BN 54 (1990)

Egyptian "Prophetic" Writings and Biblical Wisdom Literature

Nili Shupak - Haifa

Within the surviving corpus of the ancient Egyptian literature there is a group of compositions similar in structure, content and vocabulary, which constitute a self-contained unit. These works are The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, The Dispute between a Man and his Ba, The Prophecies of Neferti, The Admonitions of Ipuwer and The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb.

The compositions were written either during the First Intermediate Period or the Middle Kingdom[1] and are essentially expressions of disapproval and criticism of prevailing social conditions and administrative corruption[2].

The five Egyptian works have been ascribed to various genres - polemic literature, political literature or wisdom literature - but the general tendency of research is to classify them as prophetic literature. Scholars are also divided as to the purpose of the works - didactic, entertainment, royal propaganda, or social and political criticism.

In a recent paper[3] I attempted to show that in ancient Egypt there was no parallel to Biblical Prophecy, whose salient features are divine inspiration,

---

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. T. Fenton who took the time to read this article and make valuable comments.

1 For the exact date of the composition of the different works see: N. SHUPAK, Egyptian "Prophecy" and Biblical Prophecy, in: Shnaton, An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, ed.M.WEINFELD, 11(1990), pp.4-7,(hebr).

2 Scholars are divided on the question of whether the calamities and wrongdoings referred to in these works are connected with real historical events or are fictional accounts based on a literary model. For details see J. ASSMANN, Königsdogma und Heilserwartung. Politische und kultische Chaosbeschreibungen in ägyptischen Texten, in Apocalipticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East, Tübingen, 1983, pp. 345-377. For the translation of the compositions and further discussion see: W.K. SIMPSON, ed., The Literature of Ancient Egypt, Yale, 1972, pp. 31-49; 201-240; M. LICHTHEIM, Ancient Egyptian Literature, Berkeley, 1973, vol. I, pp. 139-184; N. SHUPAK, Selected Terms of Biblical Wisdom Literature in Comparison to the Egyptian Literature, Ph.D. dissertation,Jerusalem, 1984, pp. XXVII-XXVIII (in Hebrew with an English abstract; to be published in English in Orbis

universalistic outlook, censure of idolatory and exhortation on behalf of monotheism. The above texts cannot therefore be considered "prophetic" in the Biblical sense - if at all - despite the features they share with Biblical prophecy, but should be related to the Egyptian wisdom genre, albeit as an independent autonomous unit. These conclusions were based mainly on a comparison of the Egyptian works with the phenomenon of prophecy and prophet in the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of the present discussion is to reinforce these conclusions, by a complementary procedure, namely, by comparing the Egyptian texts with Biblical wisdom literature[4]. This comparison indicates the existence of features common to both groups in structure, style, vocabulary and content.

1. Structure

a. Speeches enclosed within a narrative framework:

All the Egyptian compositions under review except for The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb contain a narrative frame in prose that serves as a setting for a rhetorical section in verse. In The Eloquent Peasant the frame describes the causes for the Peasant's complaints, which form the core of the work. Similarly, the opening tale of The Prophecies of Neferti provides the background for Neferti's speeches by describing the events in the court of King Snefru (4th Dynasty). The Admonitions of Ipuwer probably opened with a similar frame, although this has been lost. The prose frame of The Dispute between a Man and His Ba, of which only remnants have survived, probably clarified the hero's longing for death.

An analogous structure is found in the Biblical wisdom literature. The final version of the Book of Job, the one available to us today, is likewise divided into prose and poetry: the narrative frame in chapters 1-2 and 42: 7-17 form a prologue and epilogue to the main part of the work, namely, chapters 3-42: 6. This contains the rhetorical speeches of Job and his friends,

---

Biblicus et Orientalis, 1990) and ibid., for the publications of the Egyptian sources; see also S. HERRMANN, Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgestalt mittelägyptischer Literaturwerke, Berlin, 1957, pp. 94-98.

3 SHUPAK, Egyptian "Prophecy", pp. 1-40.

4 The term "wisdom literature" in the present context relates to the "wisdom" books of the Bible, namely Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes and not to passages subject to the influence of wisdom tradition or in which sapiential features are clearly evident.

and God's reply to Job; while the prologue tells of the testing of Job, the righteous man, and describes the tribulations suffered by him and his family, and the epilogue records his restoration - a fitting setting to the words uttered by the speakers in the main body of the work.

b. The title:

The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb has an opening that is different from those of the works mentioned above; there is a title presenting the name of the work and its subject matter as well as the particulars of the writer:

"The gathering of words (*mdwt*)
The heaping of maxims (*ṯsw*)
The seeking of phrases (*ḫnw*) by searching heart made by a priest of On,
Sene's (son),
Khakheperre-sonb, called Ankhu" (Recto 1).

