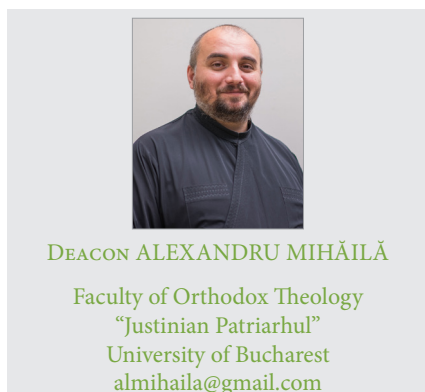


THE TEACHINGS OF AMENEMOPE AND THE BOOK OF PROVERBS OF SOLOMON (22:17-24:22)

Abstract

The study explores the links between the Teachings of Amenemope from Ancient Egypt and the Proverbs of Solomon book. Egyptologist Erman observed the first connections. Since then, there have been hypotheses about the Proverbs author's access to Amenemope's text. Analysis reveals significant parallels between the two works – calls for obedience, respect for the poor and elderly, and warnings against greed. The author also highlights specific adaptations to Israelite realities and beliefs. He notes the Egyptian influence on biblical wisdom, with the author redefining this wisdom in an Israelite context. The influences point to a universalist view, transcending cultural boundaries, with the search for wisdom from diverse sources.



Keywords

Influences, Connections, Wisdom, Proverbs, Amenemope

Introduction

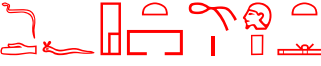





The Teachings of Amenemope is a work dating from the Ramesside period (13th-11th centuries BC). The complete text is in papyrus B.M. 10474 held in the British Museum. In 1888 the Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge bought the papyrus for the British Museum in Egypt. In 1922 Budge published a description of the papyrus, and in 1923 he published the entire manuscript (introduction, English translation, hieroglyphic transcription of the hieroglyphic text and facsimile) (Budge 1923, 9-18). In 1924 the German Egyptologist Adolf Erman published the first German translation (Erman 1924, 241-52). Other translations followed in languages of international circulation (Hallo 1997, 115-22; Pritchard 1969, 421-5; Otto 1991, 222-50), and in 1974 for the first time in Romanian (Daniel 1974, 159-78). The Egyptian text was edited

by Lange (Lange 1925), the most recent edition being that of Laisney (Laisney 2007). In 2002, as his doctoral thesis, James Roger Black also published part of the critically edited text with commentary (Black 2002).

Already in 1923, Budge notes small connections with the book of Proverbs in general (Amenemope 6 // Prv 15:17 and Amenemope 7 // Prv 23:7) (Budge 1923, 357), but gives precedence to presumed Semitic sources. In 1924 Adolf Erman is the first to notice the connection with the so-called “Words of the Wise” in the book of Solomon’s Proverbs (Prv 22:17-24:22) (Erman 1924, 86-93; Grebmann 1924, 272-96).


Various explanations have been offered for this reality (Ruffle 1977, 29-68; Overland 275-92; Schipper 2005, 53,72). The author of Proverbs would have had in front of him an edition of the Teaching of Amenemope in Egyptian or in a Hebrew translation (Römheld 1989, 113) or Aramaic (Fox 2014, 77). The Hebrew primacy proposal has remained only a hypothesis that has not been embraced by scholars (Drioton 1956; Heintz 1989, 19-29). Other authors have remained more reticent about the influence of the Egyptian text (Whybray 1994, 132-41). But especially since the 1970s, through the monograph of Irene Grumach, the idea of Egyptian influence on the Wise Words in the Book of Proverbs has been accepted in the academic world (Grumach 1963, 208-24).

I present below some examples of the connection between the Proverbs of Amenemope and the literary corpus of the Book of Proverbs 22:17-24:22, entitled “Words of the Wise” (Trimijopoulos).

