

THE TYNDALE BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY LECTURE, 1975*

THE TEACHING OF AMENEMOPE AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

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A. Historical Introduction

It is a curious fact that the announcement of the discovery of the *Teaching of Amenemope* was in connection with an Old Testament *crux*. Renouf¹ cited a passage as a possible clue to the meaning of אֲבִרָה (Gen. 40:43) in the same year (1888) the Budge² recorded the purchase of the Papyrus in Egypt and although Renouf's use of it has not been accepted, the *Teaching* has remained of immense interest to Old Testament scholars ever since. After these two brief mentions, the papyrus received no more attention until 1922 when Budge³ published a description of its contents and considerable portions of the text in transcription and translation. In his publication of the complete manuscript a year later, he briefly noted⁴ one or two passages similar in thought to passages from the Book of Proverbs and a popular account of the *Teaching*, published two years later,⁵ contained speculation on how this similarity might be explained.

Another work⁶ appeared in 1924, claiming a closer connection than Budge had allowed and suggesting how it had

* Delivered at Tyndale House, Cambridge, on 19th June, 1975.

¹ Renouf, L. (1888) *PSBA* 2, 6.

² Budge, E. A. W. (1888) *By Nile and Tigris*, I, London, 337.

³ Budge, E. A. W. (1922) *Recueil d'Études Égyptologiques dédiées à la mémoire de Jean-François Champollion* Paris, 431-446.

⁴ Budge, E. A. W. (1923) *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum* 2nd Series London, 9-18, 41-51, pls. I-XIV.

⁵ Budge, E. A. W. (1924) *The Teaching of Amen-em-Apt, Son of Kanekht* London.

⁶ Erman, A. (1924a) *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Sitzung der philosophisch — historischen Klasse vom 1 Mai) 15, 86-93.

originated. Erman demonstrated that the *Teaching of Amenemope* was closely parallel with the portion of Proverbs sometimes subtitled “Words of the Wise” (22:17 — 24:22) and claimed that it was possible to use the Egyptian text to elucidate the *crux* in Proverbs 22:20. Budge believed that *Amenemope* contained ideas⁷ of Semitic origin but Erman reversed the direction of the connection and claimed that Proverbs 22:17 — 24:22, were the work of a Jewish scribe translating the Egyptian book with suitable adaptations to make it acceptable to his fellow Hebrews.

Erman’s article aroused great interest in the work throughout the world of Old Testament studies. Articles appeared in a multitude of journals, all following Erman’s thesis and adding more and more examples of parallels to the seven which he had modestly proposed. Indeed it looked remarkably as though an academic parlour game of “Spot the Parallel” was in progress, with marks awarded for each ingenious parallel suggested and bonus points for emendations of the text. Typical of these articles is the work of Gressmann,⁸ based on Erman’s⁹ and Lange’s¹⁰ German translations.¹¹ He was able not only to find in Proverbs 22:17 — 24:22 the thirty sections to which Erman’s emended text of 2:20 referred but also to link each one of these sections with a chapter in *Amenemope*. The principal English work at this time was a translation by Griffith¹² linked with a study of the parallel passages by Simpson who differed from Erman in suggesting that the evidence pointed to the fact that “the proverbial literature of the Near East knows no national boundaries” and that both Egyptian and Hebrew writers had drawn on this common stock of wisdom material.¹³

These different accounts of the origin of the similarity were

⁷ Budge, E. A. W. (1924) 103.

⁸ Gressman, H. (1923a) *Vossische Zeitung* Nr 294 (2nd June) 2f and (1924b) *ZAW* n.f. 1, 272-296 (reviewed by Weill. J. (1925) *Rev. des Etudes Juives*, 80, 1, 108-112.

⁹ Erman, A. (1924b) *OLZ* 27 241-252.

¹⁰ Lange, H. O. (1924) *Nordisk Tidsskrift udgivet af Letterstedtska Forening* 94-107 and (1925) *Das Weisheitsbuch des Amenemope aus dem Papyrus 10474 des British Museum* (Series Det kgl Danske Videnskabernes Selskab Historisk-filologisk Meddelelser 11, 2 Copenhagen).

¹¹ See also Sellin, E. (1924) *OLZ* 45 n.f. 1 26 cols. 1873-1884.

¹² Griffith, F. Ll. (1926) *JEA* 12, 191-231.

¹³ Simpson, D. C. (1926) *JEA* 12, 232-239.

developed by Oesterley¹⁴ and Humbert¹⁵ but the difference of opinion did not involve any doubt about the relationship of the two texts and few hesitated to use the Egyptian text as a basis for emendation of the Hebrew. A note of caution and disbelief was introduced by the articles of Brunet¹⁶ and Herzog¹⁷ but they appear not to have received any serious consideration in academic circles and the situation described by Gardiner in 1942 in the first edition of the *Legacy of Egypt* was of “complete unanimity” on the dependence of Proverbs on *Amenemope*.¹⁸ Gardiner’s claim was not entirely true however, for in addition to the work of Brunet and Herzog, Oesterley,¹⁹ writing in the same book as Gardiner had once again proposed the theory of a common source and yet another point of view had been expressed by Kevin, who claimed that the Egyptian sage had relied on a Semitic original and that his work was limited to making an Egyptian adaptation of the *Words of the Wise*.²⁰ With the introduction of this theory most of the possible permutations had been covered. Kevin’s theory was poorly argued however and the weight of opinion was clearly behind either a hypothetical common source or borrowing from the Egyptian text. In 1951 Baumgartner suggested that the common source had been abandoned as a working hypothesis, claiming that “the theory that Amenemope is original of Proverbs 22:17 — 23:11 has now been generally accepted.”²¹ The attempt to dispute this historical connection between the two texts, or to trace both back to an earlier Hebrew collection of proverbs had been given up”.

It was, therefore, a bubble of considerable size which Drioton attempted to prick when he suggested that it was the Egyptian text which was borrowed and traced it back to a Semitic original from which it might be assumed that the

¹⁴ Oesterley, W. O. E. (1927a) *The Wisdom of Egypt and the Old Testament* London and (1927b) *ZAW*, 45 n.f. 4, 9-24.

¹⁵ Humbert, P. (1929) *Récherches sur les Sources Égyptiennes de la Littérature Sapientiale d’Israël* Neuchatel.

¹⁶ Brunet, A. (1949) *Sciences Écclesiastiques* 1, 19-40.

¹⁷ Herzog, D. (1929) *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete* 7, 124-160.

¹⁸ Gardiner, A. H. (1942) (Ed. S. R. K. Glanville) *Legacy of Egypt* Oxford 62-72.

¹⁹ Oesterley, W. O. E. (1942) *ibid* 246-8.

²⁰ Kevin, R. O. (1930) *Journal of the Society of Oriental Research* 14, 115-157.

²¹ Baumgartner, W. (1951) (Ed. H. H. Rowley) *The Old Testament and Modern Study* Oxford 210-237.

compiler of Proverbs had also drawn his material.²² Drioton's argument followed the lines of Kevin's, pointing to difficulties in the Egyptian text which could be resolved if it were assumed that they arose out of attempts by a not over-bright scribe to render a Semitic text into Egyptian. Kevin had been completely ignored but an Egyptologist of Drioton's stature could not be brushed aside so easily. Even so, his theory was at once challenged by several scholars and it is clear that the weight of opinion is solidly against him. His philological arguments were effectively answered by R. J. Williams²³ and B. Couroyer²⁴ and his suggestion that the borrowing was made in an Israelite colony in Egypt in the VIIth century B.C.²⁵ has been ruled out by the discovery of two more manuscripts confirming, if confirmation were needed, the much earlier date of the Egyptian text.

The interest which Drioton's theories aroused rapidly abated once they were refuted and it seemed to be generally assumed that it was reasonable to revert to the *status quo*. In 1964 for instance, Gray²⁶ in his commentary on 1 and 2 Kings twice referred to "the incorporation of a section of the Wisdom of Amenemope in the Book of Proverbs" and Helck says, "that Proverbs 22:17 — 23:11 is largely dependent on the Teaching of Amenemope is now generally accepted".²⁷

There does now seem to be, however, a more cautious note creeping into the various discussions of the relationship and noticeably less tendency to emend the Hebrew text to conform to the Egyptian. In her recent study, Irene Grumach has restated the earlier idea of a common source on which both Amenemope and Proverbs 22:17 — 23:11 are based.²⁸ The wheel seems to have turned full circle but it remains to be asked whether any corresponding progress has been achieved.

²² Drioton, E. (1959a) *Mélanges Bibliques* (Andre Robert Festschrift) Paris 254-280 and (1959b) *Sacra Pagina: Miscellanea Biblica Congressus Internationalis Catholici de re Biblica 1* Paris, 229-241 (= *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 12-13).

²³ Williams, R. J. (1961) *JEA* 47 100-106.

²⁴ Couroyer, B. (1961a) *RB* 67 208-224 & 395-400.

²⁵ Drioton, E. *À la Rencontre de Dieu* (A. Gelin Festschrift).