This type of title is characteristic of the Wisdom Instruction genre in Egypt, Israel and the ancient Near East in general[5]. Sometimes further details are added: the name of the person addressed and the circumstances and purpose of the instruction. Khakheperre-sonb does not refer directly to his objective in the title of his work, but this is intimated in the prologue that follows:

"Would that I had unknown phrases
Maxims that are strange
Novel, untried words
Free of repetition;
Not transmitted sayings,
Spoken by the ancestors!" (2-3).

The writer's purpose was therefore to produce new expressions, words and ideas not used by his predecessors; but the use of the unreal conditional mood suggests that these literary ambitions were not realized[6].

---

5 On this see the comprehensive research of K.A. KITCHEN, Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: The Factual History of Literary Form, in: Tyndale Bulletin 28 (1977), pp. 69-114 and The Basic Literary Forms and Formulations of Ancient Instructional Writings in Egypt and Western Asia, in: Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren, eds. E. HORNUNG and O. KEEL, Freiburg-Göttingen, 1979, pp. 236-282; see also SHUPAK, Selected Terms., pp. 2.

6 For a different explanation of the aim and message of Khakheperre-sonb see: B.G. OCKINGA, The Burden of Khaᶜkheperreᶜ-sonbu, JEA 69 (1983), pp.

The Instruction of Ptahhotep, which belongs to the Egyptian Wisdom Instruction genre mentioned above, and preceded Khakheperre-sonb by several centuries (6th Dynasty), shows that such a title was in use in Egyptian literature from ancient times; this composition also opens with the name (*sb3yt* - instruction) and author of the work:

"Instruction (*sb3yt*) of the Mayor of the city, the Vizier Ptahhotep, under the Majesty of King Isesi" (1).

Further on, the circumstances of the writing of the instruction are given: the writer, the Vizier Ptahhotep, having grown old and conscious of his age, requests the King to permit his son to succeed him. The King grants his request and Ptahhotep begins the instruction intended for his son. First he states the objective:

"Instructing (*sb3yt*) the ignorant to know
and in the standard of good speech
a profit for him who will hear,
and woe to him who will disobey it" (47-50)

In The Instruction of Amenemope (of the Ramesside Period) the title is long and more detailed. It opens with the name and nature of the work:

"Beginning of the instruction (*sb3yt*) for life
The teaching for well being
Every rule for relations with elders
The duties of the courtiers."

A description of the triple objective follows. This is to order his relations with his masters, with the god who is the ultimate master, and with the people he ruled:

"Knowing how to answer one who speaks,
To reply to one who sends a message
So as to direct him to the paths of life,
To make him prosper upon earth;
To let his heart enter its' shrine,
Steering clear from evil;
To save him from the talk of others,
To let (him) be praised in the mouth of people" (1,1-12).

88-95; OCKINGA assumes that the Egyptian priest did indeed succeed in fulfilling his desire to say something new by choosing a fresh theme for his work, namely, "he does not dwell on the past or foretell the future but in contrast ponders on the present condition of the land" (ibid., p. 91).

The title concludes with the name of the writer of the instruction, Amenemope, his titles and the name of his youngest son, to whom the instruction is directed (1,13-3,7)[7].

The same pattern appears in Biblical wisdom literature. The Book of Proverbs opens with a title containing the name and author of the work - "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel" (1:1) - and its purpose: "That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity; that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth" etc. (1:2-6; cf. Ptahhotep, ibid.).

A short form of this title containing only the personal name and epithet of the author or the compiler appears at the beginning of Ecclesiastes: "The words of Qoheleth, the son of David, King of Jerusalem" (1:1 cf. 1:12), and at the beginning of the Collections of Agur (Prov. 30:1) and of Lemuel (ibid. 31:1)[8].

2. Stylistic Devices

a. Repeated phrases and formulas:

Each section or stanza is introduced by the same phrase or interlaced with the same words for the purpose of establishing continuity among the parts of the composition and imparting a sense of unity to the whole. Each of the nine complaints in The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant contains passages whose lines begin with the same opening formula. In complaint no. I, for example, a negation is repeated ("No...No..."):

"No (squall) shall strip away your sail
Your ship shall not lag
No mishap shall befall your mast..."

---

7 Cf. The titles at the beginning of the following Instructions: The Merikare (I,1) Duakhety (Ic-Ie), Amenemhet (I 1-3). Ani (title - Pap. Berlin and Introduction - II 1-9), Ankhsheshoqy (1,1-4,19). For further examples see KITCHEN, The Basic Literary Forms.

8 The construction of the introduction of the Old Testament prophetical books is different; it usually contains the following details; the title ("The words", "the words of God", "the vision", "the burden", or "the burden of the words of God"), the author's/prophet's name and the names of the king in whose reigns he was active (see for example Jes, Jer, Hos, Amos, Zeph). At times, information about the prophet's country (Jer, Amos, Mic, Nah) and occupation (Jer, Amos) is added. For details and references see, W.R. HARPER, A Commentary on the Book of Amos, (Edinburgh, 1973), p. 1

In complaint no. III the repeated formula is a simile ("You are like"):

"You are like a town without a governor
Like an assembly without a leader
Like a ship without a captain..."

