}$ The adversaries.

²² This meaning does not suit; I suspect a corruption.

²³ So following Polotsky 1973:140 n. 3.

²⁴ The Turin tablet has "gift" instead of the "nose" of the British Museum papyrus; see Posener 1966b:61–62.

²⁵ In the British Museum papyrus the two sentences appear as a single line but on the Turin tablet as two lines.

²⁶ Here in the special meaning of one who is ill or insane.

The god is his builder.

He tears down, he builds up daily,
He makes a thousand poor by his will,
He makes a thousand men into chiefs,
When he is in his hour of life.²⁷
Happy is he who reaches the west,

20 When he is safe in the hand of the god.

Chapter 26

Do not sit down in the beer-house
XXV.1 In order to join one greater than you,
Be he a youth great through his office,
Or be he an elder through birth.
Befriend a man of your own measure,

5 Re is helpful from afar.

If you see one greater than you outdoors,

Walk behind him respectfully; Give a hand to an elder sated with beer,

Respect him as his children would.

The arm is not hurt by being bared, 28

The back is not broken by bending it.

A man does not lose by speaking sweetly,

Nor does he gain if his speech bristles. The pilot who sees from afar,

15 He will not wreck his boat.

Chapter 27

Do not revile one older than you, He has seen Re before you; Let <him> not report you to the Aten at his rising,

20 Saying: "A youth has reviled an old man."

Very painful before Pre XXVI.1 Is a youth who reviles an elder.

²⁷ Volten (1963:88) explained this to mean that the sun-god acts through the gods who are assigned to each hour of the day.

Let him beat you while your hand is on your chest,

Let him revile you while you are silent;

If next day you come before him,

He will give you food in plenty. A dog's food is from its master, It barks to him who gives it.

Chapter 28

5

Do not pounce on a widow when you find her in the fields²⁹

10 And then fail to be patient with her reply.

Do not refuse your oil jar to a stranger, Double it before your brothers. God prefers him who honors the poor To him who worships the wealthy.

Chapter 29

Do not prevent people from crossing the river,

If you stride freely in the ferry.³⁰
When you are given an oar in the

When you are given an oar in the midst of the deep,

Bend your arms and take it.

20 It is no crime before the god,

XXVII.1 If the passenger is not passed up 31 Don't make yourself a ferry on the river

And then strain to seek its fare; Take the fare from him who is wealthy,

5 And let pass him who is poor.

Chapter 30

Look to these thirty chapters, h

²⁸ I.e., stretching the arm out of the sleeve in a gesture of greeting. The same remark occurs in "Ptahhotep," line 445/448.

²⁹ I.e., when you find her gleaning in fields not her own.

 ³⁰ I.e., when there is ample room in the ferry.
 31 It is not clear whether *hwty* means

[&]quot;passenger" or "sailor"; in any case, the meaning is that the passenger should help with the rowing if asked to do so.

^h Prov 22:20–21

They inform, they educate;
They are the foremost of all books,

They make the ignorant wise.

If they are read to the ignorant,
He is cleansed through them.

Be filled with them, put them in your heart,
And become a man who expounds them,

One who expounds as a teacher.

The scribe who is skilled in his office, He is found worthy to be a courtier.

Colophon

That is its end.

XXVIII.1 Written by Senu, son of the divine father Pemu.

ⁱ Prov 22:29