²⁶ Gray, J. (1964) *I & II Kings* London 140, 2nd ed. (1970) 146f.

²⁷ Helck, W. (1968/9) *AfO* 22, 26.

²⁸ Grumach, I. (1972) *Untersuchungen zur Lebenslehre des Amenemope* (Münchener Ägyptologische Studien, heft 32) Munich.

B. Date and Authorship of the two works

The full text of the *Teaching of Amenemope* is preserved on a papyrus in the British Museum (B.M. 10474). It has recently been skilfully conserved and there are very few places where the reading is in doubt. The hieratic is neat and regular with only a few strange signs, and can be dated between the XXIInd and XXVIth Dynasties, *i.e.* between 950 and 650 B.C. The layout of the text is worthy of comment; after a long introduction the text is divided up into chapters which are marked off with headings: First Chapter, Second Chapter, etc. and these and a few other lines are in rubrics. More importantly, the text is not arranged continuously but in lines that we would describe as verse. The lines are of varying length but the parallelism and poetic form of the content is clear and corresponds almost exactly to the physical lines of the text.

An ostrakon in the Cairo Museum, copied by Professor J. Černý but now seemingly untraceable in the Museum storerooms, originally seems to have contained the text of Chapter I and first part of Chapter 2. Professor Černý, whose authority on this subject is unquestionable, told me that he dated this ostrakon to the late XXIst or possibly early XXIInd Dynasty.

A similar date has been suggested by B. J. Peterson for a fragmentary sheet of papyrus in the Medelhausmuseet in Stockholm which carries two columns of text partially covering chapters 7 to 11.²⁹ Besides these copies there are three writing boards, one in Turin, one in the Louvre and one in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.³⁰ The Turin writing board (no. 6237) preserves the bulk of chapters 24-26 and, with only one exception, follows exactly the same line division as the B.M. text. It is interesting that, as well as preserving these divisions, there are marginal signs reading Day 4, Day 8, Day 10, Day 12 and Day 18, irregularly spaced but possibly indicating set portions for a pupil's study. The text is very closely related to the B.M. text but Griffiths' suggestion that the Turin scribe used the B.M. text as an exemplar is stretching credibility.

²⁹ Peterson, B. J. (1966) *JEA* 52, 120-128.

³⁰ Posener, G. (1966) *Rev d'Eg.* 18, 45-65.

Very little can be made of the Moscow board beyond identifying the text as parts of chapters 4 and 5, and the Louvre board contains 3 lines from the Introduction. Posener has shown that these boards belong to a class that can be dated to the XXVth Dynasty, c. 750-650 B.C.³¹

Finally, a graffito from Medinet Habu,³² the temple of Ramesses III at Thebes, and a second writing board in Turin,³³ both preserve the first line or title of our text.

The XXIIInd Dynasty date of the Stockholm and B.M. papyri and the Cairo ostrakon indicate a date for the composition before 1,000 B.C. Although some of the internal evidence, the vocabulary, orthography and grammar often suggests a later date, yet there are some examples of these same three points which would seem to follow Middle Kingdom usage of about 1,800 B.C. Most of the personal names were in use by the XVIIIth Dynasty and common in the XXth and, although Horem ma'akheru, the name of the son of Amenemope for whom the Teaching was written, is not otherwise found before the Late Period, the name of the scribe of the B.M. papyrus, Senu, is not otherwise found after the XXth Dynasty. The use of the *Teaching* as a school text in Dynasty XXV suggests that it was established as a classic during the Ramesside period if not earlier and on the basis of the Stockholm and Cairo copies, even an XVIIIth Dynasty date would be acceptable.

Few Egyptologists would dispute that the *Teaching* was cast in its present form by a scribe called Amenemope but Old Testament scholars are less happy about the ascriptions of the authorship of Proverbs to Solomon (Pr. 1:1, 10:1, 25:1) although it is difficult to see why this should be so.

R. B. Y. Scott, is unhappy about Solomon's authorship because, apart from the actual ascriptions in the Book of Proverbs the 'tradition' rests on the description of his achievements in 1 Kings which includes passages containing so many superlatives that they "must be recognized as legendary by any sober historian".³⁴ But must we, by the same token, dismiss the claims of a many-sided genius like

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Edgerton (1937) *Medinet Habu Graffiti Facsimiles* (OIP 36) pl. 10 no. 30.

³³ Posener, G. (1973) *Rev d'Ég*, 25, 251-2.

³⁴ Scott, R. B. Y. (1974) *Proverbs Ecclesiastes* (Anchor Bible) New York, 11.

Imhotep, a vizier, doctor, compiler of one of the first medical texts, architect and engineer, designer and builder of the Step Pyramid, who also managed to find time to put together a wisdom book which was sufficiently important to be listed among the top 8 works of literature by a New Kingdom scribe? If Imhotep is too remote, perhaps an artist, soldier, historian and statesman like Sir Winston Churchill might be a better example.

Perhaps part of the problem lies in the use of the word 'author'. It would, I believe, be quite unreasonable to argue that one man actually composed all the maxims to be found in this book and it is better to talk of a 'compiler' than an 'author', who assembled together a collection of current folk proverbs such as

A soft tongue can break a bone (Pr. 25:15),

A door turns on its hinges, a sluggard on his bed (Pr. 26:14), and other epigrams from other sages whose teaching he was willing to incorporate into his own, the men referred to in Proverbs 22:17 and 24:23 as 'the wise'.

But there is also much linking material, advising the hearer of the value of paying attention to the precepts and longer passages where what might have been a relatively simple proverb such as Proverbs 3:14 "Wisdom is more profitable than silver", has been expanded, the metaphor developed and the whole built up into a short homily. To this extent one can talk of an author and I really do not see why this work could not be undertaken if not by Solomon at least by a scribe working directly under his supervision. The counsellors and scribes whom David and Solomon gathered around them and who are frequently mentioned in Samuel and Kings (2 Sa. 8:17; 15:37; 20:25; 1 Ki. 4:3; 2 Ki. 22:8-10; etc.) are the sort of men who could well be set to such a task.

The Solomonic date for this enterprise is supported by stylistic and linguistic parallels in the Canaanite and Ugaritic literature of the late Bronze Age.³⁵

The note at Proverbs 25:1 about the transmission of the following five chapters and the explicit attribution of the final

³⁵ Albright, W. F. (1960) *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* Leiden (V. T. Supp. 3) 1-15.

Storey, C. I. K. (1945) *JBL* 64, 319-337.

Kitchen, K. A. (1978) — this volume.

two chapters to other sources suggest an intention to ensure that the book is correctly ascribed. There seems to be no logical reason to discount this in favour of any substantial editing at a later date.

C. General points of connection

It is plain that Proverbs, along with other Biblical wisdom books, has much in common with the wisdom writings of other parts of the Ancient Near East. Wisdom literature is one of the most important classes of texts from the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia and sufficient examples survive to illustrate both the different national or cultural preferences and, at the same time, the underlying similarity of thought and expression.

The different preferences can be seen from the fact that various types of wisdom were not apparently universally equally popular. In the various cultures there appear to be differing preferences for certain forms and differing emphases or degrees of interest in certain subjects. Mesopotamian wisdom³⁶ for instance includes several collections of folk proverbs while in the Egyptian and Hebrew corpus there are only isolated examples quoted in stories or letters, and the evident enthusiasm of Mesopotamian writers for contrived debates or literary contests between two entities such as Summer and Winter, Bird and Fish, or Silver and Copper, is not shared by the Hebrew and Egyptian writers.

It is difficult to know to what extent these apparent preferences are simply due to the accident of survival. There are, for instance, no known examples of fables from Egypt before Dynasty XXVI (c. 650 B.C.) though they are known from Mesopotamia and the Old Testament (Jdg. 9:7-15, 2 Ki. 14:9; Is. 10:15; 24:16; etc.) yet there are papyri of Ramesside date (Dynasty XXI-XXII) which contain pictures of animals playing musical instruments and games like chess, or hunting or driving each other in scenes reminiscent of Aesop's fables.

³⁶ In this article I have used the adjective "Mesopotamian" as a blanket term to cover both Sumerian and Akkadian wisdom literature. The Sumerian texts that we have all date from about 2,500 B.C. onwards and were apparently accepted in the traditional scribal corpus.

This may well indicate that the fables existed, and may even have been written down, but the texts either have not survived or have not yet been discovered.

In one important aspect, the contents of Hebrew wisdom literature can be distinguished from that of the surrounding nations. Many writers have pointed out that, in contrast to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian sages who usually stress the material advantages of following their advice, Hebrew חכמה is a whole way of life or attitude of mind that is most concisely summed up in the text that appears on the foundation stone of Tyndale Library — The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. (Pr. 9:10.)

