

Parallels between Proverbs and the Instruction of Amenemope

Proverbs	Amenemope	
	Page and Line	Chapter
22:17-18	3:9-11; 3:16	ch. 1
22:19	1:7	introduction
22:20	27:7-8	ch.30
22:21	1:5-6	introduction
22:22	4:4-5	ch. 11
22:23	No parallel	
22:24	11:13-14	ch. 9
22:25	13:8-9	ch. 9
22:26-27	No parallel	
22:28	7:12-13	ch. 6
22:29	27:16-17	ch. 30
23:1-3	23:13-18	ch. 23
23:4-5	9:14-10:5	ch. 7
23:6-7	14:5-10	ch. 11
23:8	14:17-18	ch. 11
23:9	22:11-12	ch. 21
23:10-11	7:12-15; 8:9-10	ch. 6
23:12-24:10	No parallels	
24:11	11:6-7	ch. 8
24:12-22	No parallels	

THE INSTRUCTION OF AMEN-EM-OPET

A general parallelism of thought or structure between Egyptian and Hebrew literature is common. It is, however, more difficult to establish a case of direct literary relation. For this reason, special attention is directed to the Instruction of Amen-em-Opet, son of Ka-nakht, and its very close relation to the Book of Proverbs, particularly Prov. 22:17-24:22. Amen-em-Opet differs from earlier Egyptian books of wisdom in its humbler, more resigned, and less materialistic outlook.¹

The hieratic text is found in British Museum Papyrus 10474 and (a portion only) on a writing tablet in Turin. The papyrus is said to have come from Thebes. The date of the papyrus manuscript is debated. It is certainly subsequent to the Egyptian Empire. A date anywhere between the 10th and 6th centuries B.C. is possible, with some weight of evidence for the 7th-6th centuries.

Only a selection of items from an extensive bibliography will be noted. The papyrus was reproduced in *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum. Second Series*, ed. by E. A. W. Budge (London, 1923), Pls. I-xiv; followed by Budge, *The Teaching of Amen-em-apt, Son of Kanakht* (London, 1924). A. Erman established the specific relation of Amen-em-Opet and Proverbs in *Eine ägyptische Quelle der "Sprüche Salomos"* (*SPAW*, May, 1924, 86-93). H. Gressmann advanced the study of the relationship in *ZAW*, XLII (1924), 273-96. The standard study of the texts is now H. O. Lange, *Das Weisheitsbuch des Amenemope* (Copenhagen, 1925). The best trans-

¹ On the characteristics of older and later Egyptian books of wisdom, see R. Anthes, *Lebensregeln und Lebensweisheit der alten Ägypter* (AO, 32, Leipzig, 1933).

lation and commentary in English are those of F. Ll. Griffith, in *JEA*, XII (1926), 191-231, which is followed (pp. 232-39) by D. C. Simpson, *The Hebrew Book of Proverbs and the Teaching of Amenophis*. Although most commentators have inclined toward the view of a direct or indirect dependence of the Hebrew upon the Egyptian, a counteropinion was expressed by R. O. Kevin, *The Wisdom of Amen-em-apt and its Possible Dependence upon the Hebrew Book of Proverbs* (Philadelphia, 1931).*

Introductory

THE BEGINNING OF THE TEACHING OF LIFE, the testimony for prosperity, all precepts for intercourse with elders, the rules for courtiers, (5) to know how to return an answer to him who said it, and to direct a report to one who has sent him, in order to direct him to the ways of life, to make him prosper upon earth, let his heart go down into its shrine, (10) steer him away from evil, and to rescue him from the mouth of the rabble, revered in the mouth of the people;

made by the Overseer of the Soil, one experienced in his office, the seed of a scribe of Egypt, (15) THE OVERSEER OF GRAINS WHO REGULATES THE MEASURE and manages the *yield of grain* for his lord, who registers islands and newly appearing lands in the Great Name of his majesty,² [who] establishes landmarks at the boundaries of the arable land, (ii 1) who protects the king by his records, and who makes the land-register of Egypt; the scribe who sets up the divine offerings for all the gods and gives land-titles to the common people; (5) THE OVERSEER OF GRAINS [AND PROVIDER] OF FOODS, who *transports magazines with grain*, the truly silent one³ in Abydos of the Thinite Nome, the triumphant one of Akhmim, possessor of a tomb on the west of Panopolis, (10) possessor of a grave in Abydos, AMEN-EM-OPET, THE SON OF KA-NAKHT, the triumphant one of Abydos;

