



Potential Non-Jewish Authorship

1. Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, Or haChaim to Exodus 19:21

ונראה כי טעם הדבר הוא להראות ד' את בני ישראל הדור ההוא וכל דור ודור כי יש באומות גדולים בהבנה ובהשכלה, וצא ולמד מהשכלת יתרו בעצתו... כי לא באה הבחירה בישראל לצד שיש בהם השכלה והכרה יותר מכל האומות... אלא לחסד עליון ולאהבת האבות.

It appears that Gd did this [presenting the judicial hierarchy of courts as the idea of Yitro] to show the Children of Israel in that generation and every generation that the nations include giants of understanding and insight. Learn from Yitro's insightful counsel... For Israel was not selected due to greater insight and sense than other nations... but due to Divine kindness and love for their ancestors.

2. Content challenges? The "foreign woman", Sophia personification, Emphasis on agriculture, lending, etc.

3. Prof. Avigdor Hurvitz, *Mikra l'Yisrael: Mishlei* pg. 13

מתברר שהאשה הזרה בספר משלי כלל איננה נוכרייה אלא אשת איש ישראלית, או ישראלית פנויה, והיא נקראת "זרה" כי היא זרה לכל אדם שאיננו בעלה.

It becomes clear that the "foreign woman" in Mishlei is not at all a foreigner, but a married Jewish woman or a single Jewish woman. She is called "foreign" because she is foreign to any man other than her husband.

4. John Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs*, Tyndale Biblical Archaeology Lecture 1975, pp. 34-35

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". But must we, by the same token, dismiss the claims of a many-sided genius like 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.

5. Rabbi Saadia Gaon to Mishlei 30:1 (as cited in Daat Mikra to 30:1, footnote 1)

פשט הלשון אשר חכמינו ז"ל קוראים אותו "פשוטו של מקרא" הוא שהיה אדם נקרא "אגור" ורבו שלמדו נקרא "איתאל". וקבל התלמיד הזה מרבו את המאמרים הללו הבאים, כמו שקבלו "אנשי חזקיה" בשם שלמה את המאמרים שקדמו... אלא שכל הבאורים הללו, ואף על פי שהם נכונים ואפשריים, נראה לי להניח את השמות עבריים כפשוטן...

The simple language, which our Sages call *peshuto shel mikra*, is that there was a man called *Agur* and his mentor who taught him was *Itiel*. And this student received from his mentor these next statements, as "the men of Chizkiyahu" received in the name of Solomon the preceding statements...

But all of these explanations [associating each name with Solomon, as we brought above], even though they are correct and possible, it appears to me to leave these Hebrew names with their simple meaning...

6. Ibn Ezra (or Rabbi Moshe Kimchi) to Mishlei 30:1

דברי אגור - היה בימי שלמה הולך ביושרו יודע דעת ונכבד בדורו, על כן המלך שלמה אסף דברי חכמתו בספרו: "The words of Agur" – In the days of Solomon, he walked justly and knew knowledge and was honoured in his generation. Therefore King Solomon collected his wisdom in his book.

Non-Jewish Content?

7. Prof. Avigdor Hurvitz, *Mikra l'Yisrael: Mishlei* pg. 52

תוצאת לוואי הגזרה מהסתמכות החכמה על הניסיון היא שההתגלות האלוקית נדחת לפינה ואיננה משחקת בה תפקיד מרכזי. אין בספרות חכמה מקום לדבר אלקים ומשום כך אין בה נוסחות כגון "כה אמר ד'" או "נאום ד'" או "היה דבר ד' אלי לאמר" וכיוצא באלה. רק במקומות מיוחדים יש התערבות אלוקית או מקור אלוקי לחכמה.

A side effect resulting from the reliance of wisdom on experience is that Divine revelation is pushed off to the side, and it does not play a central role. There is no room in Wisdom Literature for the word of Gd. Therefore, it does not have language like, "So declares Gd," "The message of Gd," "The word of Gd came to me," and the like. Only in unique places is there Divine involvement or a Divine source for wisdom.