If we have to be cautious about differences of form and content we can be more affirmative about the similarities of thought and expression where the subject matter does coincide. The similarities become particularly noticeable in the class of wisdom literature to which *Proverbs* and *Amenemope* belong. The folk wisdom enshrined in these collections of precepts is the distillation of the accumulated experience of related peoples with cognate languages living in similar circumstances and meeting comparable situations. It is not surprising that they have much in common; it would be noteworthy indeed if their reactions were particularly disparate. In fact, much of this wisdom relates to the community of experience shared not only by the inhabitants of the Ancient Near East but by all men everywhere. It is, in short, good sense.

Leaving aside for the time being 'the Words of the Wise', the similarities of thought and expression identified by such writers as Erman, Gressmann and Simpson between the remaining chapters of *Proverbs* and *Amenemope* can be matched by other passages from Hebrew, Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature. This becomes clear at all levels from the structural passages which give the works their basic form, through the general and specific content of the books to the details of vocabulary and figurative imagery.

It is not surprising that there should be similarity between the structural passages and that many books should begin with an injunction like Amennakht:

Pay attention, and listen to my words, Do not pass over what I say

(*Teaching of Amennakht*, 3-4).³⁷

Amenemope's words

Give your ears, listen to the things which are spoken
 Give your mind to interpret them

(*Teaching of Amenemope* iii. 9-10),³⁸

are typical of this injunction and there are several parallels in Proverbs (e.g. 1:1-7, 3:1, 4:1-2, 10:20, 5:1, 7:1-3, etc.) and in other wisdom texts, e.g.

Give ear, O my people, to my law:
 Incline your ears to the words of my mouth

(*Psalm 78:1*)

Nor is it surprising that they should stress the value of their advice: Amenemope's self-recommendation

If you spend your time with these things in your heart
 You will find it a success
 You will find my words a storehouse of life
 And your body will prosper on earth

(*Teaching of Amenemope* iii, 17-iv, 2)

has several parallels in Proverbs e.g. *Proverbs* 2:20-22; 3:1,2; 4:10 etc. but they are not only two books to urge their own worth. One of the first known wisdom writers, the Egyptian Old Kingdom vizier Ptahhotep claims:

If you listen to the things which I have told you
 All your plans will be advanced (?)
 Their truth is their value
 Their memory passes from the mouths of men (i.e. they are quoted from memory)
 Because of the value of their precepts

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep* 507-511).³⁹

In fact Ptahhotep and Amenemope both use the same words to describe this process:

May you join me, your body (*ḥ r t*) being prosperous
 (*w ḏ ḏ*) on earth

Teaching of Ptahhotep 637),

(If you attend to these instructions)

³⁷ Posener, G. (1955) *Rev d'Eg* 10, 61-72.

Lichtheim, M. (1976) *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley) 2, 176-8.

³⁸ Simpson, W. K. (1973) *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven 241-265.
 Lichtheim, M. (1976) 2, 146-163.

³⁹ Simpson, W. K. (1973) 159-176.

Lichtheim, M. (1973) *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley) 1, 61-80.

. . . your body (*h r t*) will prosper (*w d ʒ*) on earth
(Teaching of Amenemope iv, 2).

Still on this question of general form, many of the writers also impart their advice as from a father to his son. This is made very explicit in the *Teaching of Ptahhotep* where he explains how the king allowed him to set up a school in which to teach his own son and those of other courtiers, and W. G. Lambert has shown that in the scribal guilds of Mesopotamia the teacher-pupil relationship was often expressed as father-son.⁴⁰ The pattern lasts from Ptahhotep through to Ahiqar and both Amenemope and Proverbs conform to it.

Nor is it any more surprising that most books give similar advice about subjects of general interest. It is for instance, wrong to mock the afflicted:

Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker:
 And he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished
(Proverbs 18:5)

is often compared with

Do not laugh at a blind man nor scorn a dwarf
 Nor spoil the plan of a lame man
 Do not scorn a man who is the hand of God
 Nor be fierce of countenance towards him when he has erred

(Teaching of Amenemope xxiv, 9-12),

but the thought also occurs in Mesopotamian wisdom

Do not insult the downtrodden and . . .
 Do not sneer at them autocratically
 With this a man's god is angry
 It is not pleasing to Shamash, who will repay him with evil
*(Counsels of Wisdom 57-60).*⁴¹

Protection of the poor is also important: the Egyptian writer Khakheperresonb reminds us that

There is no champion for the wretched to rescue him from one stronger than himself.

*(Lament of Khakheperresonb Vs. 4),*⁴²

and Rekhmire claimed on his autobiographical tomb stele as one of his many virtues

⁴⁰ Lambert, W. G. (1957) *JCS* 11, 1-14 and 112 and (1960) *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* Oxford 13-14.

⁴¹ Lambert (1960) 96-107.

⁴² Simpson, W. K. (1973) 230-233.

“I judged poor and rich (alike), I rescued the weak (lit. the broken of arm) from the strong.

(*Rekhmire, Biographical Inscription*, line 20).⁴³

This helps to put into context the parallel claimed between *Proverbs 22:22* and *Teaching of Amenemope iv, 4-5*, see below p.

Rather it is right to give alms, and it will meet with divine approval:

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due,
When it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

(*Proverbs 3:27*).

Do not refuse your hand to one whom you do not know who comes to you in mortal poverty.

(*Teaching of Ani v,10*).⁴⁴

Do not eat bread while another stands (by) and you do not stretch out your hand towards the bread for him. He will know it (or perhaps: it will be known) for eternity.

(*Teaching of Ani viii,3*).

The one begging for alms honour, clothe;
Over this his god rejoices.

(*Counsels of Wisdom 61-65*).

Several writers are concerned with a normal family life:

A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband:

But she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.

(*Proverbs 12:4*)

If you are a man of standing, found in a house,

Love your wife as is proper . . .

Keep her from getting control.

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep 325-326, 332*),

and they warn particularly about the dangers of involvement with the strange woman of *Proverbs 2:16*

To deliver thee from the strange woman,

Even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;

(*Proverbs 2:16*)

Beware of the woman from abroad, who is not known in her town.

(*Teaching of Ani, iii, 13*)

Family life includes of course proper respect for parents,

⁴³ Davies, N de G. (1943) *The Tomb of Rekhmire at Thebes* New York 81.

Sethe, K. (1909) *Urkunden des Aegyptischen Altertums* IV Berlin 1077, 18.

⁴⁴ Lichtheim (1976) 135-146.

which seems to include caring for your aged mother:

. . . despise not thy mother when she is old.

(*Proverbs 23:22b*)

Double the food which you give to your mother, and carry her as she carried you.

(*Teaching of Ani vii, 19*)

and helping home your drunken father!

Give your hand to an old man who is sated with beer,
Respect him as his children (would).

(*Teaching of Amenemope xxv, 8-9*)

(A good son is one)

Who takes his hand in drunkenness;
Who carries him when sated with wine.

(*II Aqht i,31*)⁴⁵

Reliability in a messenger is recommended by both *Proverbs* and *Ptahhotep*:

As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him;
For he refresheth the soul of his masters.

(*Proverbs 25:13*)

If you are a confidant

Whom one noble sends to another,
Be completely reliable when he sends you,
Carry out the message as it was spoken.

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep 145-148*)

If an official sends you on an errand, deliver it as he said it.
Do not take from it or add to it. He who leaves (a message alone) produces joy.

(*Teaching of Kheti, son of Duauf x,3*)⁴⁶

as is also a proper degree of attention from an official towards a petitioner:

Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor,
He also shall cry, but shall not be heard.

(*Proverbs 21:13*)

It is not (necessary) that everything which (a petitioner) asks should come to pass, but a good hearing is soothing to the heart.

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep 275-276*)

⁴⁵ Gibson, J. C. L. (1978) *Canaanite Myths and Legends* Edinburgh, 104.

⁴⁶ Simpson, W. K. (1973) 329—336.

Lichtheim (1973) 184-192.

and other Egyptian writers agree that a soft answer turns away wrath:

Do not raise an outcry against the one who has attacked you . . .

The rash man in his hour,
Withdraw before him, leave him alone
God knows how to answer him.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* iv, 10 and v, 15-16)

Do not speak evil to one who attacks you (?). Your voice on the day of a brawl, let it remain in your heart. You will find it good when the time for bearing affliction comes to you.

(*Teaching of Ani* vi, 15-vii, 1)

Let him beat you, with your hand in your bosom
Let him curse you, while you keep silence.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xxvi, 2:3)

The writer of the *Counsels of Wisdom* advises returning good for evil in line with *Proverbs* 25,21 and *Amenemope* XXII 3-8

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;
And if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.

(*Proverbs* 25:21)

Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you;

Requite with kindness your evil-doer,

Maintain justice to your enemy,

Smile on your adversary.

If your ill-wisher is . . . nurture him.

Do not set your [mind] on evil.

(*Counsels of wisdom* 41-46)

and it is better to avoid other peoples quarrels:

He that passeth by, and vexeth himself with strife belonging not to him,

Is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.

(*Proverbs* 26:17)

Do not loiter where there is a dispute

For in the dispute they will have you as a testifier

Then you will be made their witness,

And they will bring you a lawsuit not your own to affirm.

