



BRILL

ጌጋጎ ጌጋጎ *Mጌጎ* 'Maat', Death and the Afterlife

Abstract Ideal and/or Lived Practice?

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Abstract

This study sets out to demonstrate how in classical and traditional Afrikan thought one's afterlife on physical and spiritual planes is thought of as being commensurate with one's adherence to ጌጋጎ ጌጋጎ *Mጌጎ* 'Maat' in terms of lived practice rather than simply as an abstract ideal. As such, we will interrogate textual examples from classical ጌጋጎ ጌጋጎ *Kmt* 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' and attested lived examples from contemporary Afrika among the Kasena-Nankana with brief references to other cultural-linguistic groups. We demonstrate there is a shared understanding from the classical to the contemporary in terms of how one's body is treated and how one's experience in the afterlife is conceptualized. We find that conceptions of the afterlife have influenced how Afrikans engage ጌጋጎ ጌጋጎ *Mጌጎ* 'Maat' as praxis.

Keywords

Kemet – Afterlife – Indigenous – Maat – Reincarnation




 dd m3't ir m3't irr.k ni m m3't





speak Maat do Maat do.2MS DAT.1MS in Maat

'Speak Maat, do Maat. Do Maat towards/for me.'

(Bak, 2016, p. 422)

1 Introduction: Objective of Study and Definitions of M3't 'Maat'

The objective of this article is to argue that the body's preparation for the afterlife as well as how the afterlife is conceived of directly relate to the community's view of the person's adherence to  M3't 'Maat' as practice in classical and traditional Afrika. In other words, Ancestorship is communally determined.¹ This has implications for one's afterlife on both the physical and spiritual planes.

In contemporary times,  M3't 'Maat' is usually translated into English in the context of seven cardinal virtues: truth, justice, righteousness/propriety, harmony, balance, order, and reciprocity (Banner, 2021; Daniels et al., 2022; Durham, 2020; Kalonji, 2014; Karenga, 2003; Martin, 2020; Psychologists, 2022; Swain, 2011). It is thus necessary to disambiguate what  M3't 'Maat' is from what  M3't 'Maat' is not (Aketema & Kambon, 2021; Kambon & Songsore, 2021; Kambon et al., 2021). In his seminal text entitled *Maat, the moral ideal in ancient Egypt: A study in classical African ethics*, Obenfo² Maulana Karenga (2003, p. 3) argues that the  M3't 'Maat' is best examined as a moral ideal stating:

The focus on the moral ideal rather than the assumed moral practice of ancient Egypt is done for several reasons. [... T]he ideal expressed in the literature is more readily accessible and saves one from problematic claims about practice which often are at best, only speculative and at worst prejudicial and reductive.

However, after engaging with a plethora of texts, in the same book, Karenga (2003, p. 132) later states:

Therefore in the Sebaitic tradition, **Maat is not the Truth or Justice as the abstract Ideal**, but is something one speaks and does, loves, wills and practices. When Intef, son of Sent (Sethe 1928b, 81.3–4) says "I am a listener who listens to Maat and ponders (*sw3w3*) it in his heart," he is

indeed contemplating Maat. But he is contemplating it not so much as an abstract Truth or ideal, but as an engaging moral practice. (**bold emphasis added**)

This latter articulation is in alignment with that of Obenfo Kamau Rashid (2020, p. 365), in his chapter “Maat As Liberatory Praxis,” which argues that:

The practice of Maat requires comprehensive systems that reinforce and defend Maat. It is not simply a philosophical idea, nor is it an idea that is simply an ethical value; it is a holistic paradigm, a totalizing social imperative.

𓄏𓄏𓄏 Mꜣꜥt ‘Maat’ as practice is also discussed by Martin (2008, p. 954) who intentionally “avoids the notion of an ideal” with regard to her discourse on Maat.

According to Martin (2008), as explained below, 𓄏𓄏𓄏 Mꜣꜥt ‘Maat’ serves three purposes: cosmological, philosophical and religious:

In its cosmological sense, Maat is the principle of order that informs the creation of the universe. In its religious sense, Maat is a goddess or neter[et] representing order or balance. Last, in its philosophical sense, Maat is a moral and ethical principle that all Egyptians were expected to embody in their daily actions toward family, community, nation, environment, and god. (p. 951).

The idea of 𓄏𓄏𓄏 Mꜣꜥt ‘Maat’ as multi-layered is consistent with Tâta Théophile Obenga’s (1990; 2004) assertion that:

La notion de maât est complexe et riche. Trois niveaux de compréhension s'imposent:

1. *Au plan universel, la notion de maât « exprime l'harmonie des éléments enfin établis à leur place ». C'est le Tout ordonné, le cosmos.*
2. *Dans le domaine politique, la notion de maât s'oppose à l'injustice. C'est au nom de la maât que Pharaon soumet les rebelles et domine les contrées étrangères.*
3. *Au niveau individuel, « la maât recouvre les règles concrètes du savoir-vivre et les principes moraux ». Se soumettre à ces règles et principes, c'est réaliser concrètement l'ordre universel en soi, vivre en harmonie avec le Tout ordonné. L'acte humain le mieux réussi, utile et convenable, est cosmologiquement circonscrit, comme le nom de Pharaon qui se trouve loti dans un cartouche, un cercle – cette parfaite figure géométrique qui représente le Soleil vivifiant. (Obenga, 1990, p. 158)*

