

The Negative Confession of the Scribe

by Dennis Saleh

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN religious teachings instructed that upon death, the soul traversed a fearsome underworld landscape to reach the throne of the Lord Osiris, who sat in judgment, with a tribunal of 42 assayer gods, in the Hall of Maati. Here, the deceased's heart was weighed, and as a part of the ceremony, the departed one was allowed to enter into the accounting a list of 42 transgressions he had not committed, his negative confession.

I did not write to change the instructions
 I did not write at the hour of prayer
 I did not write while looking away

I did not write in the name of another, but in my own
 I did not write in the manner of another
 I did not write that which was already written

I did not write when unclean, unclothed, in ill-health
 Nor when intoxicated, nor in grief, nor in misery
 Nor did I write upon sand, nor think to write upon water

I wrote no more words than needed, nor less than required
 I wrote no less than the tally, nor more than the balance
 I neither abbreviated nor omitted

I have undone no word, misstated no glyph
 I have written no name backwards, nor upside-down
 I have not set one word against another in contradiction

I have not written apologies, mitigations, extenuations
 I have not written obfuscation, confusion, calamity
 I have not written words in vain, in disrespect, in contempt

Neither have I written flattery, cajolery, conspiracy
 Neither have I written sham, slur, nor claims upon others
 Nor have I written with thought of more, for gain, nor
 praise

Neither have I written down secrets, nor in secret inks
 Nor have I written covertly, clandestinely, closeted
 Nor have I written out of envy, to harm, nor bring disrepute

I have not written solicitations to the harlot
 Nor ministrations to the false priest
 Nor mendacity to the tax collector

I have not written that which is untrue
 Nor without meaning, nor without merit
 Nor have I written untrue oaths, nor false utterances

I have not changed truth to be otherwise
I have not written what I did not know
I have lessened no meaning, nor compromised any

I have written no errors, I am free of blame, I am sound
Neither have I written without prayer, nor without thanks
Neither have I written against the gods

I have not been other than a friend to words and writing
I have not written but in the service of correctness
I have raised no hand other than to take a pen

I have not ceased from writing
I have not ceased from writing
I have not ceased from writing