The same pattern may be observed in The Dispute between a Man and his Ba, The Admonitions of Ipuwer and elsewhere (see Table I columns 3 and 5).

Similarly in the Biblical wisdom literature repetition of identical particles and words is exemplified in the following verses: "by" (*b·*) in Prov. 11:9-11 and "a man" (*'iš*) in 16:27-29; "a time" (*ᵓēt*) in Eccl. 3:1-8 and "it is better" (*ṭôb*) in 7:1-4,5,8; "if" (*'im*) in Job 31:24-40.

b. Use of proverbs and imagery:

Extensive use is made of The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant of imagery and maxims grounded in daily life. The judge is likened to the father of an orphan, a husband of the widow, a brother of her who is divorced and an apron of the motherless (B_1 62-64).

The administration of justice, which is the central theme of the work, is compared to the action of a pair of scales, while the bodily organs of the presiding judge are likened to their parts; for example:

"Your heart is the weight,
Your two lips are its arms"
(B_1 165-167 cf. B_2 92-93, B_1 160-162; B_1 311-313 etc.)

The judge is also likened to a sailor plying the lake of truth, that is, one who steers the ship of his life according to the norm of justice (for example, ibid., B_1 54ff., 126-127, 156-159). The author of The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant makes frequent use of sayings, such as "The name of a poor man is pronounced according to his master"; "If you are slow you are not fast"; "If you are heavy you are not light"; "There is no yesterday for the lazy".

The same devices add dimension to the speeches of the Man and his Ba. In the first poem the hero likens the malicious broadcasting of his name to various objects giving off foul odors, while in the third poem, which is in praise of death, he compares the latter to phenomena causing joy and pleasure.

The Book of Proverbs offers a rich array of images and maxims referring to daily life reminiscent of the sayings of the Eloquent Peasant (Prov. 1,16-18;6,6-8; 10:26; 11:22 et passim). Ecclesiastes too abounds with proverbial language and imagery (7:6; 9:4, 12 et passim); while the heroes of the Book

of Job, who are counted among the sons of the East, spice their speech with aphorisms and proverbs relating to flora and fauna (8:11ff.; 13:12,25ff.; 29:19; et passim). Images of this kind apparently characterized the wisdom of the East for they appear also in the collection at the end of Proverbs relating to this wisdom (Prov. 30:15-33).

c. Series of contrasts to highlight the absurdity of the current state of affairs:

This stylistic device, common in the ancient Near East wisdom literature[9], is a dominant feature in the works under consideration. In The Admonitions of Ipuwer we read:

"See, he who lacked grain owns granaries...
See, he who lacked dependents owns serfs" (9,4-9,5)
"See, the poor of the land has become rich
The man of property is a pauper" (8,2)
"See, the son of man is denied recognition,
The child of his lady became the son of his maid"
(2,14 et passim).

In line 2,9 of the same work the situation is summed up in an explicit image:

"Look, the land turns like a potter's wheel."

The same pattern is observed in The Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb:

"Justic (*ma'at*) is cast out
Evil is in the council hall" (Recto 11)
"The one who gives commands
is (now) one to whom commands are given" (Verso 2,3)
"Look, the affairs of a servant are like those of a master" (Verso 6).

This pattern is followed in The Prophecies of Neferti:

"I show you the land in distress
The weaked-armed is strong-armed
One salutes him who saluted.

---

9 On the topic of "World Upside Down" in the Biblical and ancient Near Eastern Wisdom literature see: F.C. FENSHAM, The Change of Situation of a Person in Ancient Near East and Biblical Wisdom Literature, Annali Instituto Universitario Orientale, 21 (1971), pp. 155-164 and R.C. van LEEUWEN, Prov. 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down, JBL 105/4 (1986), pp. 599-610.

I show you the undermost uppermost...
The beggar will gain riches,
The great (will rob) to live
The poor will eat bread
The slaves will be exalted..." (54-57).

In The Eloquent Peasant the anarchy that reigns in the land is described thus:

"The magistrates do wrong
Right dealing is bent sideways
The judges snatch what has been stolen" (B_1 98-99)
"The peace-maker makes grief,
He who should soothe makes sore..." (B_1 249-250)[10].

This observation of the reversal of natural order of things is also found in the Biblical wisdom literature; Ecclesiastes, for example, marvels that -

"Folly (Septuagint: "a fool") is enthroned on great heights, but the rich sit in low places. I have seen slaves on horses, while lords must walk on foot like slaves". (10:6-7; see also 3:16; 7:15 and 8:10)[11].