Translation:

The concept of *Maat* is complex, multi-layered. To understand it, we need to examine it on three levels:

1. On the universal level, the concept of *Maat* “expresses the harmony of the elements as clearly established, each in its right place.” This is the concept of the ordered Whole, the cosmos.
2. On the political level, the concept of *Maat* works against injustice. It is in the name of *Maat* that the pharaoh subjugates rebels and dominates foreign lands.
3. On the individual level, “*Maat* embraces specific rules for living in concert with moral principles.” Whoever lives according to these rules and principles achieves universal order in his or her own life, in practical terms, and lives in harmony with the ordered Whole. (Obenga, 2004, pp. 191–192)

Expanding on this initial idea of three levels, *N’lôngi* Obenga later fleshes out what he refers to as the five spheres of reality that in the three tier model were collapsed together. He writes:

Maat is concerned with all the spheres of reality. There are five realities:

- The divine or sacred world
- The Cosmos or the universe
- The state or the governance
- The society or the human community (humanity)
- The human being (family)

Each of these realities has five dimensions of significance:

- Religious
- Cosmic
- Political
- Social
- Anthropological

Thus, the five realities have together 125 dimensions of significance. This is Maat’s number. It means that because of Maat, the sacred world must be balanced to itself, to the cosmos, to the state, to the society and to humans. The cosmos must be balanced to the divine world, to itself, to the state, to the society and to humans. The state must be balanced to the sacred, to the cosmos, to itself, and to humans. The humans must be balanced to the divine world, to the cosmos, to the state, to the society and to themselves (Montgomery, 2009, pp. 43–44; Obenga, 1996, pp. 93–94)



FIGURE 1 An image of the 𓄏𓄗 Ntrt 'feminine divinity' 𓄏𓄗 M3ʿt 'Maat'
PHOTO CREDIT: RAND AFRICAN ART [HTTPS://BIT.LY/3J45KZQ](https://bit.ly/3j45kzq)

The contemporary study of archeoastronomy is in recognition that our Ancestors worked to bring the architectural on earth into alignment with the cosmos (Kambon & Asare, 2019). This is consistent with *Obenfo Obenga's* (1990; 1996, 2004) typologies of 𓄏𓄗 M3ʿt 'Maat' operating at the confluence of several spheres of reality each with several dimensions as explicated above.

Giving insight to $\text{𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤐} M_3't$ 'Maat' and her virtues as held by ancient $\text{𐤎𐤎𐤏𐤓} Kmt(yw)$ 'Black People', *Obenfo Beatty* (1997, p. 221) explains,

The feather as a symbol of truth is weighed against the heart of the deceased. If the heart were weighed against the feather as a physical specimen, the scales would never be balanced. Hence, the heart is metaphor for a person's will and desire to be in harmony with Maat which is reflected in behavior and conduct. The heart, being in harmony with Maat, reflects the moral and spiritual worthiness necessary to enter the abode of the blessed.



2 Conceptual Framework: Cultural Complementarity and Mutual Illumination



There is an existing world view that traditional cultures in Afrika that practice traditional Afrikan=Black spirituality share the same worldview as that of the ancient $\text{𐤎𐤎𐤏𐤓} Kmt(yw)$ 'Black People's' spiritual practice of $\text{𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤐} M_3't$ 'Maat'. This is supported by the similarities in cultural practices including the indigenous Afrikan knowledge of life after death as reminiscent in the $\text{𐤎𐤎𐤏𐤓} Kmt(yw)$ 'Black People's' concept of $\text{𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤐} M_3't$ 'Maat' in indigenous cultures (Diop, 1991, Hilliard, 1992 & 1995). Far from abstract overgeneralization, this is the principle of cultural complementarity wherein we argue here that:




What lacks in Igbo is supplemented by Zulu, what is incomplete in Shona is substantiated by Dinka, what is forgotten by Bambara is returned by Fon, what is obscure in Owambo is clarified by Ayiti (Haiti) (Gumbe, 2020, p. 12; Kamalu, 1998, p. 107)




In this vein, we also concur with Nana Carruthers (1989) who, with regard to different creation stories from classical $\text{𐤎𐤎𐤏𐤓} Kmt$ 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks'³ states

The various creation perspectives are not competing doctrines but parts of a whole. They represent various points on the circle of perception as the creation which is the focal point is brought into view. This same [phenomenon] occurs when anything is viewed from several angles, each point reveals a configuration somewhat different from, but not incompatible with all other viewpoints. (Carruthers, 1989, pp. 64–65)

This is to say, the more pieces of the puzzle that one has at one's disposal, the better one is enabled to see and understand the totality of the Afrikan worldview and how the pieces all fit together rather than being limited by a fragmented vision. The various cultures are manifestations of the shared worldview in a similar way to which branches of a river delta with all their individual and unique contours are ultimately still components of one river. To notice differences between one branch of the delta and another is not tantamount to them not still being part of the same river. As such, in this article, we set out to compare concepts of  Mꜣꜥt 'Maat', Death and the Afterlife in classical  Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' and contemporary Kasena-Nankana culture utilizing Kambon's (2017b) theory of Mutual Illumination which shows how one phenomenon can shed light on another and vice versa.