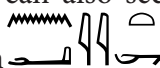
- 3.8  *dd.f hwt tpt*
- 3.9  *imi ḥḥwy.k sḏm i ḏdwt*
- 3.10  *imi ḥ3ty.k r whḥ.w*
- 3.11  *3ḥ p3 dit st m ib.k*
- 3.15  *hr rḥ wnw ḏḥ n mdw*
- 3.16  *iri.w nḥyt m nst.k*

“He says: chapter one: / Bow down thine ear, listen to the sayings, / set thine inward parts to understand them. / It is a profit to put them in thy heart / [...] When there is a storm of words / make them a mooring stake for thy tongue” (ch. 1-3; 8-11; 15-16). “Bow down thine ear, and listen to the words of the wise, and turn thine heart to my knowledge. For it is pleasant if you keep them in your belly, they will sit like a stake on your lips” (Prv 22:17-18).

Egyptian scribes used red ink for headings and chapters, otherwise using black ink. The text in Amenemope 3.8 is written in red ink (rubric).

The Egyptian phrase “bow down your ear” ( *imi nḥwy.k*, lit. “give your two ears”) has the Hebrew equivalent “bow down your ear” (הט אזנך *haṭ ’ozn^e ka*).


“The words of the wise” (מִדְּבַרֵי חֲכָמִים) in the Masoretic Text would constitute the title of the literary corpus, equivalent to the formula in Prv 24:23, in which a new corpus begins: גַּם אֵלֶּה לְחַכְמִים “and these belong to the wise”.


One can also see an adaptation to Palestinian realities: the “mooring stake” (in Egyptian  *n’yt*) becomes in Hebrew יָתֵד “tent peg”. Indeed, it seems very likely that the phrase יִכְנּוּ יַחְדָּו עַל שִׁפְתֶיךָ, literally “shall be set together on your lips” is corrected to read יָתֵד “tent peg” instead of יַחְדָּו “together”. This reading is also suggested in the critical apparatus of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

There is even a translation of the Holy Scriptures, the New American Bible (1991), which adopts the following translation for Prv 22:19: “that your trust may be in the Lord I teach you the words of Amenemope”. In the Masoretic Text appears אֲנִי הַיּוֹם אֶלֶּיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶלֶּיךָ, literally “I will teach you today even you”, but which in Hebrew a cumbersome construction (Fox 2009, 709). The phrase הַיּוֹם אֶלֶּיךָ אֶתֶּה would thus constitute a distorted transcription of the name of the Egyptian sage.

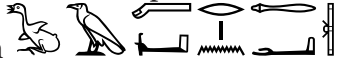



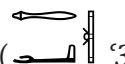


A generic comparison of the two texts also shows that the Hebrew text has been adapted to the Yahwist religion. Indeed, Prv 22:19 refers to Yahweh (the Lord): “that your trust may be in the Lord”. In other words, the Egyptian text is not taken as such, but adapted to the concrete realities of Israel’s life and to the monotheistic conception.

4.4  *s3w tw r ḥwr^c i3dt*
 4.5  *r n šiw s3w^c*

4.6  *m iri i3w drt.k r tkn*
i3(w)

4.7  *m tw.k t3 r n '3*

“Beware of reviling a poor man / and oppressing a cripple, / do not stretch out your hand to touch an old man, / nor open your mouth against an old man” (ch 2 – 4.4-7). “Do not rob the poor, for he is poor, and do not oppress the wretched at the gate [of the city]” (Prv 22:22).

In Amenemope 4.7 the expression “neither open thy mouth against an elder” is literally in Egyptian  *t3 r n '3* “do not rebuke the mouth of an elder”. In the Egyptian text, there are several categories against which the listener is admonished to show respect: “the poor” (Egyptian  *i3d*), “the cripple” or the one with crushed limbs (Egyptian  *s3w*), “the old man” (Egyptian  *i3w*) and “the great one” ( '3). In Hebrew only the category of the poor  and  is retained.

7.11  *ḥwt mḥt 6-nwt*


7.12  *m iri rmnw*
wḏy ḥr tštiw n 3ḥ

7.13  *m tw.k*
tḥiw h3w3t n nwh

7.14  *m iri snkty r mḥ 1 n 3ḥt*


7.15  *m tw.k h3d*
tšiw n ḥ3rt


“Chapter Six: / Do not move the boundary markers of the field, / Do not change the place of the measuring line, / Do not be greedy for a palm of ground, / Nor trample on the widow’s boundary” (ch. 6 - 7.11-15). “Do not move the widow’s boundary, and do not violate the orphan’s field” (Prv 23:10).