In Proverbs 30:22-24 the same pattern is used in a series of numerical sayings, the introductory heading reads: "Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up"..., following which the author tabulates the paradoxes of a slave who reigns, a fool with eating, an odious woman who marries, and a maid who succeeds her mistress. These verses bear a remarkable resemblance to corresponding passages in the Egyptian sources.

---

10 The Instruction of a Man for His Son, (translated by KITCHEN, OrAn 8 (1969), pp. 189-208), dated to the 12th Dynasty contains a similar picture (see lines 13a-16 and mark especially the affinity with the passages of The Admonitions of Ipuwer quoted above). However, in contrast to the passages given above, the god appears in The Instruction by a Man for His Son as responsible for the overthrow of order. Changes in circumstances and position caused by the deity are perceived as positive in Biblical and in ancient wisdom in general (Job 12:17ff.Cf. Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam 2:4-8). Changes not effected by divine dispensation are negative: they become symbolic of anarchy and chaos. Cf. FENSHAM, The Change, p. 158.

11 Eccl. 8:10 is a difficult passage, but it clearly refers to the good fortune enjoyed by the wicked, who were buried, and "had come and gone from the place of the holy", i.e., they had had access to the temple; whereas those who had behaved righteously "were forgotten in the city".

3. Literary forms and patterns:

a. Parallelism:

Parallelism between the verses and also between stanzas of a poem is indeed a typical feature of the ancient Near Eastern poetry in general, but this literary form is also common in the Egyptian writings under discussion as well as in the Hebrew wisdom texts. In the Egyptian texts the most frequent forms of parallelism are synonymous, antithetic and complementary[12]. Examples may be found in Table I, column 4. The entire range of the Hebrew wisdom literature, from the individual, single proverb (in the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) to larger poems (Proverbs and the Book of Job), presents a variety of parallelism, as exemplified in the following passages:

antithetic parallelism in Prov. 10:1,5; Eccl. 3:21; 10:2,13.

synonymous parallelism in Prov. 3:1; 8:1: Job 33:1; Eccl. 11:4,7.

complementary parallelism in Prov. 9:1,2; Job 39:1,14; Eccl. 2:2.

analogic parallelism in Prov. 17:3; 25:23; etc. Job 34,2; Eccl. 2,13.

b. Addressing the heart/soul:

Another literary pattern frequently used in these works is the opening formula of a man speaking to his heart (*ib*) or to his soul (*ba*). The Dispute between a Man and His Ba is conceived as a dialogue between a man and his soul; Khakheperre-sonb seeks to share his troubles with his reluctant heart (Recto 7; Verso 1,5ff.); The "prophet" Neferti begins his speech with the words:

"Stir, my heart
Bewail the land" (20)

When adversity, human misconduct, and social wrongs overwhelm man with grief, he can turn only to his heart for consolation and counsel. Little wonder, then, that the same device is used by the authors of Hebrew Speculative Wisdom literature. In Ecclesiastes the speaker addressed his heart six time (1:16; 2:1,15,16; 3:17,18); and in the same text recurrent use is made of the phrase: "I applied my heart (i.e., mind) to seek and to search out/to know" (1:13,17; 2:20; 8:16,19; 9:1).

---

12 "Complementary parallelism" relates here to cases of parallel lines in which the second line continues and completes the thought/idea given in the first.

4. Vocabulary

The terminology of the texts under discussion reflects the different aspects and values of the wisdom tradition. Certain phrases and expressions concern teaching and instruction; positive and negative traits of characteristics; the wise man and the fool; wise sayings; and sometimes they are characterized by the association of the different parts of the body with acquiring knowledge and wisdom. (For a list of these terms see Table II.) Most of these terms have semantic eqivalents in the lexicon of Biblical Wisdom; some even have etymological equivalents. As this subject is extensively discussed in my Selected Terms in Biblical Wisdom Literature in Comparison to the Egyptian Literature[13] and elsewhere[14], only a few examples are given here:

In Egyptian the wisdom instruction is called *sb3yt*, derived from the verbs *sb3* (Table II, section 1), and like its Hebrew equivalent *mūsâr* it has a double meaning: to "instruct"-"reprove", and to "chastise"-"beat". Both terms refer to the actual means of transferring information from teacher to pupil; beating with a stick was common practice in ancient schooling.

One of the terms denoting a "word of wisdom" or a "maxim" in Egyptian is *ṯs(t)* (ibid., section 7), namely, "knot". The Hebrew equivalent of *ṯs* is *taḥbulôt* which only appears on the wisdom books in the Bible. Like its Egyptian counterpart, the word is connected with "tying", "knots" *ḥebel*, in Hebrew. Figuratively, both *taḥbulôt*, and *ṯs* designate a saying that is tightly phrased ans well constructed or a maxim formed like a series of knots and loops.

In Egyptian the belly (*ḥt*) (ibid., section 6) is perceived as the seat of thought, mind and feeling. In the Bible the use of *beṭen* in this sense is practically limited to the wisdom books. The idiom *ḥadrê bāṭen*, found only in Proverbs, probably reflects the Egyptian concept.