Thus, as exemplified by classical  Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' and contemporary Kasena-Nankana culture, for the soul of the dead to reach the afterworld, one would have had to have lived according to the principles of  Mꜣꜥt 'Maat' as defined above.






What Primary Texts have to say About  Mꜣꜥt 'Maat': Afterlife on the Physical Plane and Ancestral Realm as Evidence of  Mꜣꜥt 'Maat' as Practice in Classical  Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks'

In consultation with primary texts, it is clear that the Ancestors viewed  Mꜣꜥt 'Maat' as inextricable from lived practice. In this regard, the afterlife and what happened to one when one passed on was seen as a measure of the degree to which one lived one's life in alignment with  Mꜣꜥt 'Maat'. To this point, the stela of  *imꜣhw sꜥtp-ib-rꜥ* 'imAxw⁴ Sehotep-Ib-Ra' also known as The Loyalist Instruction as shown in example (1) below reads thusly:



1.


					
<i>nn</i>	<i>iz</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>sbi</i>	<i>hr</i>	<i>Hm.f</i>
NEG	tomb	GEN	rebel	on	servant.3MS

'There is no tomb for the one who rebels against His Servant,'⁵


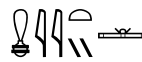
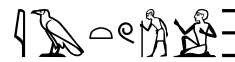

				
<i>iw</i>	<i>hꜣt.f</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>ꜣmꜣn</i>	<i>mw</i>
PART	body.3MS	as	throw LAT	water

‘and his body is something thrown into the water.’
(J. P. Allen, 2014, pp. 156, 158)







This text is in alignment with *Obenfo* Rashid’s (2020) contention regarding the comprehensive systems that reinforce and defend  *Mꜣꜣt* ‘Maat’ – in this case that of the ruler who would deny a tomb to traitors. It is also commensurate with the idea that  *Mꜣꜣt* ‘Maat’ is “not simply a philosophical idea, nor is it an idea that is simply an ethical value; it is a holistic paradigm, a totalizing social imperative” (p. 365).

The instruction of  *zhꜣw iny* ‘Scribe Ani’ in example (2) below states:




2.



			
<i>ir</i>	<i>myti</i>	<i>ist.w</i>	<i>ʿt.w</i>
PART	copy	aged.PL	great.PL

‘Emulate the great departed’




					
<i>htpw</i>	<i>ksw</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>hnw</i>	<i>mt</i>	<i>sn</i>
rest.PL	bowing in		interior	tomb	3PL

‘Who are at rest within their tombs.’

		
<i>bw</i>	<i>hpr.w</i>	<i>tꜣy</i>
NEG	transpire.PL	rebuke

	
<i>n pA</i>	<i>irw.f</i>
of DET	do.PL.3SG

‘No blame accrues to him who does it.’ (Suys, 1935, p. 37)

The idea contained in this line is that no matter how much  *Mꜣꜣt* ‘Maat’ may be interpreted or analysed as an abstract ideal in modern times, the thought of the  *Kmt(yw)* ‘Black People’ was that one whose behaviour was at variance with  *Mꜣꜣt* ‘Maat’ in practice would not be honoured

šm	r	nmtt	f
go	LAT	stride	3MS

'One who goes towards his stride;'

iw	f	irf	imyt	im
PART	3MS	do.3MS	inventory	thereby

'He will make a will by it,'

nn	wn	iz	n	wn	ib
NEG	exist	tomb	for	steal	heart

'No tomb exists for the greedy'
(Žába, 1956, p. 40)

We argue here that these texts mutually illuminate each other by shining greater metaphorical light on each other leading to a more holistic conceptualization of *M3't* 'Maat' as found in primary texts. As such, in an emic view, whether or not one endures is directly related to the degree to which one's measure of behaviour is *M3't* 'Maat'. The context in which this text is written is one in which the right to make a tomb is granted by the Ruler (the political component) and which is worked upon by artisans (the social component).

In fine, the focus on practice is not only realized in terms of what happens to one's physical body after passing (*ε.n.* to be honoured with a tomb or not), but also in terms of what happens to one in the Ancestral realm as articulated below in example (4) from the tomb of *im3hw p-di-isir* 'imAxw P-di-Isir':

4.

Imntt	dmy mr	nty	n	wn	f
west	landing-place	shore	REL	NEG	fault.3SG

'The West (Amenta) is the landing place of the blameless.'

<i>dwꜣ nTr</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>ph</i>	<i>sw</i>
praise nTr	DAT	man	reach	3MS

'Praise nTr for one who has reached it.'