(for) his son, the smallest of his children, the littlest of his adherents, (15) the Privy Councillor of Min Ka-mutef, the Water Pours of Wen-nofer, who installs Horus upon the throne of his father, . . . , (iii 1) *Examiner* of the God's Mother, Inspector of the Black Cattle of the Terrace of Min, who protects Min in his shrine, Hor-em-maa-kheru being his right name, (5) the child of a notable of Akhmim and son of the Sistrum-Player of Shu and Tefnut and Chief Choir-Leader of Horus, Ta-Usert.⁴

HE SAYS: FIRST CHAPTER:

Give thy ears, hear what is said,
Give thy heart to understand them. (10)
To put them in thy heart is worth while,⁵
(But) it is damaging to him who neglects them.
Let them rest in the casket of thy belly,
That they may be a *key* in thy heart.

² The shifting of the course of the Nile brought new lands into being. Apparently these were crown domains.

³ Properly submissive or conformist.

⁴ The mother's titles and name. The members of the family enjoyed no high offices.

⁵ For these first 3 lines, cf. the first 3 lines of the corresponding section of Prov. 22:17-18a.

At a time when there is a whirlwind of words, (15)
 They shall be a mooring-stake *for* thy tongue.
 If thou spendest thy time while this is in thy heart,
 Thou wilt find it a success;
 Thou wilt find my words a treasury of life, (iv 1)
 And thy body will prosper upon earth.⁹

SECOND CHAPTER:

Guard thyself against robbing the oppressed
 And against overbearing the disabled. (5)
 Stretch not forth thy hand against the approach of
 an old man,
 Nor *steal away* the speech of the *aged*.
 Let not thyself be sent on a dangerous errand,
 Nor love him who carries it out.
 Do not cry out against him whom thou hast
 attacked, (10)
 Nor return him answer on thy own behalf.
 He who does evil, the (very) river-bank abandons
 him,
 And his *floodwaters* carry him off.
 The north wind comes down that it may end his
 hour;
 It is joined to the tempest; (15)
 The thunder is loud, and the crocodiles are wicked.
 Thou heated man,⁷ how art thou (now)?
 He is crying out, and his voice (reaches) to heaven.
 O moon,⁸ establish his crime (against him)!
 So steer that we may bring the wicked man
 across, (v 1)
 For we shall not act like him—
 Lift him up, give him thy hand;
 Leave him (in) the arms of the god;
 Fill his belly with bread of thine, (5)
 So that he may be sated and may *be ashamed*.⁹
 Another good deed in the heart of the god
 Is to pause before speaking. . . .¹⁰

FOURTH CHAPTER:¹¹

As for the heated man of a temple, (vi 1)
 He is like a tree growing in the open.
 In the completion of a moment (comes) its loss of
 foliage,
 And its end is reached in the shipyards;
 (Or) it is floated far from its place, (5)
 And the flame is its burial shroud.
 (But) the truly silent man holds himself apart.
 He is like a tree growing in a *garden*.
 It flourishes and doubles its yield;

⁹ It is obvious that each chapter (Egyptian: "house") is divided into stanzas. For example, the first chapter divides 4-4-4. However, the division is not always clear. Does the second chapter divide 4-4-2-4-4-2 or 4-4-8-6-2? Does the fourth chapter divide 4-2-4-2 or 6-6? Therefore, this translation does not attempt such divisions.

⁷ The "hot" man is the passionate or impulsive man, in contrast to the "silent" or humbly pious man.

⁸ The moon-god Thoth was the barrister of the gods.

⁹ The thought of this section is akin to the "coals of fire" passage in Prov. 25:21-22 or 24:29.

¹⁰ The third chapter, here omitted, advises restraint in debate. "Sleep before speaking." Avoid arguing with "the heated man," because "the god knows how to answer him."

¹¹ This chapter has general similarity to Ps. 1 or Jer. 17:5-8.