In the Egyptian text, “a handful of earth” is actually “a cubit of earth”, with the unit of measurement “cubit” (e.g.  *mḥ*) also found in biblical culture.

Strictly speaking, in Hebrew Prv 23:10 is **אל תסג גבול עולם** “do not move the boundary of eternity”. But also, in the critical apparatus of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia it is suggested to replace **עולם** “eternity” with **אלמנה** “widow” based on the text in the Teachings of Amenemope (Gemser 1963, 87). It is interesting that the Romanian Synodical Bible and Cornilescu’s 1924 Bible accept this substitution for “widow”, although it has no basis in the Hebrew text. In the Septuagint it is *ᾠρια αἰῶνια* “eternal boundaries”, which Ananias’s Bible renders by “ancient boundary stones”. Indeed, the correction made based on the Egyptian text is also justified because the pair “widow” - “orphans” is preserved as socially assisted persons.


9.14  *m iri mš3pw*
r ḥ3ḥ ḥ3ww

9.15  *wd3 n.k ḥrw tw.k*


9.16  *ir ini.tw n.k wsrwt m ḥwr^c*

9.17  *nn sdr.w m diw.k*

9.18  *ḥd t3 bn st m pr.k*

9.19  *p tr.w*
t3y.w st rḥ bn st

9.20  *w n*
p3-iwdnwt r.f ‘qw.f sw ‘m[3m.f sw]

10.1  *m diw.f ḥ3rpwy.w*
m dw3t

10.2 iriy.w n.w
 b3yw '3 m d3r.w

10.3 st h3rpyw.w n p3
 šn'

10.4 iriy.w n.w dnḥw mi r3wi

10.5 st pwi r t3 pt

“Do not strive for wealth, / what you have will be enough for you. / If riches come to you by robbery, / they will not stay with you at night. / The day comes and they will be no more in your house / Their place is seen, but they are no more. / The earth opened its mouth, took them, swallowed them up / And made them melt. / Along with it (Lange 1925, 58) they collapsed into the world beyond / A great pit was made to fit them / They collapsed into the cellar. / And they made wings like geese / And flew up into the sky” (ch. 7 - 9:14-20; 10:1-5). “Don’t strive to become rich, don’t put your wits into it. Will you watch with your eyes as it wastes away? For wealth makes wings like an eagle soaring to heaven” (Prv 23:4-5).

The Egyptian text refers not only to wealth (Egyptian ḥ3wt), but also to acquired social power (Egyptian wsrwt). The Egyptian text emphasises the acquisition of wealth through silnicide, plunder (Egyptian), which corresponds to the profile of the Teachings of Amenemope, addressed to those who wished to make a career as officials in the pharaonic administration. The Hebrew text treats enrichment in a general way.

The term “land” in Amenemope 9.20, iwdnwt, is the Neo-Egyptian variant for the older term iwt n (Hanning 2001, 37). The image of the earth opening its mouth and swallowing is also found in Holy Scripture. For example, in Nm 16:30.32 the earth opens its mouth and swallows up the rebels raised against the priesthood. The pit in the ground is also equated in the Egyptian text with the

“storehouse pit” (Egyptian *šn'w* “store”, “trading space”, “working space”, “storage space”; the translation “cellar” is contextual), a reality also known in Israel: cisterns or pits dug into the ground and plastered over in which grain was stored (King and Stager 2002, 1216-9).

The most interesting parallel is between the wealth that takes on goose-like wings in the Egyptian text and the wealth that takes on eagle-like wings in the Hebrew text. The summer goose (*Anser anser*), in Egyptian *r* or *r3*, is a very common sight in the Nile-watered area of Egypt, less suited to the dry, semi-desert and desert space of Israel. This is why the biblical author uses the image of the eagle or hawk, in Hebrew *נֶשֶׁר*, more familiar to the inhabitants of the Holy Land.