<i>nn</i>	<i>spr</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>nb</i>	<i>r.z</i>	<i>wp</i>	<i>ib.f</i>	<i>ᵀk</i>
NEG	arrive	man	each	LAT.3FS	unless	heart.3MS	straightforward

<i>m ir</i>	<i>mꜣt</i>
in	do

'No one reaches it unless his heart is upright in doing Maat.'

<i>n dnw</i>	<i>šw[ʒ]</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>bw[ʒ]</i>	<i>im</i>
NEG	distinguish	poor	from	rich

DEM

'The poor is not distinguished from the rich there.'

<i>wp</i>	<i>gm</i>	<i>ntw</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>wn.f</i>
only	find	REL	in	NEG	fault.3MS

'Only he who is found free of fault'

<i>iwz[w]</i>	<i>hn</i>	<i>kd(i)</i>	<i>mtt</i>	<i>nb</i>	<i>nhh</i>
scale	together with	kite	amidst	owner	eternity

'by scale and weight before the owner of eternity'

<i>n</i>	<i>šw</i>	<i>n tm m</i>	<i>hsbt.f</i>
NEG	empty of	NEG in	reckoning.3MS

'There is none exempt from being reckoned'

<i>Dḥwti</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>i'n</i>	<i>ḥr</i>	<i>mḥꜣt</i>
Djehewty as		baboon	on	balance

'Djehewty as Baboon in charge of the balance'

<i>r ḥsb</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>nb</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>irt.n.f</i>		<i>ḥr dp</i>	<i>tꜣ</i>
FUT reckon	man	each	in	do.PST.3MS		on top	earth

'will reckon each man for his deeds on earth.'
(Lefebvre, 1924, p. 54)


In other words, while there is a socio-political component of the afterlife in the sense of being granted a tomb or otherwise, there is also a spiritual component in terms of what happens to one on the spiritual plane after death as articulated in the passage above. Consistent with the principle of reciprocity, these considerations are seen as being in direct relation to one's behaviour on earth. This attestation will be connected to similar practices among the Kasena-Nankana of contemporary Ghana below.

Indeed, Classical Afrikan=Black Spirituality regards death as a journey back to life (Fu-Kiau, 2001; Obenga, 2004). In the *Kikongo* language, a proverb states *Tufwanga mu soba* 'We die in order to undergo change' (Kambon, 2017, p. 7). The Kasena-Nankana of the Upper East Region of Ghana, have the same indigenously Afrikan knowledge of reality (Abasi, 1995).

It is *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' that informs how people in ancient *Kmt* 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' abhor evil and extol the qualities of harmony, justice, truth, and righteousness. Living in accordance with these values guarantees the people a tomb after transition (death) and a place in the ancestral world.




3 *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat', Death and the Afterlife as Social Phenomena

Mꜣꜥt 'Maat' in the view of Karenga (2003), is polysemous. *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' is deified as a *Ntrt* 'feminine divinity'. Beatty (1997, p. 217) affirms that she is known as 'Mistress of all the *Ntrw* 'Divinities'', 'Lady of the Sky,' and 'daughter of Ra'. Total adherence to *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' is essential to attaining eternity. In this regard, *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' is a divinity when written as *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' as well as a concept when written as *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat'. *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' as a concept, which Allen (2014) and Menkiti (1984) explain, is a prerequisite to joining the society of the Ancestors or residing among those who continue

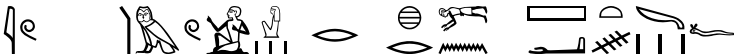
was immutable" (Beatty, 1997, p. 221). Most indigenous traditions appear to hinge on that which is in alignment with the practice associated with  *Mꜣꜣt* 'Maat' (not necessarily in name, but in the embodiment of the concept) known as the declarations of innocence. To this point, Obenfo Karenga (2003, p. 5) argues:

Within this conceptual framework which allows for two interpretations of moral ideals, Maat is clearly the ideal theme, and the Declarations of Innocence are a collective set of ideal norms which taken as a whole and considered as a single unit become an ideal norm or standard of conduct. Maat is the ground and point of orientation and the Declarations of Innocence (DOI) evolved as an ideal norm by which the Maatian person set programmatic tasks which conformed to the moral vision of Maat, the ideal theme or conceptual ideal.

A key point that seems to elude many and which is not mentioned directly by Karenga is the fact that there is no authoritative and definitive version of the Declarations of Innocence in the way that there are, say, ten immutable commandments in the judeo-christian tradition. This is the essential difference between continuous revelation (Afrikan) wherein transformation is constant vs. discontinuous revelation (eurasian book religions) wherein all that is to be revealed is to be found in a supposedly sacred book written in the past (O. Kambon, 2017a).

In essence, this malleability allows one to be able to substitute that which could not be said truthfully from that which could. Simpson (2003, pp. 269–270) demonstrates a few examples of this wherein the declaration "I have not mistreated cattle." may, in certain instances, be replaced with "I have not mistreated associates." Similarly, "I have not debased a [Netcher]" could be and commonly was replaced with the variant "I have not debased a deed of the king in my time." The declaration "I have not caused pain." had a common variant "I have not caused hunger." and so forth and so on. In short, for example, the declarations for a ruler would necessarily be different from that of, say, a farmer, due to the necessarily different practices in which they would need to engage and due to the different behaviours that each could truthfully say that he/she did not do. This difference is best explicated in the prophecy of  *imꜣḫw Nfrti* 'imꜣxw Neferti' in example (5) below, in which the ruler  'Imny' 'Ameny' plays the following role in his maintenance of  *Mꜣꜣt* 'Maat'.