When confronted with a dispute, go your way; pay no attention to it.

(*Counsels of Wisdom* 32-36)

Lying and slander are abhorrent to Hebrew, Egyptian and Babylonian writers:

He that hideth hatred is of lying lips;
And he that uttereth a slander is a fool.

(*Proverbs* 10:18)

Do not act as witness to a false statement,
Or remove another man by your tongue.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* 16,1)

Do not utter libel, speak what is of good report.

Do not say evil things, speak well of people.

One who utters libel and speaks evil.

Men will waylay him with his debit account to Shamash.

(*Counsels of Wisdom* 127-130)

One who utters slander, who is guilty of backbiting,

Who spreads vile rumours about his equal,

Who lays malign charges against his brother, . . .

(Only a portion of the text is preserved; the lines quoted
apparently belong to a list of evil-doers.

(*Hymn to Ninurta* obverse, 5-9)⁴⁷

Lack of sincerity was frowned upon:

Do not speak with a man insincerely,

That is the abomination of God.

Do not separate your heart from your tongue,

Then all your plans will be successful.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xiii, 15-18)

With a friend and comrade do not speak . . .

Do not speak hypocrisy, (utter) what is decent.

(*Counsels of Wisdom* 148-149)

Do not converse (with a tale) bearer,

Do not consult (with a . . .) . . . who is an idler;

In (your) good grace you will become as a mind for them,

Then you will reduce your own output, forsake your path,

And will let your wise, circumspect mind be considered

rebellious.

(*Counsels of Wisdom* 21-25)

for careless talk diminishes respect:

Do not pour out your heart to everybody,

So that you diminish respect for yourself

Do not spread round your words to the multitude

Or associate to yourself one who is indiscreet.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xxii, 11-16)

⁴⁷ Lambert (1960) 118-120.

Keep your tongue from answering your superior
 And guard yourself from his rebuke
 When he makes a statement to snare you
 And you may be released by your answer,
 Discuss the answer with a man of your own rank
 And beware of blurting it out.

When the heart is hurt, words are swifter
 Than the wind at the Nile mouths.

(A man) is ruined and built up by his tongue.

(Teaching of Amenemope xi, 15-20)

Do not open your heart to a stranger so that he may reveal
 your speech to your disadvantage.

(Teaching of Ani vii, 7-8)

In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression:
 But he that refraineth his lips doeth wisely.

(Proverbs 10:19)

Beware of careless talk, guard your lips;
 Do not utter solemn oaths while alone,
 For what you say in a moment will follow you afterwards,
 But exert yourself to restrain your speech.

(Counsels of Wisdom 131-134)

Let your mouth be restrained, and your speech guarded.

(Counsels of Wisdom 26)

My son, do not chatter overmuch till thou reveal every
 word which comes into thy mind, for in every place are their
 eyes and their ears; but keep watch over thy mouth, let it
 not be thy destruction (?)

(Ahiqar 96,97)⁴⁸

and malicious gossip is rebuked by several Egyptian writers:

If you hear anything, good or bad,

Put it away, unheard.

Put a good report on your tongue,

While the evil remains hidden in your heart.

(Teaching of Amenemope xi, 8-11)

Choose the good and speak good while the evil lies hidden
 in your body.

(Teaching of Ani vii, 10)

Hide what is said in your house, act as one who is deaf.

(Teaching of Ani ii, 10)

⁴⁸ Cowley, A. E. (1923) *Aramaic Papyri*, Oxford, 223.

Do not recount a calumny,
You should not even listen to one.

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep* 350-351)

If you hear a bad report, you should not understand . . .
(The text is broken but the editor compares it with the passage from *Amenemope*).

(Teaching on Berlin Ostrakon P. 14371 line 2.)⁴⁹

In fact a wise man refrains from all gossip:

He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets:
But he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

(*Proverbs* 11:13)

. . . and he hears a thing and does not reveal it.

Behold, this is precious before Shamash.

(*Ahiqar* 93)

The impartial administration of justice was a matter of common concern to all people of the Ancient Near East. At the installation of an Egyptian vizier in the XVIIIth Dynasty (Rekhmire c. 1450 B.C.)⁵⁰ he was reminded that he should “see to it for yourself that everything is done in conformity with the law . . . and precedent . . .” Obviously judges and other public officials were potentially subject to corruption. The advice to Rekhmire continues “As for the official in public view, the winds and waters report all that he does; so his deeds cannot remain unknown . . . The abomination of god is partially . . . Look upon a man whom you know like one whom you do not know.” Even a judge who was above bribes might be impressed by a person’s dress or standing:

Do not defraud a man in the law court,
Or remove the just man.

Do not pay attention to a man in fine clothes
Or heed him who is shabbily dressed

Do not receive the gift of a strong man
And oppress the powerless for him.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xx, 21-xxi, 4)

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons: neither shalt thou take a gift; for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

(*Deuteronomy* 16:19)

⁴⁹ Hintze (1954) ZAS 79, 33-36.

⁵⁰ Davies (1943) 85-88.

Sethe (1909) 1102-1117.

Justice is a great gift of God
He dispenses as he wishes.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xxi, 5-6)

As well as the major crimes that were considered in these courts the wisdom writers show themselves thoroughly up to date with an interest in consumer protection and fair trading:

Do not tamper with the balance, or falsify the weights . . .

Do not make yourself deficient weights . . .

Do not make yourself an ephah measure which holds
two . . .

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xvii, 18; xviii, 4; 21)

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small.

Thou shalt not have in thy house divers measures, a great and a small.

A perfect and a just weight shalt thou have; a perfect and a just measure shalt thou have;

(*Deuteronomy* 25:13-15a)

The merchant who [practises] trickery as he holds the balances,

Who uses two sets of weights, thus lowering the . . .

The merchant who practises trickery as he holds the corn measure,

Who weighs out loans (or corn) by the minimum standard, but requires a large quantity in repayment,

(text goes on to describe his fate).

(*Hymn to Shamash* 107-108 and 112-113)⁵¹

(The whole of *Amenemope*, Chapter Sixteen deals with the subject of true weights and measures, on which the *Hymn to Shamash* also has much to say).

A false balance is an abomination of the Lord;

But a just weight is his delight.

(*Proverbs* 11:1 & cf. 16, 11; 20:10 & 23)

The honest merchant who weighs out loans by the maximum standard thus multiplying kindness,

It is pleasing to Shamash, and he will prolong his life.

(*Hymn to Shamash* 118-119)

As well as these mundane issues there are theological observations that these writers have in common. Man's inability to understand God's plans is a common theme:

⁵¹ Lambert (1960) 121.

The heart of a man plans his way
But God directs his step.

(*Proverbs* 16:9)

and

There are many plans in a man's heart
But it is the counsel of God that will stand

(*Proverbs* 19:21)

can be compared with

God is in his success
Man is in his failure
The words which men say are one thing
The things which God does are another.

(*Amenemope* xix, 14-17)

and

Truly you do not know the plan of God.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xxii, 5)

Both passages can be compared with

The will of a god cannot be understood; the way of a god
cannot be known. Anything of a god (is difficult) to find
out.

(Proverb on BM 38486 7-8)⁵²

and

Who knows the will of the gods in heaven?
Who understands the plans of the underworld gods?
Where have mortals learnt the way of a god?

(*Ludlul bel nemeqi* II, 36-38)⁵³

Because of this Man's plans come to nothing and his
position in life is always subject to change:

Boast not thyself of tomorrow;
For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

(*Proverbs* 27:1)

The plans of men never come to pass

(But) the decrees of God come to pass.

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep* 115-116)

(Whatever) men do does not last for ever, mankind and
their achievements alike come to an end.

(*Counsels of a Pessimist* 9-10)⁵⁴

⁵² Lambert (1960) 264-5.

⁵³ Lambert (1960) 21.

⁵⁴ Lambert (1960) 107-9.

There is no man who knows (how) his plan (will turn out?)
when he plans for the morrow.

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep* 345)

He who was alive yesterday is dead today.

For a moment he was dejected, suddenly he is exuberant.

(*Ludlul bel nemeqi* II, 39-40)

As for the rich man of last year, he is a beggar this year.

(*Teaching of Ani* viii, 6)

Prepare not thyself on this day for tomorrow ere it be come,
is not (?) yesterday like today upon the hands of god?

Meditate not plans for the morrow: today is not over until
tomorrow comes.

(*Teaching on Ostrakon Petrie* XI rto 1 & vso 5)⁵⁵

Prepare not for the morrow before it arrives;

One knows not what mischance may be in it.

(*Eloquent Peasant* 183-184)⁵⁶

A man's plans are all subject to the will of God and this
cannot be changed so there is no point in worrying about the
future:

There is no-one whom Fate and Fortune do not know.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* ix, 11)

One cannot escape what has been determined.

(*Teaching of Ptahhotep* 480)

Do not go to bed, fearing the morrow,

When day dawns, what is the morrow like?

Man does not know the morrow is like.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xix, 11-13)

Lo! I live today; tomorrow is in the hand of God.