It (stands) before its lord. (10)
 Its fruit is sweet; its shade is pleasant;
 And its end is reached in the garden. . . .¹²

SIXTH CHAPTER:

Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries of
 the arable land,
 Nor disturb the position of the measuring-cord;
 Be not greedy after a cubit of land,
 Nor encroach upon the boundaries of
 a widow.¹³ . . . (vii 15)
 Guard against encroaching upon the boundaries of
 the fields,
 Lest a terror carry thee off. (viii 10)
 One satisfies god with the will of the Lord,
 Who determines the boundaries of the arable land.¹⁴ . . .
 Plow in the fields, that thou mayest find thy
 needs, (17)
 That thou mayest receive bread of thy own threshing
 floor.
 Better is a measure that the god gives thee
 Than five thousand (taken) illegally.
 They do not spend a day (in) the granary or
 barn; (ix 1)
 They make no provisions for the beer-jar.
 The completion of a moment is their lifetime in the
 storehouse;
 At daybreak they are sunk (from sight).
 Better is poverty in the hand of the god (5)
 Than riches in a storehouse;
 Better is bread, when the heart is happy,
 Than riches with sorrow.¹⁵

SEVENTH CHAPTER:

Cast not thy heart in pursuit of riches, (10)
 (For) there is no ignoring Fate and Fortune.¹⁶
 Place not thy heart upon externals,
 (For) every man belongs to his (appointed) hour.
 Do not strain to seek an excess, (15)
 When thy needs are safe for thee.
 If riches are brought to thee by robbery,
 They will not spend the night with thee;
 At daybreak they are not in thy house:
 Their places may be seen, but they are not.
 The ground has opened its mouth . . . that it might
 swallow them up,
 And might sink them into the underworld. (x 1)
 (Or) they have made themselves a great breach of
 their (own) size
 And are sunken down into the underworld.*
 (Or) they have made themselves wings like geese
 And are flown away to the heavens.¹⁷ (5)

¹² The fifth chapter urges honesty in relations with the temple, because today's dispositions may be upset by tomorrow's changes.

¹³ cf. Prov. 22:28; 23:10. The omitted following portion gives god's penalties against the encroacher.

¹⁴ The thought is generally that of Prov. 23:11.

¹⁵ cf. Prov. 15:16-17.

¹⁶ The god *Shay* and the goddess *Renenu* were two deified concepts, whose governing role was particularly strong at this time.

¹⁷ cf. Prov. 23:4-5.

Rejoice not thyself (over) riches (gained) by robbery,
Nor mourn because of poverty.

If an archer *in the van* advances (too far),
Then his *squad* abandons him.

The ship of the covetous is left (in) the mud, (10)
While the boat of the silent man (has) a fair breeze.
Thou shouldst make prayer to the Aton when he
rises,

Saying: "Give me prosperity and health."
He will give thee thy needs for this life,
And thou wilt be safe from terror.¹⁸ . . .

NINTH CHAPTER:

Do not associate to thyself the heated man,
Nor visit him for conversation.¹⁹
Preserve thy tongue from answering thy
superior, (xi 15)

And guard thyself against reviling him.
Do not make him cast his speech to lasso thee,
Nor make (too) free with thy answer.
Thou shouldst discuss an answer (*only*) *with* a man
of thy (own) size,
And guard thyself against plunging headlong into it.
Swifter is speech when the heart is hurt (xii 1)
Than wind *of the head-waters*.²⁰ . . .
Do not leap to hold to such a one,
Lest a terror carry thee off.

TENTH CHAPTER: (xiii 10)

Do not greet thy heated (opponent) in thy violence,²¹
Nor hurt thy own heart (thereby).
Do not say to him: "Hail to thee!" falsely,
When a terror is in thy belly.
Do not talk with a man falsely— (15)
The abomination of the god.
Do not cut off thy heart from thy tongue,
That all thy affairs may be successful.
Be sincere²² in the presence of the common people,
For one is safe in the hand of the god. (xiv 1)
God hates him who falsifies words;
His great abomination is the contentious of belly.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER:

Be not greedy for the property of a poor man, (5)
Nor hunger for his bread.
As for the property of a poor man, it (is) a blocking
to the throat,
It makes a *vomiting* to the gullet.
If he has *obtained* it by false oaths,
His heart is perverted by his belly.²³ . . . (xiv 10)
The mouthful of bread (too) great thou
swallowest and vomitest up, (xiv 17)
And art emptied of thy good.²⁴ . . .

¹⁸ The omitted eighth chapter tells the effects of evil speech.