5.



iw *ʕm.w* *r* *hr* *n* *šʕt.f*

 PART eurAsian.PL FUT fall GEN sword.3SG.POSS


'eurasians will fall of his sword,'



timh.w *r* *hr* *n* *nswt.f*

 Timeh.HUM.PL FUT fall GEN flame.3SG.POSS

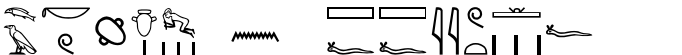
'timehiw will fall of his flame,'



iw *sbl.w* *nw* *dndn.f*

 PART rebel.PL GEN.PL wrath.3SG.POSS

'rebels to his wrath,'




h3k.w *ib* *n* *šššfywt* *f*

 rebel.PL heart GEN awe .3M.SG.POSS

'traitors due to awe of him,'


[...]



tw *r* *kd* *inb.w-ḥk3 (nh wd3 snb)*

 one FUT build wall.PL-(of)-ruler (life, prosperity, health)

'One will build the Walls-of-the-Ruler (life, prosperity, health)'



nn *rdit* *h3y* *ʕm.w* *r* *kmt*

 NEG allow enter eurAsian.PL LAT Kemet

'To bar eurasians from entering Kemet (the Black Nation/the land of Black people);'

[...]

<i>iw</i>	<i>m3't</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>iit</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>st.s</i>
PART	Maat	FUT	come	LAT	seat.3F.SG

'Maat will come to her seat,'

<i>isft</i>	<i>drti</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>rwti</i>
isft	expel	LAT	outside

'isft driven to outside.'
 (Golénischeff, 1927, pls. 23–25; Kambon, Forthcoming)
 (Bold emphasis added)

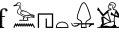
In fine, what the ruler does to ensure *M3't* 'Maat' is different from what, an artisan, farmer, or scribe would do. As such, depending on one's social role, one's declarations of innocence would necessarily be different.

Similarly, among the Akan and the Bakongo people, a truthful, righteous, and just life is essential to one transitioning into the afterworld and becoming an Ancestor (Ephirim-Donkor, 1997; Fu-Kiau, 2007; Gyekye, 1987; Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992). However, there was latitude in terms of understanding what amounted to a truthful, righteous, and just life as communally and collectively determined in the socio-political context in which the deceased operated.

By the same token, as is widely held in most indigenous Afrikan communities, people who live lives of shame, cowardice, deceit, and injustice and/or experience undesired forms of death such as suicide are hardly respected or remembered as alluded to above in Figure 2. The deeds of such persons die with them, and they soon rot in the memories of their communities due to living lives of *isft* 'wrong, wrongdoing, falsehood' at variance with the spirit of *M3't* 'Maat'.⁷ This distinction was essential in the maintenance of order in society in classical and contemporary times.

Correspondingly, in consonance with the *M3't* 'Maat' principle, the Kasena-Nankana speak of the ubiquitous eye of *We* 'The Supreme Being', which witnesses and records all our deeds. Evidentially, males are named, *Webadoa* (The Supreme Being does not sleep) to remind the living that their deeds will not go unnoticed. In other words, a person must live an ethical and moral life (consistent with, what in classical *Kmt* 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' would be seen as living in alignment with *M3't* 'Maat').


The importance of this text is that it shows that all those who live lives of righteousness have the right to final funeral rites and it shows the extent to which the state would mobilize resources, human and otherwise, to recover the body to ensure that a proper burial and associated rituals were completed.

Similarly, in the story of  *imꜣꜥw sꜣnht* 'imAxw Sanhat', we find the protagonist in his old age being entreated thusly:



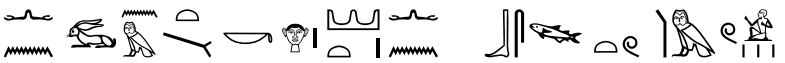
ir n.k iwt r Kmt

'Make your return to Kmt 'Nation of Blacks/Land of Black people.'

This entreaty precedes one of the most elaborate expositions from classical  *Kmt* 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' on what would be included in his final funerary rites, translated thusly:

think of the day of entombment,
 when you are sent to the state of honor.
 The evening is separated for you with cedar oil
 and bandaging in Tayet's arms.
 The procession's following is made for you on the day of interment,
 the mummy-case of gold, with head of lapis-lazuli,
 the sky above as you lie on the bier,
 oxen drawing you, chanters in front of you.
 Funerary dances are done for you at your tomb's mouth,
 the offering-list is recited for you,
 and slaughter is done at the mouth of your offering-slabs,
 your columns constructed of limestone
 amid the king's children.
 (J. P. Allen, 2014, p. 398)

This detailed exposition culminates in the following passage in example (7) below:


nn wn m(w)t .k hr hꜣst nn bs tw ʿꜣm.w
 NEG exist death 2SG on foreign NEG inter one eurasian.PL
 You shall not die in a foreign land, interred by eurasians!