The rich vocabulary at the disposal of the Egyptian and Hebrew sage expressing the theme of foolishness can be divided into two groups: terms denoting the "positive fool" type and terms denoting the "negative fool" type. Two of these terms appear in the works under discussion: the *hm*, who belongs to the first category, and the *wh3* who belongs to second (ibid., section 4).

---

13 See SHUPAK, Selected Terms (n. 2).

14 See for example: SHUPAK, Die Welt des Orients 14 (1983), pp. 216-230; Tarbiz 54/4 (1985), pp. 475-483 (Hebrew), RB 94/1 (1987), pp. 98-119, and SÄK 17 (1990, in press).

The parallel words in Hebrew Wisdom are *petî*, the "positive fool" whose ignorance derives from lack of knowledge and inexperience but who is amendable to correction, and the *k'sîl*, the "negative fool", who like his Egyptian counterpart *wh3* refuses to learn and despises knowledge.

5. Subject Matter and Themes:

The following motifs are common to the Egyptian texts and the Biblical wisdom:

a. Social admonition:

Social admonition is a theme shared by all the Egyptian works under consideration. In some of these texts almost identical words and phrases are used to describe similar circumstances[15]. Ipuwer denounces lawlessness and corruption: the laws of justice are cast away, they are trampled on in public places; he laments the violence and insecurity that have taken hold of the land: men lie in wait to rob and kill the passer-by. He concludes by fixing the guilt for the decline into evil ways on the regent king. Khakheperre-sonb complains of truth being cast aside, of evil replacing it in the council chamber (cf. Eccl. 3:16), of people rising early in the morning to suffering and grief, of the poor being unable to defend themselves against the powerful. Neferti speaks of men turning their back on murder, of neighbour killing neighbour, of son being the enemy of his father, of rivalry between brothers and of the lowly elevated to positions of supremacy.

The Eloquent Peasant preaches upholding justice and maintainence of the social order. He execrates the perversion of the juridical system and rebukes the judges who preside over it. Like the Eloquent Peasant, the narrator of the Dispute between a Man and His Ba has undergone personal suffering that causes him to voice general social criticism extending over four poems; the climax is in the second poem, which describes the corruption that is all around:

"To whom shall I speak today?
Brothers are mean,
The friends of today do not love.

15 The striking resemblance in the manner in which these admonitions are phrased has led some scholars to conclude that these expressions have a common historical Sitz im Leben, namely the First Intermediate Period (second millennium BC.), and that in time they became traditional literary pattern; see LICHTHEIM, Literature., Vol. I, pp. 139, 145, 149, 150.

To whom shall I speak today?
Hearts are greedy
Every one robs his comrade's goods" etc.

Like the heroes of The Admonitions of Ipuwer and The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the Hebrew sages vent their rage at those who control society. Wicked rulers are denounced in Proverbs chap. 29 (2,4,12,14). Ecclesiastes grieves for the oppressed who have no comforter in the land (4:1) and decries the corruption of the institutions of law and justice: "... in the place of judgement there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness" (3:16 cf. 5:7). Ipuwer, the Egyptian sage, speaks critically of an aging king, and his Hebrew colleague prefers "a poor and wise youth" to "an old and foolish king" (Eccl. 4:13).

Job enumerates the social ills that have been perpetrated by evildoers in hin own generation: trespassing, theft, murder, adultery, waylaying (chap. 24); and in the Book of Proverbs the sage Agur, son of Jakeh, speaks of the moral degeneracy of men of his generation "who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers", and those "whose teeth are swords, and their mouths armed with knives, to devour the poor of the earth and the needy from among men" (30:11-14; cf. 6:17-19).

b. Longing for death and doubt about the value of life on the one hand, praise of pleasure on the other:

Both the Egyptian disputing with his *ba* and Job are in despair of living and pray for death; "life is a passage (even) the trees fall", protests the Egyptian Lebensmüde in The Dispute between a Man and His Soul (20,21); and Job persistently wishes for death throughout his bewailings (3:3ff., 20-22; 10:18-19; 13:15). This attitude of despair and weariness with life is echoed in the utterances of Ipuwer: "Lo, great and small (say) 'I wish I were dead" (4,2-3). This being the way of the world, all that remains in life is to seek immediate pleasure. So, in The Dispute between a Man and His Ba, the soul declares that pleasures are the very essence of living: "Follow the feast day, forget worry" (68). The same axiom is expressed in Ecclesiastes: "There is no greater good for man than eating and drinking and giving him joy in his labour" (2:24; see also 3:12,22 et passim).

c. Undeserved material and physical downfall of a decent man:

This motif runs through the Book of Job. It is also a major theme in The Eloquent Peasant, whose goods are confiscated and who himself has been flogged by the high officials.