(Pap. Leiden I 369 5-6)⁵⁷

Do not arrogate to yourself the power of God,

(As though) there were no Fate or Fortune.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* xxi, 15-16)

Even in the face of disaster however Amenemope claims that
Poverty when in the hand of God, is better

Than riches in the storehouse.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* ix, 5-6)

a thought that finds echoes in an Assyrian proverb:

It is not wealth that is your support,

⁵⁵ Černý, J. and Gardiner A. H. (1957) *Hieratic Ostraca* 1 Oxford pl. 1.

⁵⁶ Simpson (1973) 31-49.

⁵⁷ Wente, E. (1967) *Late Ramesside Letters* (SAOC 33) Chicago 18-19.

It is your god.

(*Assyrian Proverb Collection* 42-43)⁵⁸

as well as in Proverbs:

Better is a little with the fear of the Lord

Than great treasure and unrest with it.

Better a meal of herbs and love there

Than an ox (from the) stall and hate with it.

(*Proverbs* 15; 16-17)

In fact worshipper will be rewarded by his God and will prosper:

Reverence begets favour,

Sacrifice prolongs life,

Prayer atones for guilt.

The god-fearing man is not slighted by [the god?]

(*Counsels of Wisdom* 143-146)

It is to the Sun when he rises that you should pray,

Saying, 'Grant me prosperity and health'.

He will give you your needs in life,

And you will be safe from fear.

(*Teaching of Amenemope* x, 12-15)

Unless you seek the will of the god, what luck have you?

He that bears his god's yoke never lacks food, though it be sparse.

(*Theodicy* 239-240)⁵⁹

Every day worship your god;

Sacrifice and benediction are the proper accompaniment of incense.

Present your free-will offering to your god.

For this is proper toward the gods.

Prayer, supplication, and prostration

Offer him daily, and you will get your reward.

Then you will have full communion with your god.

(*Counsels of Wisdom* 135-141)

Righteousness is more important as an act of worship than attention to detail of the ritual sacrifice:

More acceptable is the character of one upright of heart, than the ox of the evil-doer.

(*Teaching for Merikare* 128-129)⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Lambert (1960) 225.

⁵⁹ Lambert (1960) 63.

⁶⁰ Simpson (1973) 180-192.

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.

(1 Samuel 15:22)

A man's moral behaviour affects not only his own wellbeing, but all his family, for good or ill, *cf.* Exodus 20:5:

A righteous man who walks in his integrity
Blessed are his sons after him

(Proverbs 20:7)

He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house;
But he that hateth gifts shall live.

(Proverbs 20:27)

(A wrong-doer's) property is taken out of the ownership of his children,

His possessions are given to another.

(Teaching of Amenemope viii, 7-8)

His heir will not assume control of his property
Nor will his brothers take over his estate.

(Hymn to Shamash 116-117)

Subject matter apart there are numerous instances of linguistic contact between Hebrew and Egyptian, and of course even more between Hebrew and the other Semitic languages. R. J. Williams has listed many examples, including personal names, individual words and idiomatic expressions although some of his examples seem to stretch the point.⁶¹ I find it difficult to imagine, for instance, any significant connection between the picture of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:42 sitting on Mt. Carmel with 'his face between his knees' and Egyptians doing the same thing as a sign of mourning.

Several of the literary images in Proverbs also reappear in other wisdom books:

Wisdom is compared with a priceless treasure
If thou seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hid treasures;

(Proverbs 2:4)

Good speech is hidden more than emerald,
(but) it may be found among the servant girls at the millstones.

(Teaching of Ptahhotep 58-59)

⁶¹ Williams, R. J. (1971) (Ed. J. R. Harris) *The Legacy of Egypt* Oxford.

There is that speaketh rashly like the piercings of a sword;
But the tongue of the wise is health.

(*Proverbs* 12:18)

Be a craftsman in speech, (so that) you may be strong, for
the tongue is a sword to (a man) and speech is more
powerful than any fighting.

(*Teaching for Merikare* 32)

or with a well

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water;
But a man of understanding will draw it out.

(*Proverbs* 20:5)

O Thoth (the god of wisdom) thou sweet well for a man
thirsting in the desert!

It is sealed up to him who finds his mouth (useful), it is open
to the quiet one. The quiet one comes and finds the well,
but (for) the rash man, thou art (blocked).

(Pap. Sallier I viii, 5)⁶²

A woman is compared with a ditch:

For a whore is a deep ditch:

And a strange woman is a narrow pit.

(*Proverbs* 23:27)

Do not know her (a strange woman) carnally: a deep water,
whose windings one knows not, is a woman who is far from
her husband.

(*Teaching of Ani* iii, 14)

Much has been made of the long sustained metaphor in
Amenemope's Fourth Chapter (v.20 — vi, 12) where the
sense seems to be the comparison of the hothead and the quiet
man with two trees.⁶³ The first flourishes for a short while but
is soon cut down and used to build a ship that is eventually
burnt, far away from its home. The second grows steadily in
an orchard, producing abundant crops and giving pleasant
shade for its owner. This passage is often compared with the
simile of the god-fearing man in Psalm 1:

(A man who fears the Lord) shall be like a tree planted by
the streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in the
season:

Whose leaf also does not wither; and whatsoever he doeth
shall prosper.

⁶² Caminos, R. (1954) *Late Egyptian Miscellanies* Oxford 303-329.

⁶³ Drioton, E. (1962) *Mélanges V. V. Struve* 76-80.

The wicked are not so:
But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

(Psalm 1:3-4)

and with the two men in Jeremiah

(A man who trusts in his own strength) shall be like the heath (or tamarisk) in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit a parched place in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited.

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out his roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

(Jeremiah 17: 6-8)

This comparison is entirely fair for there is clearly a basic simile common to all three passages but there is a particular aspect of the Egyptian figure which is not reproduced in the Hebrew passages. I believe it is significant that the first tree “floats far from its place” and is eventually burnt while the second “reaches its end in the grove” where it was first planted. This seems to me to reflect the Egyptians’ horror of dying in some foreign country and having their body destroyed by fire and the ultimate fate of each tree which is not touched on in the Old Testament passages is of great importance in the Egyptian book.

I think it is important to give these points of contact at some length since they help us to view the common issues between Proverbs and Amenemope against their proper background. There are undoubtedly numerous parallels in other texts as well so it can be no part of the argument that the Words of the Wise is directly borrowed from Amenemope.

I now turn to a detailed discussion of the first part of the Words of the Wise, Proverbs 22:17-23:11.

D. The Words of the Wise and the Teaching of Amenemope

Proverbs 22:17-18
Incline your ear, and hear
the words of the wise;

Amenemope iii, 9-11 & 16
Give your ears, listen to the
things which are spoken;

And put your heart to my
knowledge.

For it is pleasant if you
keep them within yourself

They are established
together on your lips.

A number of emendations have been suggested to this passage in spite of the fact that it makes good sense as it stands. Several writers⁶⁴ would like to take דְּבַר יִּמּוּת out of the text and put it as a title and substitute a second דְּבַר יִּמּוּת to correspond with דְּעֵת יִּמּוּת although the antithesis of ‘the words of the wise’ on one hand and ‘my knowledge’ on the other hand make just as good parallelism, and in fact some writers emend⁶⁵ לְדַעְתָּי to לְדַעְתָּם (following the LXX) to correspond with *Amenemope*.

More interesting is the suggestion⁶⁶ that יְחַדֵּר in v.18 should be emended to כְּיִתְּדֵי פֶּי יִתְּדֵי ‘like a tent peg’ on the basis of the Egyptian *n r y t* ‘a mooring post’, the translator having adapted a riverine metaphor into one drawn from desert life, but again it is possible to read the unemended text with good sense. May we not take יְכַנֵּן in the well-attested sense of “being prepared or ready” and יְחַדֵּר as referring to all the proverbs or even specifically to the ‘words of the wise’ and ‘my knowledge’ and translate “so that they are altogether ready on your lips”.

This is a structural passage and other passages can be brought forward telling the reader that it will be advantageous to pay attention to the advice he is given (see above p. 38). If the Hebrew text is emended unnecessarily in three places, we may read with R. J. Williams:⁶⁷

Give ear and hear *my words*

Set your mind to *know them*

For it is fine that you keep them within you

That they be fixed *as a tent peg* on your lips

⁶⁴ e.g. Toy, C. H. (1948) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, (International Critical Commentary) Edinburgh 423 followed by Erman (1924) 88, Simpson (1926) 236 *et al.*

⁶⁵ e.g. Erman (1924) 88, Humbert (1929) 18 and Simpson (1926) 236.

