

Axioms of Kemet

Instructions for Today from Ancient Egypt

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CONTENTS

Dedication **6**

Preface **6**

Introduction **7**

Instruction of Merikare **9**

Instruction of Hardedef **17**

Instruction of Amenemope **18**

Advise to the Youthful **34**

Instruction of Ptah-Hotep **35**

Instruction of Kagemni **43**

Songs of the Birdcatcher's Daughter **44**

Instruction of Pepi **45**

Prophecy of Neferty **47**

Testament of Amenemhat **48**

Hymn to the Nile **49**

The Leiden Hymns **50**

Prayers of Pahery II **53**

The Harper's Song **54**

The Eloquent Farmer **56**

Chronology: Ancient Kemet **58**

Glossary **59**

Bibliography **61**

About the Editor **63**

Dedication I

This work is dedicated to people and intuitions that promote peace, truth and justice.

Dedication II

My children: Akiba K. Zulu, Itibari M. Zulu, Jr., Togba K. Zulu, Kadiatou N. Zulu. My grandchildren: Avonte D. Webb, Ashanti K. Surrrell, and Simone F. Zulu.

Preface

This volume is a selected introductory literary interpretation of ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) literature organized in thematic sections based on literal translations of the Medu Neter into English, self-consciously organized to bring a new audience to the splendiferous wisdom of ancient Kemet.

Upon reading this anthology, one is encouraged to juxtapose the self-evident truths, ethics and moral questions of yesterday to the ethics and moral questions of today.

For those who have read my contribution to Kemetic thought in *Exploring the African Centered Paradigm*, this volume is a continuation of that process involving the placement of African thought and ideas at the center of human consciousness.

Introduction

This work (originally set for a book in print) highlights the self-evident and recognized truth of ancient Kemetic literature that place life in a contextual paradigm. Thus, in fifteen sections and 254 entries, one can obtain insight into some of the most important literature in history.

The central instructions in this collection are the *Instructions of Amenemope*, the *Instruction of Merikare* and the *Instructions of Amenempe* [100 entries], with the *Instruction of Ptah-Hotep*, representing perhaps the best moral instruction to survive antiquity passed from parent to child to facilitate peace and good governance.

The mission of this collection is to provide discourse for a progressive Kemetic axiology that can inform our reality as we place good values, respect, and key principles of human culture at the head of our consciousness.

I hope the good words presented herein will encourage you to approach Kemetic literature with a new excitement that will spark a full investigation into the dynamics of ancient Kemetic literature.

Peace and blessings,

Itibari M. Zulu
Senior Editor, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*

Axioms of Kemet...
truth and wisdom from ancient
Egypt,
instructing
today.

Instruction of Merikare

Royal instruction and testament attributed to Khety III (a.k.a. Kheti, Akhtoi) given to his son Merikare who ruled during the tenth dynasty of the first intermediate period (2130-2040 BCE) at Henen-nesut.

Justify yourself in the presence of God....

...a good disposition is heaven, but to defame the ill disposed is dangerous.

Be skillful in speech, that you may be strong

...the strength of the tongue and words are braver than all fighting....

...a wise person is a school for people of influence....

Copy your forefathers, for their work is carried out through knowledge, and endure in their writings.

...even an expert can become one who is instructed.

Do not be evil, for patience is good....

...make your lasting monuments in remembrance of your love.

...give thanks for your goodness, and your health will be good....

Respect the great; keep your people safe; consolidate your frontier and your patrolled area, for it is good to work for the future.

Show respect for life....

Wretched is a person who has bound the land for selfishness....

...the Lord of the Two Lands will live forever....

Make your influential leaders great, so they can execute good laws....

...one who is rich in house will not be one-sided, for they do not lack, and they own property....

Great is the great one whose great ones are great....

Speak truth in your house, so that people of great influence will respect you....

Do justice so that you may live long on earth. Calm the weeper, do not oppress the widow, and do not oust a person from their family property....

Beware of punishing wrongfully; do not kill, for it will not profit you....

The soul comes to the place it knows, and it will not overstep the ways of the past; no magic can oppose it, and it will reach those who give it water.

Do not put your trust in length of years, for some regard a lifetime, as an hour....

...a person survives after death, and past deeds are laid before the person in a heap.