¹⁹ cf. Prov. 22:24. For the last two lines of this chapter, cf. *ibid.* 22:25.

²⁰ A long omitted passage sets forth the miseries of "the heated man."

²¹ Perhaps: You will suffer if you treat an excited opponent with arbitrary abruptness. Prov. 27:14 has been cited as a parallel, with the alteration of Hebrew *re'e(hu)* "his friend," to *ra'* "an evil (man)."

²² "Heavy."

²³ cf. Prov. 23:6-7.

²⁴ cf. *ibid.*, 23:8. The omitted twelfth chapter advises honesty in the trusted factor of a noble.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER:

Do not confuse a man with a pen upon
papyrus— (xv 20)

The abomination of the god.

Do not bear witness with false words, (xvi 1)

Nor *support* another person (*thus*) with thy tongue.

Do not take an accounting of him who has nothing,
Nor falsify thy pen.

If thou findest a large debt against a poor man, (5)

Make it into three parts,

Forgive two, and let one stand.

Thou wilt find it like the ways of life;

Thou wilt lie down and sleep (soundly); in the
morning

Thou wilt find it (again) like good news. (10)

Better is praise as one who loves men

Than riches in a storehouse;

Better is bread, when the heart is happy,

Than riches with sorrow.²⁵ . . .

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER:

Do not *lean on* the scales nor falsify the weights,

Nor damage the fractions of the measure.²⁶

Do not wish for a (common) country
measure, (xvii 20)

And neglect those of the treasury.

The ape²⁷ sits beside the balance,

And his heart is the plummet. (xviii 1)

Which god is as great as Thoth,

He that discovered these things, to make them?

Make not for thyself weights which are deficient;

They *abound in grief* through the will of god.²⁸ . . .

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER: (xix 10)

Do not spend the night fearful of the morrow.

At daybreak what is the morrow like?

Man knows not what the morrow is like.²⁹

God is (always) in his success,
Whereas man is in his failure; (15)

One thing are the words which men say,

Another is that which the god does.³⁰

Say not: "I have no wrongdoing,"

Nor (yet) strain to seek quarreling. (20)

As for wrongdoing, it belongs to the god;

It is sealed with his finger.

There is no success in the hand of the god,

But there is no failure before him.

If he³¹ pushes himself to seek success, (xx 1)

In the completion of a moment he damages it.

Be steadfast in thy heart, make firm thy breast.

Steer not with thy tongue (alone).

²⁵ cf. *ibid.*, 16:8. The fourteenth chapter asks honest relations with a client, the fifteenth honest recording by the secretary.

²⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 20:23.

²⁷ The animal sacred to Thoth, god of just measure.

²⁸ cf. Prov. 16:11. The seventeenth chapter continues the theme of false measures.

²⁹ Meaning and the probable strophic structure call for a line following this, to the effect that tomorrow is in the hand of god.

³⁰ cf. Prov. 19:21 and 16:9 and the *Homo proposuit sed Deus disponit* of Thomas à Kempis.

³¹ A man.

If the tongue of a man (be) the rudder of a boat, (5)
The All-Lord is its pilot.⁸² . . .

TWENTIETH CHAPTER:

Do not confuse a man in the law court,
Nor *divert* the righteous man.
Give not thy attention (only) to him clothed in
white, (xxi 1)
Nor give consideration to him that is unkempt.⁸³
Do not accept the bribe of a powerful man,
Nor oppress for him the disabled.
Justice is the great reward of god; (5)
He gives it to whom he will. . . .
Do not falsify the *income* on the records,*
Nor damage the plans of god.
Do not discover for thy own self the will of god, (15)
Without (reference to) Fate and Fortune.⁸⁴ . . .

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER:

Do not say: "I have found a strong superior, (xxii 1)
For a man in thy city has injured me."
Do not say: "I have found a *patron*,
For one who hates me has injured me."
For surely thou knowest not the plans of god, (5)
Lest thou *be ashamed* on the morrow.
Sit thou down at the hands of the god,
And thy silence will cast them down.⁸⁵ . . .
Empty not thy belly to everybody,
Nor damage (thus) the regard for thee.
Spread not thy words to the common people,
Nor associate to thyself one (too) outgoing of heart.⁸⁶
Better is a man whose talk (remains) in his belly (15)
Than he who speaks it out injuriously.⁸⁷
One does not run to reach success,
One does not *throw* to his (own) damage.⁸⁸ . . .