⁶⁶ Gressman (1924b) 274, reads יְחַדֵּר, Sellin (1924) 1236, reads כִּי יְחַדֵּר as do Humbert (1929) 18, Simpson (1926) 236 *et al.*

⁶⁷ Williams (1971) 279.

and we have a passage at first sight closely parallel to the Egyptian text but lacking three lines from the centre and still showing small variations such as the unusual singular use of $\gamma \imath \aleph$ compared with the Egyptian dual form, and the absence of a possessive pronoun with Egyptian 'words'. It is perhaps also significant that *whr* and $\imath \imath \imath$, *nfr* and $\imath \imath \imath$, *ns* and $\imath \imath \imath$ are not entirely synonymous and one might have expected a translator to use a more precise translation such as $\imath \imath$ instead of $\gamma \imath \aleph$ to correspond with Egyptian *ib*. It is legitimate to argue that the Hebrew scribe should be allowed some freedom in his rendering of the Egyptian but then it is surely fair to ask why a satisfactory Hebrew text should be emended to conform if it is a free translation. It seems to be a case of wanting to have one's cake and eat it. It would be easier to see how the Hebrew passage could come to be written by someone acquainted with the Egyptian text but recalling it from memory and making up or omitting what he could not remember.

Proverbs 22:19-20

In order that your trust may
be in the Lord

I have instructed you today,
even you.

Have I not written for you
previously(?)
about counsels and
knowledge?

Amenemope i, 7 & xxvii, 7-8

i, 7 To direct him on the path
of life,

xxvii, See for yourself these
thirty chapters
They are pleasant, they
educate.

Proverbs 22:19 is sometimes⁶⁸ compared with *Amenemope* i, 7 but requires reading $\imath \imath \imath$ instead of $\imath \imath \imath$. The emendation is supported by the LXX but the use of a similar metaphor is hardly enough to suggest a link between the two texts. $\imath \imath \imath$ is moreover an acceptable Hebrew construction similar to the use of $\imath \imath$ in *Gen. 27:34*,³⁴ and there is no reason why emendation should be necessary.

In verse 20 comes the crux, $\imath \imath$ in the *Kethibh* for which the *Qere* suggests $\imath \imath$ and for which Erman⁶⁹ made his famous suggestion $\imath \imath$ on the basis of *Amenemope* xxvii,

⁶⁸ Gressman (1924b) 274.

⁶⁹ Erman (1924) 89 E.

7, but I believe it should be treated with some reserve.

Firstly a numeral in Hebrew can only stand by itself when the noun it qualifies is in close proximity and unambiguously linked⁷⁰. We would therefore have to assume that a word such as *דבר ים* had dropped out. Specifications of measure, weight or time may be omitted⁷¹ but *דבר ים* hardly qualifies in this category.

A second objection is that *לשלישים* is not as firmly supported by the context as some commentators suggest. It had been proposed⁷² before the *Teaching of Amenemope* was known but without meeting acceptance. Before Erman's suggestion was made scholars had divided this section into different numbers of maxims and Erman himself did not suggest that "30" in its Proverbs setting had any significance. He suggested that the Hebrew compiler had inserted it mechanically from the Aramaic or Hebrew translation which he postulated, and thought that the word had lost its significance in its new context. Gressmann and Sellin however were sure that they could find 30 divisions within this part of Proverbs and most other scholars have been persuaded by their arguments, but it is remarkable that the divisions are not more obviously distinguished, especially since *לשלישים* itself is not explained by a noun. For instance, Scott⁷³ and Whybray,⁷⁴ to quote two recent writers, have to take 23:23 out of order and treat it as one maxim so that 23:22 and 24/25 can be grouped to form another. Does 23:26 belong with verses 27 and 28 or is it a separate maxim?⁷⁵ Should 23:12 and 23:19 be counted or not? Where does 22:28 fit? Once we begin looking for 30 sections it becomes easy to find them, but it is arguable whether they are indisputably clear and obvious.

If we accept *לשלישים* are we obliged to accept the idea that this part of Proverbs is based on Amenemope? Could there have been a preference for 30 chapters as the ideal form of a

⁷⁰ Gesenius W. and Kautzsch E. (1910) *Hebrew Grammar* (Trans. A. E. Cowley) Oxford para 126, x.

⁷¹ *ibid.* para 134, n.

⁷² Vaccari, quoted Brunet (1949) p. 28 fn. 4 and Perles, F. (1906) *Jewish Quarterly Review* 18, 290.

⁷³ Scott (1974) 141.

⁷⁴ Whybray, R. N. (1972) *The Book of Proverbs*, (Cambridge Bible Commentary on NEB) Cambridge 137.

⁷⁵ Gressman (1924b) and Toy (1948) differed about this although both have 30 sections.

wisdom book? I do not know of one but there might be a connection with *m r b ʒ y t*, the Egyptian Court of Thirty which has been suggested as a possible prototype for David's heroic thirty (2 Sa. 23).

If we do not accept לְשׁוֹלֵטִים how do we overcome the problem of לְשׁוֹלֵטִים ? There are a number of possibilities not the least being a hitherto unknown meaning of לְשׁוֹלֵטִים (one might point to the Arabic *salsu*, 'a necklace', or *salsalā* 'to bind together',⁷⁶ perhaps referring to a collection of wise sayings, or to the Akkadian adverbial use *š a l ā š ū* 'three times'⁷⁷), or one might retain לְשׁוֹלֵטִים and add לְקִדְמוֹתָם before it. This requires no more emendation than לְשׁוֹלֵטִים — a word has to be supplied whichever is chosen — and a reading "previously" would form good parallelism with לְקִדְמוֹתָם in v.19b. I confess to have spent some fruitless effort trying to see if the present text could have arisen by mistake from the words for 3,000⁷⁸ but I do think that emendation of לְשׁוֹלֵטִים to לְמִשְׁלֵטִים is at any rate no worse than many other suggested alterations.

There is obviously a problem in the Hebrew text at this point. I am not convinced that the reading 'Thirty' is the only solution or that it inevitably points to a link with the Egyptian text.

Proverbs 22:21

To teach you the certainty
of truth

To return words of truth to
the one who sent you.

Amenemope i, 5-6

To know how to rebut an
accusation to the one who
makes it.

To return a charge to the
one who made it.

This is the vaguest of parallels, the two texts do not even deal with the same subject. Amenemope the bureaucrat claims that his teaching will enable a man to refute an accusation while the Proverbs writer is concerned that the reader should be convinced of the importance of truth, particularly in carrying back information. It is closer, in fact, to the sense of Ptahhotep's words.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ See the standard lexica.

⁷⁷ See von Soden, W. (1974) *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, Wiesbaden, 1146.

⁷⁸ after 1 Kings 4:32.

⁷⁹ *Teaching of Ptahhotep* 145-8 see p. above.

Earlier suggestions that אמת should be omitted after אמת י⁸⁰ which would weaken the point of the Proverbs passage and make it slightly nearer Amenemope can be rejected now that Dahood has shown that this is a perfectly acceptable genitival construction using the enclitic.⁸¹

Proverbs 22:22

Do not extort from the poor
because he is poor:
Nor crush the destitute in
the gate.

Amenemope iv, 4-5

Guard yourself from
robbing the poor
From being violent to the
weak. (lt. the broken of
arm.)

A good example of a passage of general advice where it would be difficult to think of any new twist. There is no close verbal parallel though it would have been possible to make a literal translation of the Egyptian phrase 'broken of arm' into idiomatic Hebrew, and one wonders why anyone translating directly from the Egyptian would not do so. To crush the afflicted *at the gate* could perhaps refer to some form of legal oppression through the city court which met traditionally at the gate of the city. In this case of course the connection between the two texts is even more remote.

Proverbs 22:24, 25

Do not associate with a bad-
tempered man, (lit. the
owner of a temper)
Nor go with a hot-tempered
(lit. man of hot tempers)
Lest you learn his ways,

And take a snare to your
soul.

Amenemope

xi, 13, 14; xi, 17, 18
Do not associate with the
rash man (lit. the hot man.)

Nor approach him for
conversation . . .
When he makes a statement
to snare you
And you may be released by
your answer

The basis of this proposed connection is twofold; the metaphor of the snare or lasso although it is a common figure in Hebrew³⁸ and the phrase אמת י⁸¹ אמת which Simpson thinks the Hebrew writer has coined to render the Egyptian

⁸⁰ Erman (1924a) 88, D, Humbert (1929) 20 *et al.*

⁸¹ Dahood, M. (1963) *Proverbs and North-west Semitic Philology* Rome 47.

פֶּֿ שְׁמַן “the hot man”,⁸² although the phrase occurs in the singular as it is here in the Egyptian (אִישׁ חֹמֶה) in Proverbs 15:18 and אִישׁ שְׁמַן and חֹמֶה בְּעַל (Proverbs 29:22) show the same usage.

It is worth commenting that the reason Proverbs gives for keeping away from the hothead is that one will learn his ways and ensnare oneself while Amenemope does not suggest that his reader will become a hothead. In the gap between lines 14 and 17, he has moved on to a different subject entirely and is talking about how to answer a superior who is trying to set a trap.

Proverbs 22:26-27

Commentators seem generally agreed that this passage does not have a parallel in *Amenemope*.

Proverbs 22:29

You perceive a man, skilled
in his work
He shall stand before kings

He shall not stand before
obscure men.