Existence yonder is eternal, and one who complains of it is a fool, but for those who attain it, they will be like a god yonder, striding forward like the Lords of eternity.

Multiply your opponents as neighbors and see your town full of newly settled folk.

Make your influential leaders great, promote your warriors, increase the rising generation of your retainers, equip them with knowledge, established lands, and endow the cattle.

Do not distinguish the son of a person of rank from a commoner, but take a person as a friend because of their actions, so that every craft may be preformed....

Construct a fine monument to honor God, for whoever does it, their name will be remembered.

...be discreet concerning the mysteries, enter into the sanctuary quietly, eat your bread in the temple, richly provide for the altars, increase your revenues, and add to the daily offerings, for it is a profitable matter for whoever does it....

...maintain your monuments in proportion to your wealth, for a single day gives to eternity, an hour does well for the future, and God is aware of all who serve.

Do not destroy ancient buildings with destruction....

...it is good to act on behalf of posterity.

Be kind to those who are weak, and satisfy yourself with your own bread and drink.

Granite comes to you without hindrance; so do not destroy someone else's monuments.

Be inactive about the violent person who destroys altars, for God will attack those who rebel against the temple.

The soul goes to the place it knows, and does not stray on yesterday's road.

Beautify your mansion in the West; embellish your place in the necropolis with straightforwardness and just dealing....

...more acceptable is the character of the straightforward person than the ox of a wrongdoer.

...God is aware of whoever serves....

Provide for the people --- the cattle of God, for heaven and earth were made at their desire.

...God knows every name.

Instruct yourself, so that you may rise up....

...do not kill anyone who approaches you, but favor him or her, for God knows them.

Instill your love into the entire world, for a good character is remembered....

Instruction of Hardedef

Hardedef (a.k.a. Hardjedef) was one of the important men (also a prince) of wisdom and calm judgement of the fifth dynasty; his teachings were famous in antiquity. The instruction is brief; however, it is one of the earliest preserved instructions.

Find fault with yourself, before another person does.

If you want excellence, establish a household with a strong wife, and children.

Beautify your house, and make excellence your place.

Although death is bitter, life is exalted, and the house of death is for life.

Instruction of Amenemope

The *Instruction of Amenempe* was compiled about 1100 B.C.E. with the promising heading of *Beginning of the Teaching for Clearing the Mind; Instruction of the Ignorant and for Learning*.

The *Instruction of Amenempe* represents the beginning of an instruction for life (a guide for well being) in thirty chapters outlining the principles of official procedure, and the duties of the courtiers.

The Instruction informs one how to refute an accusation, how to reply to an accusation, and how to set straight paths in life.

The Instruction can assist one to: prosper on earth, settle their heart in a chapel, stay clear of evil, save themselves from the talk of others, and how to become a person who is respected because of good speech.

The Instruction ask one to take time to listen to what is being said, give their mind to interpretation because it will be profitable (when put in the heart) as it rest in the shrine of their insides and remember that *The Instruction* act as a lock in the heart, and when a storm of words come, one will be ready to articulate.

The Instruction say that should one spend a lifetime with *The Instruction* in the heart, they will find good fortune, discover words to be a treasure house of life, and their body will flourish upon earth.

The concluding section asks one to remember the proceeding section, because it pleases and instruct, and is the foremost of all books that purify the ignorant. Thus, the books should be interpreted and explained by a teacher or a scribe who is experienced, and finds self-worth in being an attendant at a royal palace.

Beware of stealing from a miserable person, and raging against a cripple.

Do not stretch out your hand to touch an elder, nor snip at his or her words.

Don't let yourself be involved in a fraudulent business....

Do not get tired because of being interfered with, or of answering a question on your own.

...stop and think before speaking.

*Do not get into a quarrel with an argumentative person,
or incite with words....*

*Proceed cautiously before an opponent, and give way to
an adversary....*

*Sleep on a decision before speaking... for a storm come
forth like fire in hay....*

*The hotheaded person in the temple is like a tree grown
indoors, it can only put forth roots for a moment....*

*The truly temperate person sets self apart, like a tree
grown in a sunlit field that flourishes and doubles its
yield as it stands with sweet fruit and a pleasant shade to
reach its end as a statue.*

Do not take the shares of the temple by violence....

Do not be greedy, you will soon find overabundance....

Do not take a temple servant in order to acquire the property of another....