<i>nn</i>	<i>dl.t(w).k</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>inm</i>	<i>n zr</i>
NEG	give.PASS.2SG	in	skin	GEN ram

‘You shall not be wrapped in the skin of a ram’

<i>ir.tw</i>	<i>dr.k</i>
do.one	limit.2SG

‘when your grave is made’...

<i>iw</i>	<i>nʒ</i>	<i>ʒw(w)</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>hwt tʒ</i>
PART	DEM	long	INF	strike land

This has become too long now to wander

<i>mḥ</i>	<i>ḥr</i>	<i>ḥʒt</i>	<i>irwt</i>	<i>k</i>
concern	on	illness	return.2SG	

be concerned about illness and come back
(J. P. Allen, 2014, pp. 119–120)

This entreaty is core to mutually illuminating understandings of the importance of the final funeral rites for *Kmt(yw)* ‘Black People’ throughout space and time as exemplified in classical *Kmt* ‘The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks’.

This classical conception is mutually illuminated by the concept of the Kasena-Nankana wherein death among Afrikans, including the Kasena-Nankana, is seen as going home. The Luo and the Komkomba see death as a call from the Ancestors (Owuor, 2006; Zimoń, 2008). This call of the Ancestors is mostly used with regard to when the very old in society make their transition. These people would not only have lived long but attained successes by way of having children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren and would have been successful farmers or would have had various other enviable traits or engaged in professions worth emulating as perceived by their descendants and the social community as a whole. It is due to these attributes associated with the call of the Ancestors that the death of a young person is considered as



FIGURE 3 A Kasena-Nankana war dance performed to honour an elderly man
PHOTO BY THE FIRST AUTHOR

sudden or abnormal. No person who had attained the requisite age and deeds is denied the gaiety and fanfare that comes with his/her funeral. Meanwhile, those who lead lives where they do not produce children or live deviant lifestyles are not accorded these honours. Among the Kasena-Nankana, a war dance has to be performed to honour the worthy.

According to Zimoń, (2008, p. 210), the Konkomba just like the Kasena-Nankana believed that, “Dances that emphasize and celebrate life serve to oppose death. By means of dance, Africans pay homage to the [deceased] elder [...] and also express reverence and respect for them. Moreover, dances remind the Africans of and reinforce their belief in the afterlife of those ancestors whose lives were long, successful and happy”. In this celebration, the living witnessing the dancing, aspire to live like the deceased, while comforting elegies and chants sooth the soul of the dead as they journey to the after world. In short, just as explicated above in the case of classical 𐤎𐤍𐤏𐤍 *Kmt* ‘The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks’ among the Kasena-Nankana, there is a socio-political aspect to Ancestorhood in the sense that it is the human community that acknowledges one’s deeds as being worthy of emulation and one’s life as being successful. This can be compared with the classical 𐤎𐤍𐤏𐤍 *Kmt* ‘The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks’ concept of living in alignment with 𐤎𐤍𐤏𐤍 *Mꜣꜥt* ‘Maat’.



FIGURE 4 The body being taken for final funeral rites among the Kasena-Nankana
PHOTO CREDIT, FIRST AUTHOR

Consequently, demonstrating the paramount importance ascribed to final funeral rites, among the Kasena-Nankana, Akantue (2019), explicates, a clan head and his entire family, whose duty it is to perform these rites, stand to suffer consequences and continual torment from the lingering soul of the dead such as nightmares, sicknesses, accidents and – worst of all – death if the final funeral rites are not performed. This rite is known as *fulim* in Kasem and *nyua* in Nankani, without which, the dead cannot rest in their ancestral abode. Once the soul finds rest, it waits there hoping to be reborn. Nankana names like *Nyaaba* (my ancestor) *Mmalemna* (mother is returned) are some traditional names given to children who bear a resemblance to a deceased family member who has been long dead but who has recently been reborn.

Unlike the non-Afrikan notion of life and death wherein death is the terminal point of a line, Afrikans hold the view that the end of death is life as time itself is conceived as a cycle (O Kambon, 2017; Kambon, 2019). According to Imafidon (2012, p. 13), “This is evidenced in the belief in reincarnation, spirits, and the ancestral cult, which varies in degrees from one African community to another. The expectation of death and the anticipation to join the ancestors has in most cases a this-worldly effect”. It is in the expectation of becoming an Ancestor, to be reincarnated that the living strove to live by the principle of M_3^t ‘Maat’.