Here there is clearly similarity of thought but it is hardly original or confined to these two books. Almost all the Egyptian advice for young scribes is based on the theme that a successful scribe manages to avoid the unpleasant tasks and has an assured and comfortable future.

e. g.

As for the scribe, every place in the Residence is his, and he will not be poor therein.

(*Teaching of Kheti, son of Duauf*, iv, 3-4)

Proverbs 23:1-3

When you sit to eat with
a ruler
Consider carefully what
is before you
And put a knife to your
throat

⁸² Simpson (1926) 237.

Amenemope xxiii, 13-18

Do not eat food in the
presence of a noble
Or cram your mouth in front
of him
If you are satisfied pretend
to chew

<p>If you are a man of appetite Do not desire his delicacies For it is bread of deceit.</p>	<p>It is pleasant in your saliva Look at the cup in front of you And let it serve your need.</p>
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The question of behaviour at a noble's table also interested Ptahhotep but all three texts are concerned about different aspects. Ptahhotep advised his reader how to behave generally to create a good impression, Amenemope wants him to avoid appearing greedy. It is left to the writer of Proverbs to suggest moral grounds for abstaining, as well as moderation.

Proverbs 23:4-5
Do not toil to become rich

Cease from your own
understanding
(or perhaps
(In view of your wisdom,
stop)

You cause your eyes to fly
to it and it is not (there)

For wealth makes for itself
wings
And flies to heaven like an
eagle.

This is generally considered an undoubted piece of borrowing and is often quoted as an example.⁸³ It is based

⁸³ e.g. Oesterley, W. O. E. (1929) *The Book of Proverbs with Introduction and Notes* London 199 and Williams (1971) 277/8.

Amenemope ix, 14-x, 5
Do not strain to seek excess
When your possessions are
secure
If riches are brought to you
by robbery
They will not stay the night
in your possession

When the day dawns they
are no longer in your house.
Their place can be seen but
they are no longer there
The earth opened its mouth
to crush and swallow them
And plunged them in Dust.
They make themselves a
great hole, as large as they
are.

And sink themselves in the
underworld.

They make themselves
wings like geese,
And fly to heaven.

almost entirely on the metaphor in verse 5 for obviously considerably more than half the Egyptian passage has been lost in the “translation”. Some, but not all, of this omission can be explained by the fact that *Amenemope* ix, 1-3 contain references to the Egyptian underworld which a Hebrew writer might omit as unsuitable or incomprehensible. It should also be pointed out that after the first two lines Amenemope is talking about goods wrongfully acquired whilst the writer of Proverbs is rebuking an unseemly effort to amass unnecessary wealth.

This objection aside, there is clearly a common use of the metaphor likening riches to birds as they seem to grow wings and take flight. There is no difficulty about the change of the bird from Egyptian geese to a Hebrew eagle for it would be natural for a writer to choose a species with which his readers were accustomed.

This metaphor is known however elsewhere in the Ancient Near East for a Sumerian proverb makes almost exactly the same point: “Riches are migratory (?) birds which cannot find a place to settle down.”⁸⁴ and an Egyptian dream book suggests that if a man sees himself in a dream watching the catching of birds, it means that his property will be taken away.⁸⁵ That riches are transient and ephemeral is known only too well to most men; Ani comments that “last year’s rich man is this year’s beggar” (*Ani* viii, 6), and birds are used elsewhere in the Old Testament as figures for such passing entities as the glory of Ephraim in Hosea 9:11 or groundless abuse in Proverbs 26:2.

There does however, seem to be in this passage more than the simple use of a common metaphor for both are built up in the same way — the stolen riches and the wealth both make themselves wings and both fly up to heaven. Nevertheless, the substantial differences between the first parts of the two passages and the relative frequency of the metaphor partially undermine the case for a direct link.

⁸⁴ Sumerian Proverb I. 18, 19 according to Gordon E. I. (1959) *Sumerian Proverbs Philadelphia* 51.

⁸⁵ Papyrus Chester Beatty III Recto 7, 28: Gardiner, A. H. (1935) *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum IIIrd Series*, London.

Proverbs 23:6-8

Do not eat the bread of one
evil of eye
And do not desire his
delicacies
For as he thinks within
himself, so he is.

“Eat and drink,” he says to
you

But his heart is not with you.

Vomit the morsel which you
have eaten

And spoil your pleasant
words

There are two problems with this comparison that we have met before: firstly the two passages are not about the same subject — the Egyptian is about coveting the property of a poor man, the Hebrew about sharing the property of an evil man — and secondly in the six-line gap in the Egyptian there has been a further change of subject to the description of a man vainly trying to cover up a mistake.

Oesterley pointed out that “the Hebrew sage entirely misapprehended the meaning of these (Egyptian) passages”.⁸⁶

Proverbs 23:9

Do not speak in the ear of a
fool
For he will despise your
prudent discourse.

These are clearly two quite different subjects.

To say ‘Don’t talk to a fool because he will not appreciate your wisdom’ is quite a different matter from saying ‘Don’t lay bare your soul to everybody because you will lose all respect’. Even Humbert who saw more parallels than most dismissed

⁸⁶ Oesterley (1929).

*Amenemope xiv. 5-10,
17 & 18.*

Do not covet the property of
a poor man
Lest you hunger for his
bread

As for the property of a poor
man it obstructs the throat.
And wounds the gullet.

It is like a false oath that
makes something (evil)
happen to him

And his heart is deceitful
within him.

xiv, 17 The large mouthful
of bread, you have
swallowed it and vomited it
out (immediately)

You are deprived of your
advantage

Amenemope xxii, 11-12

Do not pour out your heart
to everybody,
So that you diminish respect
for you (yourself).

this as “Rapprochement assez lointain”.⁸⁷ Both are specific applications of the common theme of wisdom; “A still tongue makes a wise head”.⁸⁸

Proverbs 23:10-11

Do not remove an ancient boundary

And do not enter into the field of the orphan.

For their redeemer is strong
He will plead their cause
against you.

And compare *Proverbs*
22:28

Do not remove the ancient
boundary which you fathers
have made.

Amenemope vii, 12, 15;
viii, 9-10

vii 12 Do not remove the
boundary stone on the
boundaries of the cultivated
land.

Nor throw down the
boundary of the widow.
viii 10 Lest a dread thing
carry you off.

Shifting a boundary stone to increase the size of your own field must have been a simple and common crime especially when the victim was a defenceless widow or orphan. There are numerous references which show the importance of boundaries in an agriculturally centred economy in the Old Testament and in Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature. The threat that a “dread thing will carry you off” is hardly comparable with the suggestion that the perpetrator will be disagreeably surprised to find that the defenceless orphan in fact has a powerful ally who will take him to court.

W. G. Lambert has pointed out to me that it is more common to find injunctions against oppressing the poor *man* and suggested that it was possibly significant that these verses referred to property owned by a widow or an orphan.

E. Conclusions

I think we are at last in a position to draw some conclusions. Those who have paid attention and listened to my words will not be surprised if I confess to some doubt about the existence of a direct connection between *Proverbs* and *Amenemope*.

⁸⁷ Humbert (1929) 25.

⁸⁸ see above p. 43 and p.67 below.

The connection so casually assumed is often very superficial, rarely more than similarity of subject matter, often quite differently treated and does not survive detailed examination. I believe it can merit no more definite verdict than 'not proven' and that it certainly does not exist to the extent that is often assumed, as for example by Gray whom I quoted earlier.⁸⁹

Several of the supposed parallels do not seem to me to be parallel at all, for instance 23:21 and 24 and most of the others are either structural passages, 23:17-20, or of almost universal application, 23:22, 29. Even the apparently incontrovertible link provided by the emendation of םִן־שֶׁל־שֶׁל־יָ׃ into םִן־שֶׁל־יָ׃ can be shown to have other possible explanations or implications.

Brunet placed great weight on the difference of order in which the two sets of passages appears⁹⁰ and this has not been satisfactorily explained. If the passages from Amenemope are numbered in order as they appear in the Egyptian text their appearance in Proverbs is as follows, 2, 10, 1, 3, 6, 4, 11, 9, 5, 7, 8, 4, an order which cannot be explained on grounds of sense or style.

Brunet also found it strange that 22:26-27 had no Egyptian original. Verses 19 and 23 could be explained as positive additions specifically introducing references to Jahweh which could not be expected in the Egyptian text but which a pious Hebrew editor might feel obliged to insert, but verses 26 and 27 consist of a purely practical piece of advice for which one searches Amenemope in vain. Should we perhaps supply the missing portion? But if we assume a chapter has dropped out of Amenemope we shall end up with 31 chapters!

I think that both Brunet's points are valid and have not been properly answered. I believe there are other problems. One looks in vain for some unique point. If only Amenemope could have broken with tradition and advised a little gentle corruption or peculation, a crafty heave at a boundary stone, some subtle hints on unfair trading practices or some blatant outright thuggery. Then if Proverbs had managed to copy some of that we would have two texts standing out like

⁸⁹ Gray (1964).