This subject probably also appeared in the prose introduction to the Dispute between a Man and His Ba, which has not survived. Another point of similarity between Job and the hero of The Dispute is the debates they conduct, Job with his acquaintances, the "disputant" with his *ba*. A piquant point of detail common to these compositions is the complaint that the sufferer has become malodorous, whether physically or metaphorically, to those near him; Job says: "My breath is strange to my wife, and I am loathsome to the children of my body" (19:17), and in the first poem of the Dispute the following refrain is repeated:

"Behold my name is detested
Behold more than smell of..."

d. The value of eloquence:

Mastery of the art of speaking well is a major attribute of both the Egyptian and the Hebrew sage. Neferti, Khakheperre-sonb and the Eloquent Peasant are all distinguished by their accomplishments in rhetoric. The terms used to designate their speeches are those regularly applied to wisdom utterances. Neferti is able to address "some good words" (*mdwt nfrwt*) and "chosen maxims" (*ṯsw sṯpw*) to the king: and the title that opens the text relating to Khakheperre-sonb announces that the eloquent utterances offered in this composition consist of "words, maxims, phrases" (*mdwṯ, ṯsw, hnw*) (Recto 1; and in reverse order, ibid., 2,3). The Eloquent Peasant is introduced as a man of "good speech" (*nfr mdw*), namely, as a master orator. This faculty plays an especially significant part in the Egyptian tale, as well as in the Biblical story of Joseph, which is also associated with the wisdom tradition. In both, command of language is presented as a means of salvation from catastrophe or even of rising to greatness[16]. The Book of Proverbs often speaks in praise of eloquence and good counsel (15:23; 24:26; 25:10 et passim)[17].

---

16 Concerning this and other wisdom motifs in the Joseph story see: G. von RAD, Josephgeschichte und ältere Chochma, VTS 1 (1953), pp. 120-127.

17 See SHUPAK, Selected Terms., pp. 328-329.

e. Ambition for discovery and the desire to say new things:

These traits are associated with the Egyptian priest Khakheperre-sonb, who asserts his aspirations at the beginning of composition: "Would that I had unknown phrases, maxims that are strange, novel, untried words... not transmitted sayings..." (Recto 2). The spirit of inquiry is also characteristic of Ecclesiastes, of whom it is said: "Not only was Qoheleth a sage himself, but he taught the people knowledge, weighing and searching and fashioning many proverbs" (12:9 cf. Ben Sira 44:5)[18].

f. Learning from personal experience:

Khakheperre-sonb wishes to learn from past events and experiences. He declares: "I say this in accordance with what I have seen" (Recto 6), and "I meditate on what has happened" (Recto 10).

The Hebrew sages too draw on their own experience. In the Book of Proverbs the sage learns a lesson by observing the fate of the slothful (24:30-32), or from his personal experience as a pupil (4:3-4).

The method of learning through personal experience is characteristic of Ecclesiastes, who unlike sages who preceded him cannot be satisfied with obedient acceptance of traditional wisdom. Contemplating his various exertions in life, Ecclesiastes is compelled to conclude that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (1:12-2:26). This method of learning and drawing a lesson is especially evident in chapters 7:23-39 and 8:16-17, where the key words are "seek", "find out" (*bqš, mṣ'*) in the affirmative and negative; the search indeed produces negative results (7:24, 8:17), but the experimentation is there (7:23): "All this I have tested by wisdom".

The comparison of the five Egyptian compositions and the Biblical wisdom books presented above sheds important light on the genre of the Egyptian material. It discloses many features common to both groups of texts, expressed at various levels: structure, language, style and content. In general, of course, some of these features are also to be found in the Biblical prophecy: parallelism, repetition of words at the beginning of verses, use of imagery and metaphor, social rebuke and the claim that the natural order has been subverted. But the complex of all of them together is not found in the Hebrew

18 Concerning the spirit of inquiry and search in Eccl., see ibid., pp. 49-50.

prophecy.

It is, however, the extreme similarity or even identity of word and phrase, of trope and theme, of literary pattern and stylistic device in the two groups that calls for the recognition of a distinct category - one which has no close affinity with Old Testament prophecy but is firmly linked to Egyptian, Biblical, and indeed, ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. The various pieces within this category may have different tendencies, social or political criticism, royal propaganda and so forth, but they belong to the general genre of wisdom texts, not prophecy.