Do not say today is the same as tomorrow, or how matters will come to pass? When tomorrow comes, today is past....

Fill yourself with silence, and you will find life, and your body will flourish....

Do not displace the surveyor's marker on the boundaries of the arable land, nor alter the position of the measuring line....

Do not be greedy for a plot of land....

Take care not to topple over the boundary marks of the arable land, not fearing that you will be brought to justice....

...to make yourself prosper, take care of the Lord of all....

...do not trample on the land of someone else, for his or her good order will be profitable for you.

...plough the fields, and you will find whatever you need....

Better is the bushel that God gives you than five thousand deceitfully gotten....

Better is poverty in the hand of God than riches in the storehouse....

Better is bread when the mind is at ease than riches with anxiety.

Do not set your heart on seeking riches, for there is no one who can ignore destiny and fortune....

Do not set your thoughts on external matters, for every person there is an appointed time.

Do not exert yourself to seek excess, and your wealth will prosper....

If riches come to you by theft, they will not spend the night with you. As soon as day breaks, they will not be in your household....

Do not be pleased with yourself with riches acquired through robbery....

When you rise, you will offer to God and say, "Grant me prosperity and health", and you will be given the necessities for life, and you will be safe....

Set your good deeds throughout the world so you may greet everyone....

Keep your tongue safe from words of detraction, and you will be loved among the people....

Do not accuse a person, when the news of an escape is concealed.

Do not fraternize with a hot-tempered person, nor approach one to converse.

When a person's heart is upset, words travel faster than wind and rain.

Do not address your intemperate friend in unrighteousness....

Do not converse falsely with a person, for it is the abomination of God.

Do not separate your mind from your tongue....

*You will be important before others when you are secure
in the hand of God.*

*Do not covet the property of a dependent, nor hunger for
his or her bread....*

Do not covet the property of an official....

...do not fill your mouth with food, extravagantly....

*Do not deal with an intemperate person, nor associate
yourself with a disloyal party.*

Do not witness a false statement....

*Do not enroll someone who has nothing, nor make your
pen be false.*

If you find a large debt against a poor person, divide it into three parts. Release two of them and let one remain. Make those actions a path of life and you will pass the night in sound sleep, and in the morning, you will find good news.

Better it is to be praised as one who is loved, than one who is the owner of a storehouse of wealth....

Better is bread when the mind is at ease, than riches with troubles.

Do not exert yourself or pay attention to a person who says, "take a bribe"....

Do well, and you will attain influence.

Do not unbalance the scale, make the weights false or diminish the fractions of the grain measure....

If you see someone cheating at a distance, you must pass him or her by.

Do not be greedy for copper or adore fine clothes; what good is one cloaked in fine linen, when they cheat before God.

Beware of robbing the grain measure to falsify its fractions....

Do not act wrongfully through force....

Do not enter into a secret agreement for a deceitful or fraudulent purpose with a grain measurer, nor play with the seed allotment....

Do not go to bed fearing tomorrow, for when daybreaks, what is tomorrow?

God is success....

The words that people say pass on one side, and the things that God does pass on the other side.

Do not say, "I am without fault," nor try to seek trouble.

Be strong in your heart, make your mind firm, and do not steer with your tongue....

The tongue of a person is the steering oar of a boat, and God is the pilot.

Do not enter the council chamber in the presence of a justice of the peace and then falsify your speech.

Do not go up and down with your accusation when your witnesses stand readied.

Tell the truth before the justice of the peace; for fear that they may gain power over your body....

Do not corrupt people of the law, nor put aside the just person....

Take not the gift of the strong, nor repress the weak for the strong.

Justice is a wonderful gift of God.

Do not falsify the oracles on a papyrus and thereby alter the designs of God.

Do not claim to yourself the might of God as if destiny and fortune do not exist.

Hand property over to its rightful owners, and seek a life for yourself....

Do not say, I have found a strong protector and now I can challenge a person in my town.

Do not say, I have found an active intermediary, and now I can challenge whom I hate.

Empty not your soul to everybody....

Do not diminish your importance....

Do not circulate your words to others or fraternize with one who is too candid.

Better is a person whose knowledge is inside than one who talks to their disadvantage.

One cannot create, only to destroy....

You cannot know the plans of God or perceive tomorrow.

Sit yourself at the hands of God, and your tranquility will cause them to open.