⁹⁰ Brunet (1949).

naughty deeds in a good world and a much surer case for dependence.

Is it significant that those points which seem to receive particular attention from Amenemope do not appear in Proverbs? There is hardly any mention of his contrasting figures, the hothead and the quiet man, and no mention of his philosophical acceptance of the inadequacy of man to which he devotes several lines

God is in his success
 But man is in his failure
 The words which men say are one thing
 But the things which God does are another.

Teaching of Amenemope xix, 10

is suggested as generally parallel with *Proverbs* 14:21 and would surely have been acceptable to the most upright Hebrew. It is difficult to make out a case for omitting this idea from *The Words of the Wise* on theological grounds.

Amenemope's many metaphors from river life are also missing but this is easier to explain for they would be edited out because they would be largely meaningless in a Palestinian context.

Some of the suggested parallels only 'work' if the passage from Proverbs is compared with a piece from *Amenemope* in which there is a large gap. Proverbs 22:24, 25 and 23:6-8 are both examples of this and in each case there has been a change of subject in the interval in *Amenemope*. This substantially undermines the similarity.

A case could be argued for dependence, on the grounds of the cumulative effect of a number of similar passages. Brunet would accept only 5 of the 11 usually cited, namely Proverbs 22:17-18, 20; 22, 24-25 and 29. I would be rather more generous, accepting all these apart from 24-25, and in addition Proverbs 23:1-5 and 10. That is to say I would agree that these verses in Proverbs can be matched with passages in *Amenemope* which deal with a similar subject. This gives us a total of 11 verses of Hebrew text out of 24 and it does not seem to me to be wholly conclusive evidence of direct borrowing.

What about the theory of a common source, first proposed by Oesterley⁹¹ and taken up recently by Irene Grumach⁹² and

⁹¹ Oesterley (1927a).

⁹² Grumach (1972).

Helck?⁹³ Dr. Grumach postulates a late XVIIIth-Dynasty wisdom book of maxims in the order in which they appear in Proverbs which Amenemope used in his composition freely altering the order, and adding new material. This hypothetical book meanwhile passed into a Canaanite version and thence into Proverbs. As if to make this *Alte Lehre* more convincing Dr. Grumach reconstructs it. It is impossible to rule out such a possibility but it has no basis in fact and until some manuscript evidence for this text is discovered it can only be theoretical. A similar argument applies to Helck's suggestion that Proverbs 22-23 is based on an epitome of Amenemope which served as a *Gedachtnisstutze*. He supplies some rather tenuous evidence to show that such epitomes existed in Egypt but it is a far cry from one text, which preserves the initial lines of the chapters of the *Teaching of Ammenemes* to one that has excerpts from the beginnings, ends and even the middles of an apparently arbitrary selection of chapters in a completely different order. This epitome is again a purely hypothetical entity.

I would be prepared to accept that about half of the first part of the *Words of the Wise* can be considered to deal with the same subjects as *Amenemope* and that this could be an indication of some sort of relationship closer than coincidence.

I cannot believe that there is sufficient correspondence to justify a claim that Proverbs was borrowed from *Amenemope* in the sense that that term is normally understood, and there is no justification in my view for any emendation of the Hebrew text to bring it in line with the Egyptian.

The sort of relationship that can be demonstrated can be adequately explained by the suggestion that this passage was contributed by an Egyptian scribe working at the court of Solomon based on his memories of a text that he had heard and, may be, used in his scribal training. I believe this proposal fits all the requirements: a striking metaphor and the thirty chapter framework are remembered clearly, and the subject of much of the *Teaching* is recalled though the details and order are muddled. It seems to me that this conforms with the internal evidence of the Hebrew text and the specific note that this is part of a section based on the teaching of wise men,

⁹³ Helck (1968/9).

it conforms with our knowledge that Amenemope was used in Egyptian scribal schools, and it conforms with the known facts of the historical situation in which Proverbs was probably compiled.⁹⁴ There is plenty of evidence for cultural contact with the surrounding countries and foreigners are specifically mentioned as holding senior positions at the Israelite court. It has been suggested that some of Solomon's officials, listed in Kings 4, 3 might have been Egyptians or, at least, have Egyptian names⁹⁵ and that the title of Secretary of State in David's and Solomon's court may have been expressed by the Egyptian word for a scribe, *sš*⁹⁶

I think it is not at all unreasonable to suggest that in his search for wisdom Solomon would extend his interest beyond his national boundary. 1 Kings 4 demonstrates a knowledge of the existence of the wisdom of the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt and what could be more reasonable than that Solomon should question a cultured Egyptian at his court about this wisdom?

Postscript

At this stage in the argument I would like to introduce for consideration a text that has not previously been discussed in this context: the source will be revealed in due course. It is a collection of precepts, known by their original title as *Precepts of the Elders* — a title which is itself significant — and like the ancient Near Eastern books they describe “all the ways in which a young (man) of the better sort was expected to conduct himself; how he was to behave to his superiors, his equals, and his inferiors; how he was to revere his elders, show compassion for the unfortunate, refrain from light words, and in all circumstances be most scrupulously polite”.

Ptahhotep might well have written

Take care how you go in (to the Lord's house), for without your noticing it you will be watched. Come respectfully, bow, and make your greeting. Do not make faces when you eat; do not eat noisily and without care like a glutton, do not

⁹⁴ For a recent description see E. W. Heaton (1974) *Solomon's New Men* London.

⁹⁵ Grollenberg, L. H. (1957) *Atlas of the Bible* London 71; cf. Mettinger, T.N.D. (1971) *Solomonic State Officials* Lund 29 *et passim*.

⁹⁶ Cody, A. (1965) *RB* 72, 381-93.

swallow too quickly or in a careless manner; do not take great mouthfuls of maize cake, nor stuff your mouth, nor swallow like a dog, nor tear the cakes to pieces, nor hurl yourself upon what is in the plate. Eat calmly, or you will be mocked.⁹⁷

and the advice given throughout his *Teaching* by Amenemope is echoed by the *Precepts*:

One must speak calmly, not too fast, nor heatedly, nor loud . . .

Keep to a moderate pitch, neither high nor low, and let your words be mild and serene.

(A true gentleman should be) humble and not overweening, very wise and prudent, peaceable and calm.

Moreover it would avail nothing to feign these virtues for “our Lord God sees what is in the heart and he knows all secret things”.

Part of the addresses to the emperors on their election also resemble closely passages in Amenemope’s *Teaching*

Take care never to speak lightly, for that would make your person despised.⁹⁸

Another passage

Say nothing, do nothing with too much haste; listen to those who complain to you or bring you news calmly and to the end . . . do not be partial; do not punish anybody without reason.

has much in common with Ptahhotep’s advice to officials and the charge to the Vizier recorded in the tomb of Rekhmire.⁹⁹

The cares of kingship weighed heavy in the minds of the writers of the *Precepts* as they did upon the Middle Kingdom rulers of Egypt.

Lord (they said to him), it is you who will now carry the weight and burden of this state. The burden of government will be upon your back. It is upon your shoulders, in your lap and between your arms that our God has set the task of governing the people and they are fickle and prompt to anger. It is you Lord, who for certain years are going to sustain this nation and care for it as if it were a child in a

⁹⁷ Translations by J. Soustelle (1964) *The Daily Life of the Aztecs* Harmondsworth 233ff.

⁹⁸ cf *Teaching of Amenemope* XXII, 11 & 12, above p.61.

⁹⁹ see above, p.45.

cradle . . . Consider, Lord, that from now on you are to walk upon a very high place along a narrow path that has great precipices to the right and the left . . . Your people are protected by your shade, for you are (like two varieties of trees) which give a great round shadow; and the multitudes are protected by your branches.

Do not suppose, Lord, that the mat and the throne of kings is a place of pleasure and delight, for on the contrary, it is one of great labour, sorrow and penance.

The acceptance of the task of government, the concern to sustain the nation, as well as the cautious use of power remind us strongly of the *Teaching for Merikare*. It is also interesting to notice the literary imagery used in this passage; the comparison of the nation with a child, the dangerous path and the protective tree all have Biblical parallels, e.g. Hosea 11:1, Psalm 23:4 and Ezekiel 31:6. The references to the place where the emperor carried out his official duties provides a very close verbal link with the Egyptian title *sš n tms* “a scribe of the mat”, describing a scribe of the royal administration.¹⁰⁰

This text is not some papyrus or cuneiform tablet which has been gathering dust unnoticed in the store rooms of Birmingham City Museum, it is in fact the *ueuetlatolli* of the Aztecs, as they were recorded by Bernadion de Sahagun and others in the 16th century A.D. The parallels that I have drawn between them and ancient Near Eastern wisdom are in no way exhaustive, but the fact that they can be produced so easily underlines what should be obvious anyway, that such precepts and images are universally acceptable and hence that similar passages may occur in Proverbs and Amenemope simply by coincidence.

¹⁰⁰ Gardiner, A. H. (1947) *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* Oxford I 91*.