It should be noted, however, that living M_3^t ‘Maat’ alone does not grant passage of the soul to the Ancestral world in certain traditional Afrikan cultural expressions. No living souls will escape death. How a person dies also



FIGURE 5

An image of $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ nmti 'Nemty', the ferryman of classical $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks'

IMAGE CREDIT CHRONOLOGIA.ORG [HTTPS://BIT.LY/3D9G9UA](https://bit.ly/3D9G9UA)

question of if it is only the final funeral rites that grant the person passage, where will those who fail to meet the requirements find their souls? There appears to be a point of departure from the classical $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ Kmt(yw) 'Black People' in the form of a principle of judgement and that of the Kasena-Nankana and others. Whereas $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ mmît 'Ammit' – an otherworldly beast – ensures that the hearts of the unworthy are consumed, the Kasena-Nankana concept of the afterworld does not appear to be so straightforward. It does appear that there is a possibility of a third world for the souls of the rejected since not all will be worthy to be Ancestors and be welcomed to *Kyuuru*. This is typically seen as the spirit of the restless soul wandering through the realm of the living. It is important to note here that so-called "hell," an Eurasian phenomenon where "God" punishes evil souls, is definitely not this third place since the word/concept does not exist in any indigenous Afrikan traditions including that of the Kasena-Nankana.

Just as in classical $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks', it is understood that the soul must journey to the afterworld and requires basic accoutrements to live comfortably in the spirit world. In that world – the afterlife – the passing soul, once a farmer, will need their farm implements to till their lands. The housewife will need her earthenware pot with which she will use to cook and fetch water. It is vital to stress that for the Kasena-Nankana like the Dagaaba of north-western Ghana the journey involves crossing a river in a canoe. It is thus a sacred duty before burial to give the dead the amount necessary for the ferryman to carry him or her across. For others, the dying person should be given water to drink just before dying to prepare him or her for the long journey. All sorts of gifts are buried with the dead: they are intended for use during the journey and on arrival among the dead forebears. These are gifts of money or cowries (Abasi, 1995).

Here we find another point of confluence between classical $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' and among the Kasena-Nankana. This is seen in the person of the ferryman to whom the dead will pay to have passage. As affirmed by El-Saady (1998), in classical $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of









FIGURE 6
Nankana offerings on a grave during a fresh funeral (one who has recently died)


the Blacks', this ferryman was known as 𐤎𐤍𐤏𐤓 *nmti* 'Nemty' as shown in Figure 6. Exhumed tombs of the great 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓 *nswt bity* 'Ruler of Upper and Lower 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓 *Kmt*' have given testimony to these parting gifts as still seen in parting gifts to the deceased in contemporary Afrika=Land of the Blacks. Preparing a 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓 *nswt bity* 'Ruler of Upper and Lower 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓 *Kmt*' to journey to the afterworld in most Afrikan cultures includes adding his kingly regalia as well as adding his servants to serve him in the afterworld. Even though, in recent times, the latter is said to have been abolished by most kingdoms, the prior affirms indigenous knowledge of the afterlife.

It is to be noted however, that during the final funeral rites, which are known to bid the deceased farewell, money to pay the ferry man is given, and hoe blades to enable the deceased to cultivate their farmlands are presented. Farm produce, among other things, such as fowls are given and the giver delivers an elegy, or eulogy of the dead before either smashing the fowl on the ground or presenting the materials to the pallbearers as shown in Figure 6.


The deceased will collect the items in spirit. Since the dead at funerals that have recently taken place do not go to *Kyuuru*, where do they go with the items given them in the first place? And if they do, is it not the case then that the first final funeral rites are needless and a mere waste of time and resources? Kamalu (1998, p. 49), with regard to the Igbo people, brings the argument to rest. He clarifies, "Death does not automatically make one an ancestor, but the full funeral rights have to be enacted. Without these rites the person is banished to some form of intermediate world between the spiritual and physical world" (p. 49). The Kasena-Nankana share in this notion. When a person








dies, it is with the final funeral rites that they are able to reach the ancestral world (Akantue, 2019). When his/her funeral is not performed, his/her soul lurks around with the living. Apart from this, his/her rejected soul is also left wandering in two worlds: namely the world of the living and the realm of the Ancestors. In short, indigenous Afrikan traditions ascribe to the concept of  *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' as the way to attaining eternity. What is not shared in all indigenous Afrikan knowledge systems is with regard to the final resting place of the soul. Souls that have lived according to  *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' may reside in *Kyuru* and can be reborn. This is comparable with ancient knowledge of the resurrection of the righteous souls by  *Īsīr* 'Ausar' the Owner/Possessor of Resurrection.

There exist divergent worldviews with regard to a possible third intermediate world for those who have violated  *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' and those whose funerals are not performed. The title Ancestor is conferred onto the dead by the living who have recognized that he/she lived according to  *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat'. Fundamentally, all Afrikan cultures, irrespective of the final resting place(s) of the soul, insist on the concept of  *Mꜣꜥt* 'Maat' as this assures one of being remembered as an Ancestor with the possibility of being reborn again into the world of the living.