If you are satisfied with false words, enjoy yourself with your saliva, and look at the cup in front of you to suffice your need.

If a noble is important in office, it is like the abundance of a well when it is drawn.

Do not listen to the accusation of an official indoors, and then repeat it to another outside.

Do not jeer at a blind person nor tease a dwarf....

Do not taunt a person who is in the hand of God, nor scowl if there are errors.

People are clay and straw, and God is the potter....

How fortunate is the person who reaches the West, and safe in the hand of God.

...take as a friend for yourself someone compatible....

When you see someone greater than you, and attendants following the person, respect them.

The strong arm is not weakened when it is uncovered....

The back is not broken when one bends it....

Better is the poor person who speaks sweet words, than the rich person who speaks harshly.

A pilot who sees into the distance will not let a ship capsize.

Do not blame someone older than you disrespectfully, for they have seen the sun before you....

As a young person, respect the elder, let him or her discipline you, and let them find fault with you while you are quiet. Then when you come before the elder in the morning, you will receive bread freely.

God loves those who care for the poor....

Do not turn people away from crossing the river when you have room in your ferryboat....

If a steering oar is given you in the midst of the deep waters, bend back your hands to take it up.

Advise to the Youthful

Excerpts from the Papyrus Anastasi V, 8, 1-9, 1 via translation and commentary by Ricardo Caminos (1954) in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (Simpson, 1973, p.344).

Do not give your heart to pleasures....

...converse with those more knowledgeable than you....

Exercise the office of a judicial official, for it will be an advantage in old age.

Persevere in action daily, and you will gain mastery....

Do not spend a day in idleness....

Instruction of Ptah-Hotep

Ptah-Hotep (a.k.a. Ptahhotep) was a man of wisdom and calm understanding, a high officer-official to King Izezi (2380-2342 BCE) of dynasty five, and the author of the oldest morally instructive text to survive complete from ancient Kemet.

The precepts of Ptah-Hotep represents the beginning of the arrangement of the good sayings spoken by the noble Lord, the divine father, the beloved of Ptah, and the son of the King to the first-born of Ptah-Hotep to instruct the ignorant in the knowledge of the arguments of good sayings. The sayings (messages) are organized based on the idea that it is profitable for the person who hears them and a loss to those that transgress them.

Be not arrogant because of what you know, and deal with the ignorant as with the learned....

...good words are more difficult to find than an emerald....

If you as a leader decide on the conduct of a great number of people, seek the most perfect manner of making your decisions so that your conduct may be without blame or fault.

Justice is great, invariable, and assured....

To throw obstacles in the way of the law is to open the way for violence.

The limitations of justice are invariable....

... provide sustenance for those in the lap of peace....

...one who perverts trustfulness in order to repeat only what produce pleasure in the words of every person, great or small, is detestable.

...do not boast in the house of your neighbors....

Be active during the time of your existence, and do no more than is commanded.

Do not lose the daily opportunity of increasing the qualities of your house.

Activity produces riches, and riches do not endure when it slackens.

If you are wise, bring up a son who will be pleasing to Ptah. If he conforms his conduct to your way and occupies himself with your affairs, as is right, do to him all the good you can; he is your son, a person attached to you whom your own self has begotten.

Give orders without hesitation to those who do wrong....

Keep an eye on those who enter announcing a secret....

Declare your line of conduct without hesitation....

If you are a leader setting forward your plans ... perform perfect actions that posterity may remember....

If you are a leader of peace, listen to the discourse of the petitioner.

The way to obtain a clear explanation is to listen with kindness.

If you desire to excite respect within the house you enter ... keep yourself from making advances to a woman, for there is nothing good in so doing.

If you desire your conduct to be good and preserved from all evil, keep yourself from every attack of bad humor.

Be not of an irritable temper in regard to your neighbors; better is a compliment that displeases, than rudeness.

If you are wise, look after your house; love your wife without alloy. Fill her stomach, clothe her back; these are the gifts to be bestowed on her person. Caress her, fulfil her desires during the time of her existence; it is a kindness that does honor to its possessor. Be not brutal; tact will influence her better than violence; . . . behold to what she aspires, what she aims, and what she regards. Open your arms for her, respond to her arms; call her, and display to her, your love.

If you are wise, sitting in the council of your Lord, direct your thought toward the wise.