Table 1: The Stylistic Features and Literary Forms of the Egyptian "Prophetic" Literature

The Title	The Structure of the Composition	Refrains and Identical Opening Formulas	Parallelism	Repeated Words and Phrases
The Eloquent Peasant	The work consists of a narrative frame, and nine complaints couched in an eloquent and rhetorical style	The complaints are composed in sections which are sometimes connected by means of repeated opening formulas: Complaint I: "No...No"... "No (squall) shall strip away your sail Your ship shall not lag No mishap shall befall your mast" Complaint III: "You are like..." "You are like a town without a governor Like an assembly without a leader Like a ship without a captain" (Also in Complaints II, IV, the question "In...In" is repeated)	Complementary parallelism is frequently used; however, synonymous and antithetic parallelisms as well as parallelisms of analogy appear also. Examples: Complementary P.: "For you are father to the orphan Husband to the widow Brother to the rejected woman Apron to the motherless" (Complaint I) Synonymous P.: "Leader free of greed Great man full of basement" (Complaint I) "There is no ignorant whom you gave knowledge None foolish whom you have taught" (Complaint VII) P. of Analogy: "He who lessens falsehood fosters truth, He who fosters the good reduces (evil) As satiety's coming removes hunger Clothing removes nakedness As the sky is serene after a storm..." (Complaint VI)	

The Title	The Structure of the Composition	Refrains and Identical Opening Formulas	Parallelism	Repeated Words and Phrases
The Dispute between a Man and His Ba	The work is composed in a combination of three styles: prose, symmetrically structured speech, and lyric poetry (Lichtheim)	The verse part contains four poems. The number of stanzas in every poem varies, each of them consists of three verses (tricolon). The first verse in the stanzas belonging to the same poem, is identical and is repeated as a refrain. Poem I: "Behold my name is detested Behold more than the smell of..." (8 stanzas) Poem II: "To whom shall I speak today?" (18 stanzas) Poem III: "Death is before me today Like... Like..." (6 stanzas) (Only in the last stanzas is "Like" omitted) Poem IV: "Truly, he who is yonder..." (3 stanzas)	Complementary, synonymous and antithetic parallelism occurs in this work. For example: Poem I stanzas 1,2: Stanza 1: "Behold, my name is detested Behold, more than the smell of vultures On a summer's day when the sky is hot." Stanza 2: "Behold, my name is detested Behold,more than a catch of fish On fishing days when the sky is hot". Stanza 1 and Stanza 2 are in synonymous parallelism Poem II stanzas 1,2 Stanza 1: (a) "To whom shall I speak today? (b) Brothers are mean (c)The friends of today cannot love" b,c in complementary parallelism Stanza 2: (a) "To whom shall I speak today? (b) Hearts are greedy (c) Everyone robs his friend's goods" b,c in synonymous parallelism, stanzas 1,2 in complementary parallelism Synonymous parallelism: "There are no just men The land is left to evildoers" (122-123)	(a) The phrase "to open mouth to answer" is repeated 3 times in the prose section of the work and gives it a degree of uniformity (1,55,85) (b) Other phrases are repeated in the second poem, thereby connecting the stanzas and conveying a sense of unity: "Brothers are evil" (stanzas 1,9) "Hearts are greedy" (stanzas 2,12) "An intimate friend" (stanzas 13,15,17)

The Title	The Structure of the Composition	Refrains and Identical Opening Formulas	Parallelism	Repeated Words and Phrases
The Complaints of Khakheper-re-sonb	The text contains four sections: three of them are on the recto and one single but longer section appears on the verso. Some scholars, basing themselves on content, discern eight sections (e.g.,Kadish)	Refrain: "I mediate on what has happened" (Rec: 10; Ver. 1,2) "The land is in turmoil The entire land is in a great stir" (Rec: 10; Ver. 2)	Complementary parallelism, synonymous parallelism, and antithetic parallelism Examples: Synonymous P.: "Had I unknown words Maxims that are strange Novel untried phrases" (Rec.2; 11) Complementary P.: "Right (*m3ᶜṯ*) is cast out Wrong is in the Counsel hall" (Rec.11; 12)	Repeated words and phrases connect the various sections of the composition: to repeat (*whm*) (Rec. 2; 7) word, thing (*md.t*) (sometimes) to be ignorant (*ḫm*) (Rec.7; Ver. 5) heart (*ib*) (Rec.7;13; Ver. 1;2;3;5) to suffer (*wḫd*) (Rec.13 - twice; Ver. 4) land (*t3*) (Rec 10 twice; Ver.1;2) to be silent (*s/gr*) (Rec.12; Ver. 2;4) right, order (*m3ᶜṯ*) (Rec.11;Ver.9
The Admonitions of Ipuwer	The text is divided into sections of varying length. The sections were separated by the device of a repeated phrase at the beginning of the lines of the same section. (Erman discerned here 6 poems)	Opening formulas for introducing the sections: 1,9-6,14 "Forsooth!" (*iw ms*) 7,1-9,7 "Behold!" (*mṯn, mṯn is*) 9,8-10,5 "Is destroyed!" (*ḥḏ*) 10,6-10,11 "Destroy!" (*ḥḏ*) 10,12-13,8 "Remember!" (*sḫ3*) 13,9ff "It's however good when..." (*iw irf ḫm(w) nfr*)	Synonymous parallelism (often); complementary parallelism (often); and antithetic parallelism. Examples Synonymous: "There's dirt everywhere, None have white garments at this time" (2,8) Complementary: "She who lacked a box has furniture She who saw her face in the water owns a mirrow" (8,5) Complementary and Antithetic: (a) "He who could make for himself no sarcophagus is (now) possessor of tomb (b) Behold, the possessors of tombs are driven out on the high ground (c) He who could make for himself no coffin is (now) possessor of a treasury" (7,7-7,8) a,b and b,c in antithetic parallelism, a and c in complementary parallelism.	