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER:

Do not eat bread before a noble,
Nor lay on thy mouth at first.
If thou art satisfied with false chewings, (xxiii 15)
They are a pastime for thy spittle.
Look at the cup which is before thee,
And let it serve thy needs.⁸⁹
As a noble is great in his office,
He is as a well abounds (in) the drawing (of
water).⁹⁰ . . .

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER:

Do not laugh at a blind man nor tease a dwarf
Nor injure the affairs of the lame. (xxiv 10)
Do not tease a man who is in the hand of the god,⁹¹

⁸² The nineteenth chapter concerns honest statement in the court of law.

⁸³ *Sic*, although the negative seems out of place.

⁸⁴ cf. n.16 above.

⁸⁵ cf. Prov. 20:22 and 27:1.

⁸⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 23:9 and 20:19.

⁸⁷ cf. *ibid.*, 12:23.

⁸⁸ The twenty-second chapter again advises restraint in debate.

⁸⁹ cf. Prov. 23:1-3.

⁹⁰ The twenty-fourth chapter advises the secretary to keep the affairs of his master in confidence.

⁹¹ The insane.

Nor be fierce of face against him if he errs.
For man is clay and straw,
And the god is his builder.
He is tearing down and building up every day. (15)
He makes a thousand poor men as he wishes,
(Or) he makes a thousand men *as overseers*,
When he is in his hour of life.
How joyful is he who reaches the West,
When he is safe in the hand of the god.⁹² . . .

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER:

Do not *recognize* a widow if thou catchest her in the
fields,⁹³
Nor fail to be *indulgent* to her reply. (xxviii 10)
Do not neglect a stranger (with) thy oil-jar,
That it be doubled before thy brethren.
God desires respect for the poor
More than the honoring of the exalted.⁹⁴ . . .

THIRTIETH CHAPTER:

See thou these thirty chapters:
They entertain; they instruct;⁹⁵
They are the foremost of all books;
They make the ignorant to know. (xxviii 10)
If they are read out before the ignorant,
Then he will be cleansed by them.
Fill thyself with them; put them in thy heart,
And be a man who can interpret them,
Who will interpret them as a teacher. (15)
As for the scribe who is experienced in his office,
He will find himself worthy (to be) a courtier.⁹⁶
(colophon:)

It has come to its end
In the writing of Senu, son of the God's Father
Pa-miu.⁹⁷ (xxviii 1)

⁹² Death releases a man from the helplessness of this world. The twenty-sixth chapter deals with respect toward elders or superiors, with the twenty-seventh continuing this theme.

⁹³ Literally: "Do not find a widow." The reference is to the poor gleaning in the fields.

⁹⁴ The twenty-ninth chapter recommends appropriate etiquette for the ferryboat across the river.

⁹⁵ In Prov. 22:20, the Hebrew is to be read: "Have I not written unto thee thirty (sayings)?"

⁹⁶ cf. Prov. 22:29. The special relation of "the Words of the Wise," Prov. 22:17-24:22, to the Wisdom of Amen-em-Opet may best be shown by Simpson's comparison of passages.

Prov. 22:17-18	Amen-em-Opet 3:9-11; 3:16 (Chapter 1)
22:19	1:7 (Introductory)
22:20	27:7-8 (Chap. xxx)
22:21	1:5-6 (Introductory)
22:22	4:4-5 (Chap. II)
22:23	no parallel
22:24	11:13-14 (Chap. IX)
22:25	13:8-9 (Chap. IX)
22:26-27	no parallel
22:28	7:12-13 (Chap. VI)
22:29	27:16-17 (Chap. xxx)
23:1-3	23:13-18 (Chap. xxxii)
23:4-5	9:14-10:5 (Chap. vii)
23:6-7	14:5-10 (Chap. XI)
23:8	14:17-18 (Chap. XI)
23:9	22:11-12 (Chap. XXI)
23:10-11	7:12-15; 8:9-10 (Chap. VI)
23:12-24:10	no parallels
24:11	11:6-7 (Chap. VIII)
24:12-22	no parallels

⁹⁷ Senu was the scribe who made this copy, as distinct from Amen-em-Opet, the author of the Instruction.