To speak in the council is an art, and speech is criticized more than any other labor....

If you are powerful, respect knowledge and the calmness of language.

Command only to direct....

Let not your heart be proud and vain to the point of arrogance, nor let it be mean.

...the gift of affection is worth more than the provisions that cover your back.

Let your love pass into the heart of those who love you....

If you have become great after having been little ... know how not to take advantage of the fact....

Do not plunder the house of your neighbors, or seize goods beside you.

If you aim at polished manners, call not one whom you accost.

Converse with a person, but don't annoy the person.

Enter a discussion only after leaving time to saturate the mind with the subject of conversation.

If ignorance displays itself, and gives you all opportunity to disgrace, treat the person with courtesy, and proceed not to drive one into a corner....

Let your appearance be cheerful during the time of your existence.

Know those who are faithful to you when you are in low estate.

The wise is satisfied by knowledge....

The son who accepts the instruction of his father will grow old....

When a son receives the instruction of his father there is no error in his plans.

Train your son to be a teachable man....

...teach according to the words of the wise.

Let your thoughts be abundant....

Instruction of Kagemni

Kagemni was a high official of fourth dynasty king Snofru (2613-2589), and the father of Khufu. His writings are contained in the Papyrus Prisse at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, France.

The cautious person flourishes, and the exact person is praised....

...the innermost chambers are opened to one of silence.

...gluttony is an abomination....

...water quenches the thirst, and a mouthful of melon supports the heart.

Songs of the Birdcatcher's Daughter

Excerpts from the second cycle of the Papyrus Harris 500 (circa 1280 B.C.E., New Kingdom) in the British Museum, London.

Balance my love with your caring.

Delight me with the air of your life giving....

Instruction of Pepi

The Instruction of Pepi (2246-2152, BCE) aims to teach the duties and perquisites of a professional writer with directions on how to avoid things that would interfere with learning and proper public conduct befitting a public official.

...give yourself whole-heartedly to learning....

Nothing is as valuable as education....

Be serious and act with dignity.

Do not broadcast words that should be secret....

... speak no hasty words while sitting with a person who is belligerent.

Do not speak falsely of your background.

...avoid unguarded speech.

...it is good to study many things so you may learn the wisdom of the great.

...you can educate children as you walk in the footsteps of the wise.

Step out on the path of learning--- the friends of humankind will accompany you.

Praise God for your father and mother for placing you and your children's children on the pathway of the everlasting.

Prophecy of Neferty

The Prophecy of Neferty (a.k.a. Neferti) tells of his summons to the court of King Snefru of the fourth dynasty to entertain via good speech. When asked to speak of the future, Neferty eloquently prophesies the fall and rise of the nation.

Do not hold back! Set it before your eyes that you may stand against what rises in your presence.

Justice shall rise to her throne....

Testament of Amenemhat

The instructions of a King to his son that dates to the reigns of Amenemhat I and Senusert I of the twelfth dynasty in the first half of the twentieth century BCE.

...harvest an abundance of good fortune.

...be aware of those who can't prove themselves and are not true in their heart....

...advance a person of little means, like a person of means....

...good never comes to one without truth....

...shield the wisdom of an upright heart....

Hymn to the Nile

Sayings from the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 BCE), attributed to Kherty in the twelfth dynasty. The persons of intellect and understanding in the New Kingdom (1551-1080 BCE) praised these writings as the best of all Kemetic writing.

Each eye shines with moisture by the means of God, and all are rich through flooding kindness.

God illumines those in darkness and light their way....

All writing belongs to the word of God....

Came back to Egypt, and bring your benediction of peace...

One cannot eat precious stone and be nourished, he or she must first have food, and then, prosperity will follow.

The Leiden Hymns

Excerpts from hymns (a.k.a. *The Leiden Hymns to Amun and Thebes*) from the fifty-second year of the reign of Ramesses II (1279-1213 BCE) [a.k.a. Ramses II] during the New Kingdom that express the theology of ancient Kemet in 1238 (the hymns were named after a city in The Netherlands).

Each city stirs into life on the breath of an invisible God...

The sun ship of infinite journeys sails on course, through the sky, with a cheering crew....

God is a master craftsman, yet none can draw the lines of God's plan.

God is skilled in the intricate ways of the craftsman, and the first to fashion self into perfection.