11.12 *hwt mht 9-nwt*
 11.13 *m iri snsnti n.k p3 šmm*
 11.14 *m tw.k hnhn.fr sdd*

“Chapter Nine: / Do not befriend the angry man, / Do not come near to speak with him” (ch. 9 - 11:13-14). “Do not associate with the angry man, and with the man who is hot with anger you shall have no fellowship, lest you be led astray in his way and lay a snare for your life” (Prv 22:24-25).

The Egyptian term *šmm* means “angry”, which corresponds closely with the Hebrew *בעל-אף* “angry”, literally “lord of the [burning] face”, but also with the phrase *איש חמות* “angry”, literally “man of anger, burning”.

In Egyptian it is forbidden to associate with the angry one, but a term is used which would be better translated “to befriend” - *snsn*, which comes from *sn* “brother” - but which can also be translated as “to befriend”, “to befriend”. In Hebrew, the term *רעה*, used here in *hitpael*, comes from *רע* “near”, “companion”.

14.17 *p3 mh r t '3 'm3m.k sw bši.k sw*

14.18 iw.k šw.tw m p3yw.k nfr

“A mouthful of bread - you swallow it, but then you vomit it up / and you are left without your good” (ch. 11 - 14.17-18). “The morsel that you have eaten you shall cast out of you, and you have wasted [vainly] your chosen words” (Prv 23:8).

In Hebrew, the term פת means “piece”, but it is used especially in reference to “piece of bread”. In fact, the phrase פת להם “piece of bread” even appears in Gn 18:5. In 2 Sm 12.3 פת is used alone, but it still refers to bread or food in general. In Egyptian t or t3 refers to bread, as suggested by the hieroglyphs: a loaf of bread, a loaf of bread raised in a blid, and a loaf of bread wrapped in a roll.

The Egyptian verb bši “to vomit” has a direct Hebrew counterpart in the verb קיא “to vomit”. The variant “to throw out” is a euphemistic solution chosen by the translator. In the basic sense it is used in Jer 25:27: “Drink and get drunk, vomit (וקיו, here without *aleph*) and fall down and do not rise at the sight of the sword”. The sea monster in the book of Jonah “vomits up” the prophet (Jon 2:11), just as the holy land of Israel can vomit up unworthy inhabitants (Lv 18:25, 28). This idea of the vomiting up of wealth is also found in Job 20:15: “The wealth which he has swallowed up he now vomits up”.

Another correspondence between the Egyptian text and the Hebrew text is related to the adjectives nfr “good”, “pleasant” and נעים with the same meaning.

27.6 hwt mh 30-t

27.7 ptr n.k t3i 30 n hwt

27.8 st sd3y hr st sb3y

“The thirtieth chapter: / Look at these thirty chapters: / They give understanding, they give teaching” (ch. 30 - 27:6-7). “Have I not written to you in many (lit. “the day before”) counsels and teachings” (Prv 22:20).

This is the most interesting parallel, which would even involve correcting the biblical text. In Hebrew the word **שְׁלֹשֹׁם** appears as **שְׁלֹשֹׁם** and the *syllolism* “the day before yesterday”, which seems very strange in context. Indeed **שְׁלֹשֹׁם** can appear in the expression **תְּמוּל שְׁלֹשֹׁם** “the day before yesterday” (Ex 5:8), which occurs with variants **כְּתְמוּל שְׁלֹשֹׁם** “as yesterday the day before yesterday”, **מִתְמוּל שְׁלֹשֹׁם** “from yesterday the day before yesterday” in total in 19 verses. However, in the text of Prv 22:20 the phrase appears truncated, which would indicate that other solutions should rather be sought.

Already the rabbinic textual tradition has made an emendation: if the written form (the so-called *Ketib*) of the Masoretic Text is **שְׁלֹשֹׁם** “the day before yesterday”, the proposed read form (*Qere*) is **שְׁלֹשִׁים**, which means “officers”. It is more precisely **שְׁלִישׁ** *šališ*, usually translated as “chieftains”, meaning “third [in rank]”. It is especially used for “the third” in the chariot drawn by two horses; the first one was holding horses with a spear as a weapon, the second was an archer and shot arrows, and the third carried a shield and balanced the chariot as it went (King and Stager 2002, 244). And this term is inappropriate in context, the only argument - rather weak - being that in Prv 8:6 **נְגִידִים** which basically means “ruler”, “prince” (cf. 1 Sm 9:16; 13:14; 1 Kgs 1:35 etc.), but which in context refers to “noble words / deeds” (Emerton 2001, 431-65).