The converse is the case during periods of  *isft* 'wrong, wrongdoing, falsehood' such as the period in which we currently find ourselves. In this regard, we return to Obenfo Rashid in his observation:

The text that Theophile Obenga calls *The Lamentations of Ipuwer* is a lamentation of social decline (Obenga 2004). Set during the period that the Egyptologists call the First Intermediate Period after the end of the Old Kingdom, this text depicts a society that has descended into isfet. Foreign occupiers, marauding gangs, bandits, and usurpers – Ipuwer looks out upon a world that is characteristic of maximal chaos and disorder. In many respects, Ipuwer's narrative captures a world much like our own, both domestically and globally. (Rashid, 2020, pp. 358–359)

From  *imꜣḫw ipw-wr* 'ImAxw Ipuwer' comes the following passage:

						
<i>tm</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>ir n.f</i>	<i>dbꜣt</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>nb</i>	<i>ḥꜣt</i>
NEG	in	do DAT.3SG	sarcophagus	in	owner	tomb

'He who could make for himself no sarcophagus is (now) possessor of a tomb.'

<i>mktn</i>	<i>nbw</i>	<i>w^rb.w.t</i>
Check it 2PL	owner	tomb.PL.F
'Check it out y'all, the possessors of tombs'		

<i>dr</i>	<i>hr</i>	<i>kꜣ.n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>idbw</i>
drive away	on	high ground.1PL	mouth	riverbank
'are driven out on our high ground at the edge of the riverbank.'				

<i>tm</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>ir n.f</i>	<i>kꜣrs(w)</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>nb</i>	<i>hd</i>
NEG	in	do DAT.3SG	coffin	in	owner	treasury
'He who could make for himself no coffin is (now (possessor) of a treasury).'						
(Gardiner, 1969, p. 56)						

The significance of this text is that when there is a lack of Black power among *Kmt(yw)* 'Black People' and the ruler is no longer able to enforce *Mꜣꜣ't* 'Maat' and the social order has turned to *isft* 'wrong, wrongdoing, falsehood', that is the time when the body after transition would be mistreated. Those who are deserving of respect would be disrespected and *ts phr* 'vice versa'. However, as long as *Mꜣꜣ't* 'Maat' is maintained on the socio-political spheres of reality, the treatment of the body in the afterlife can serve as evidence of the person having lived according to *Mꜣꜣ't* 'Maat'.

6 Conclusion

This study began largely in conversation with Obenfo Karenga (2003) in his focus on *Mꜣꜣ't* 'Maat' as "moral ideal" in contradistinction with *Mꜣꜣ't* 'Maat' as lived practice. In this article, we have provided arguments and evidence – primarily in the form of how the person's body was treated and spirit was conceived of after death dependent on his/her behaviour – to demonstrate that for classical and contemporary *Kmt(yw)* 'Black People', *Mꜣꜣ't* 'Maat' is about lived practice rather than abstract ideals as even later conceded by Karenga (2003, p. 132) himself in the same text.

Further, following Obenga's (1990, 1996, 2004) conception of various spheres and dimensions within which M_3^t 'Maat' can be understood, one's afterlife on both the physical and spiritual planes is thought of as being commensurate with one's adherence to M_3^t 'Maat' in terms of lived practice rather than simply as an abstract ideal. It is in this vein that we cited copious examples from classical Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' and compared them with attested examples among the Kasena-Nankana with and other cultural-linguistic groups. This is to say, the ancient and the contemporary mutually illuminate each other allowing us to understand each one in a deeper way than if taken alone as they are, collectively, expressions of the Afrikan worldview (O. Kambon, 2017b).

In sum, we demonstrated that a shared understanding existed and continues to exist from the classical to the contemporary among $\text{Kmt}(yw)$ 'Black People' in terms of how the body of the deceased is treated and how one's experience in the afterlife is conceptualized dependent on one's lived practice. Conceptions of the afterlife have influenced and continue to influence how Afrikans engage M_3^t 'Maat' as lived practice.

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
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Notes

- 1 The upshot of Ancestorship being communally determined is that one community's Ancestors may be regarded by another community as unworthy and vice versa in the case whereby our heroes are their enemies and their enemies are our heroes. This discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.
- 2 Asante Twi translating to “well-cooked (ε.n. ‘skilled’ one); contemporarily used to translate “professor.”
- 3  *Kmt*, from whence the term  Mꞑꞑꞑ 'Maat' originates, while inappropriately referred to as “Ancient Egypt,” is a word that translates to The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks, due to its foundation by Black people and its Black population. See Kambon, O. (2021). Of Rivers, Rivulets and Repatriation. In *A Smart Ghana Repatriation Guide* Adinkra Group. <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=laXbzQEACAAJ> and Hilliard, A. G. (1992). The meaning of KMT (ancient Egyptian) history for contemporary African American experience. *Phylon* (1960–), 49(1/2), 10–22.
- 4 This is a term that translates to revered one (of the blessed dead). It is used throughout the article to refer to Ancestors respectfully.

- 5 Sometimes translated as His Majesty or His Incarnation. The translation here is due to the word Hm also translating to servant and is in alignment with the idea that the ruler is the servant of nTr. All translations herein done by second author when untranslated in original publication and/or when the original translation found to be unsatisfactory.
- 6 Boko is the public council house where words and deeds of great Ancestors would be spoken of.
- 7 𐎃𐎎 *isft* 'wrong, wrong doing, falsehood' is the complementary opposite of 𐎎𐎎 *m 3'rt* 'Truth, balance, harmony, justice, righteousness/propriety, order, reciprocity' and which invokes ideas from chaos to disorder.