God loosens the knot of suffering, tempers disease and cures without ointments...

God will save those loved, and walk with them though the underworld, to free them of debt....

...breezes are soft for one who calls upon God, for the call rescues the wind....

God is a God of mercy, and mild in dealings....

God protects what is good in the world, and is ready to take those that falter behind....

God is final, an ineffable spirit....

God's word can kill or perpetuate, for all unfold by means of God's word....

The mind of God is perfect....

*The appearance of God shines on humankind and
mirrors the sum of the world.*

Prayers of Pahery II

Pahery II was the treasurer and mayor of El-Kab and Esna who lived during the eighteenth dynasty. The inscriptions in his tomb provide a description of what life after death was thought to be like.

Your likeness is among those in heaven while you receive your offerings on earth.

Goodness is yours when you perform it....

The Harper's Song

The Harper's Song (a.k.a. The Harper's Song for Inherkhway) outlines chants of a harp player-lyric poet that sat by the tomb of Inherkhway (circa 1160 BCE) and urged the dead and the living to live life with vigor and vitality.

Care for your works in the realm of God so your seat in the afterlife will be splendid.

...spend your days joyfully and do not be weary with living.

Do not allow you heart to be troubled during your sojourn on earth....

... seize the day as it passes.

Do not grieve, whatever problems come, let sweet music play before you....

Be an upright person, a just and true person, a patient and kind person, a person content with life, a person who can rejoice and not speak evil.

Let your heart be drunk on the gift of Day until the day comes when you anchor.

The Eloquent Farmer

These excerpts purports to depict events during the reign of King Khety II of dynasty ten (2050 BCE) when a farmer is robbed by a bureaucrat. During the trial of the bureaucrat, the passionate oratory of the farmer was recorded.

The greedy person will come to no good, his or her seeming triumphs are only but moral failure.

Do whatever opposes injustice.

Do whatever opposes deceit.

Do justice for the Lord of justice.

...when good is truly good, it is priceless.

... justice is forever....

*Speak justice, do justice, for it is powerful, far-reaching,
and it endures.*

*There can never be an excess of high standards, nor
should there ever be a mean act to reach the humblest
inhabitant of the universe.*

Chronology: Ancient Kemet

Early Period

Dynasty 1-2 circa 3030-2665 BCE

Old Kingdom

Dynasty 3-6 circa 2665-2155 BCE

First Intermediate Period

Dynasty 7-10 circa 2155-2040 BCE

Middle Kingdom

Dynasty 11-12 circa 2040-1650 BCE

Second Intermediate Period

Dynasty 13-17 circa 1650-1551 BCE

New Kingdom

Dynasty 18-20 circa 1551-1080 BCE

Third Intermediate Period

Dynasty 21-24 circa 1080-655 BCE

Late Kingdom

Dynasty 25-30 circa 664-332 BCE

Glossary

Axiom: a self-evident truth; universally accepted principle or rule.

BCE: Before the Common Era, Before the Christian Era.

Dynasty: a succession of officials from the same family.

Kemet [a.k.a., KMT, The Black Land, Ta-Merry]: the ancient name of Egypt.

Lord of Justice (a.k.a., Ma'at or Maat): a phrase used to characterize the attributes of justice, truth, order, righteousness, goodness, balance, propriety, reciprocity, and harmony.

Lord of the Two Lands: a reference to the king of Kemet who ruled in the north and south.

Medu Neter [a.k.a., Mdw Ntr, Mdw Netcher, and Mdu Nter]: the Kemetic name for what is now widely known as the hieroglyphs via Greek influence.

Necropolis: a cemetery or burial ground of ancient Kemet, the name literally means 'city of the dead'.

Oracles: individuals who deliver wise pronouncements for the divine.

Osiris: a deity of ancient Kemet; the son of Geb (earth) and Nut (sky), a deity representing resurrection and how one can overcome death and enter a peaceful afterlife.

Papyrus: a plant used as a writing material in ancient Kemet.

Ptah: a creator deity of ancient Kemet that created the universe through thought and speech.

West, the: the symbolic name for the land of the dead in ancient Kemet wherein one cross the Nile to the west bank to participate in a good and vigorous afterlife.

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The above data was collected by the editor from the books listed below, with a slight editorial alternation to facilitate accuracy, and literary clarity.

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