8. Talmud, Shabbat 30b

ואף ספר משלי בקשו לגנוז שהיו דבריו סותרין זה את זה. ומפני מה לא גנוזוהו? אמרי, ספר קהלת לאו עיינינן ואשכחינן טעמא? הכא נמי ליעינינן. ומאי "דבריו סותרים זה את זה"? כתיב "אל תען כסיל כאולתו" וכתיב "ענה כסיל כאולתו"! לא קשיא: הא בדברי תורה הא במילי דעלמא. They also wanted to ban the book of Mishlei, for its words contradict each other. Why didn't they do it? Because they said, "Didn't we examine the book of Kohelet and find explanations? So let us examine this book." What were the contradictions? It is written, "Do not respond to a fool in accord with his foolishness (26:4)," and it is written, "Respond to a fool with his foolishness (26:5)!" This is not a problem – one is in words of Torah, one is in general matters.

9. Midrash, Avot d'Rabbi Natan I 1:4

אבא שאול אומר לא שהמתינו אלא שפירשו. בראשונה היו אומרים משלי ושיר השירים וקהלת גנוזים היו, שהם היו אומרים משלות ואינן מן הכתובים, ועמדו וגנוזו אותם עד שבאו אנשי כנסת הגדולה ופירשו אותם, שנאמר "וארא בפתאים אבינה בבנים נער חסר לב...". (משלי ז:ז-כ) וכתיב בשיר השירים "לכה דודי נצא השדה..." (ז:יב-יג) וכתיב בקהלת "שמח בחרור בילדותך ויטיבך לבך..." (יא:ט) וכתיב בשיר השירים "אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו" (ז:יא)...

Abba Shaul said: Not that they were patient with them, but that they explained them. At first they said that Mishlei, Shir haShirim and Kohelet were put away, because they presented *meshalot* and were not of the Writings, and they arose and put them away, until the Great Assembly came and explained them, as in Mishlei 7:7-20, Shir haShirim 7:12-13, Kohelet 11:9, and Shir haShirim 7:11...

Wisdom Literature?

10. Prof. Avigdor Hurvitz, *Mikra l'Yisrael: Mishlei* pg. 51

לפי ההגדרה הרחבה של גרהרד פון-ראד, ספרות החכמה מתאפיינת בידע מעשי של חוקי החיים והעולם המתבסס על הניסיון, הווי אומר, סמכות החכם וסמכות ספרות החכמה נובעות לא מהתגלות אלוקית אלא מניסיוני האישי של החכם או מניסיון קיבוצי של כלל העם שהחכם מייצג ומוסר. In the broad definition of Gerhard von Rad, Wisdom Literature is characterized by practical knowledge of the laws of life and the world, based in experience. Meaning, the authority of the sage and the authority of Wisdom Literature springs not from Divine revelation but from the sage's personal experience or the collective experience of the community whom the sage presents and transmits.

11. Talmud, Bava Batra 14a

סדרן של כתובים: רות תהלים איוב משלי קהלת שיר השירים קנות דניאל אסתר עזרא ודברי הימים
The order of the Writings is: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Chronicles.

12. John Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs* pg. 37

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.)

The Book of Thirty Lessons (22:17-24:22)

13. John Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs* pg. 30

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 (שלישים-שלושים). Budge believed that Amenemope contained ideas 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... Indeed it looked

remarkably as though an academic game of "Spot the Parallel" was in progress, with marks awarded for each ingenious parallel suggested and bonus points for emendations of the text.

14. John Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs* pp. 37-39

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)

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),

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)...

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. 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 Gd
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).

15. John Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs* pp. 50-51, 63

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)
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)...

One looks in vain for some unique point. If only Amenemope could have broken with tradition and advised a little gentle corruption or speculation, 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 naughty deeds in a good world and a much surer case for dependence.

16. John Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs* pp. 56-59

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.
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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...

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. (It. the broken of arm.)
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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...

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 If you are a man of appetite Do not desire his delicacies For it is bread of deceit.	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 It is pleasant in your saliva Look at the cup in front of you And let it serve your need.
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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.

17. John Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenemope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs* pg. 66-68

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 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, not tear the cakes to pieces, nor hurl yourself upon what is in the plate. Eat calmly, or you will be mocked.

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...

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 *veuetlatolli* of the Aztecs, as they were recorded by Bemadion de Sahagun and others in the 16th century. 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.