The Septuagint renders the term by a numeral *τρισῶς* “thrice”. Adolf Erman was the first to propose correcting the Hebrew text, proposing instead of **שְׁלֹשֹׁם** the numeral **שְׁלֹשִׁים** *šelošim* “thirty”, here he acknowledges a reference made by the biblical author – a Jew from Egypt of the Saite or Persian period who translated the Teachings of Amenemope into Hebrew or Aramaic (Erman 1924, 89. 92). The numeral “thirty” has a special significance in Egypt: thirty judges comprised the court of the vizier, also thirty were the gods who judged the soul after death (Fox 2009, 711). This could be a direct reference to the 30 chapters of the Teachings of Amenemope. Another possibility would be a reference to the 30 maxims into which the Words of the Wise are divided in Prv 22:17-24:22, which would imply an adaptation: instead of the 30 developed chapters of the Egyptian book, 30 Hebrew proverbs or maxims are briefly given (Fox 2002, 705).

Assessment and conclusions

I also take this opportunity to advocate the study by biblical scholars of oriental languages, including ancient Egyptian (Englund 1995; Allen 2010; Cihó 1996 and 2018). The teachings of Amenemope are a very eloquent example of the

interconnection between Egyptology and biblical study.

Despite attempts to argue for the anteriority of the biblical text to the Egyptian, I think it is fairly certain that the biblical author was inspired by the Teachings and not the other way around. The Teachings of Amenemope date from the Ramesside era (Assmann 1991, 475-500), so at least around 1100-1000 BC, whereas the collection of Proverbs of Solomon is much later. Even if the Solomonic dating, therefore from the 10th century, were valid, the Proverbs cannot be the source for the Egyptian text. The collection “Words of the Wise” (Prv 22:17-24:22) is placed after the late introduction (Prv 1-9), after the collection of Solomon’s proverbs (Prv 10:1-22:16), followed by another collection of the words of the wise (Prv 24:23-34), by the collection of Solomon’s proverbs collected in the time of King Hezekiah (8th century), and by four wisdom additions: the words of Agur son of Isaac of Massah (Prv 30:1-14), numerical proverbs (Prv 30:15-33), the words (mother) of King Lemuel of Massah (Prv 31:1-9), and the praise of the virtuous woman (Prv 31:10-31).

The biblical author does not take massively from the teachings of Amenemope, but selectively. He takes mainly from the opening chapters of the Teachings and especially from the first half of the Egyptian book. Given that in Egyptian the chapters are marked by rubrics (headings written in red ink), this could be due to the practical way in which the biblical author draws from the scroll of the Egyptian text, rotating the papyrus from beginning to end and then back again, repeating the process (Fox 2014, 78).

When inspired, the biblical author adapts Egyptian realities to Palestinian ones. For example, the comparison of wealth to geese, very natural in Egypt, becomes a comparison to the eagle for the biblical mind, and the mooring pole, specific to Egyptian boats, becomes the tent pole, very familiar to the inhabitants of the Holy Land. The biblical author also adapts the Egyptian text to Yahwist monotheism with theological additions - for example: “O that all [teachings] were on your lips! To put your hope in the Lord I want to teach you today” (Prv 22:18-19). If the teachings of Amenemope are centred on Egyptian social realities and strict social hierarchy (Keel 1979, 225-34), the biblical text insists more on the theological side.

These Egyptian influences demonstrate the biblical author’s concern to preserve traditional wisdom. Egyptian wisdom was renowned, so much so that in Acts it is supposed that Moses “was taught in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). By using non-Israelite sapiential sources such as the Teachings of Amenemope and the

words of Arab sages and kings of Massah (Arabia), the biblical author(s) demonstrate a universalist view that while the Law and the Covenant are specific to Israel, the sharing of true wisdom is common to all peoples.

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