The Title	The Structure of the Composition	Refrains and Identical Opening Formulas	Parallelism	Repeated Words and Phrases
The Prophecies of Neferti	The work consists of a narrative introduction and speeches in verse, divided into sections by titles written in red.	(a) Refrains: The following refrain divides the work into three parts, which are more or less of equal length: "I show you the land in turmoil" (38,54) Another refrain: "All happiness has vanished" (31-32, 45) (b) Introductive phrase: The following phrase returns 5 times: "I show you..." (verbally: "I give you") (38,44,48,54,55)	Complementary, synonymous and antithetical parallelism: Examples: (a) "The land is shrunk - its rulers are many (b) It is bare - its taxes are great (c) The grain is low - the measure is large..." (50-51) Synonymous Parallelism: "(So that he may speak to me) some good words, choice maxims" (7;13) Complementary Parallelism: "(I have had you summoned in order that you seek out for me) a son of yours who is wise, a brother of yours who excels, a friend of yours who has done a noble deed" (6-7)	(a) A play of words: "A strange (*ḏrḏr*) bird will breed in the Delta marsh" (29) The word '*ḏrḏr*' has the double meaning of "strange" and "hostile", and it is used here to designate the Asiatic enemy. (Goedicke, p. 20) (b) Words that are repeated in the text to give it a degree of uniformity: land (*t3* - 13 times); heart (*ib* - 4 times); Asiatic (*ʿ3mw* - 4 times). (c) Synonymic formulas consisting of the word 'land' (*t3*) accompanying by phrases expressing loss, grief, or distress: "The land is quite destroyed (*3kw*)" (23) "This land is destroyed (*ḫd*)" 24 "The land being cast away through distress (*ksn.t*)" (32) "This land is to-and-fro" (37) (See also: 39;40;46;50; and cf. 20).

Table II: Wisdom Terminology in the Egyptian "Prophetic" Literature*

Terms	The Eloquent Peasant	The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba	The Complaints of Khakheper-re-sonb	The Admonition of Ipuwer	The Prophecies of Neferti	Distribution
1. Verbs Connected with Teaching and Learning:						
ŚB3 - to instruct/teach	B1 260;286					
WḤ^{c} - to explain			Ver 1			13
ŚDM - to hear/obey	B1 113,180,189, 243	11,39,67			8,14,38	
2. The Negative Human Type: A. Negative Traits Connected with Behavior in Studies and General Conduct:						
WNI - to neglect			Rec. 11			10
THI - to transgress/err/mislead	B1 189,236,281	11			53	
IDY/SḤY - to be deaf/not to listen	B2 110; B1 113, 188				38	
B. Negative Traits and Practices Connected with Manner of Life and General Conduct:						
GRG - falsehood, deception	B1 66,160,240,263 & many other times	98	Rec. 6	13,2		
ḤNTY - desire	B1 291					
^{c}WN IB - greed, to be greedy	B1 169,117,291 + 9 times	105; 121				30 and more
T3 - hot tempered				5,3; 11, 13		
SNT - to quarrel/offend	B1 270					
RK(W) - to " /hostility			Ver. 5			
3Ḏ to be angry	B1 181; B2 297					

* This table is meant to convey only a general picture and does not present a precise statistical account. Thus when a particular term recurs frequently, only selected references are given. For a complete discussion of these terms, see Nili Shupak, Dissertation.

Terms	The Eloquent Peasant	The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba	The Complaints of Khakheper-re-sonb	The Admonition of Ipuwer	The Prophecies of Neferti	Distribution
3. The Positive Human Type: Silence, Tranquility, and Equanimity						
GR(W) - to be silent	B1 211,285,298		Ver. 2,3,4			8
KB,KBḤ - cold tempered				11, 13		
ḤRW to be satisfied, calm			Ver. 2			
4. The Consequences of Lack of Learning: Fool, Foolishness						
ḤM - to be ignorant, fool (in Biblical Hebrew: *peti*)	3 times - to be ignorant B1 218-219;286	124 + 1 time	Ver. 4,5 + twice	4,7 + 4 times		19
WḤ3 - fool (in Biblical Hebrew: *ksil*)	B1 218-219, 286	17		6, 13		
5. The Consequences of Acquiring Knowledge: Wise, Wisdom						
S̈S3 - be wise		84	Ver. 3		67	Over 29 (Only references connected with the idea of wisdom were taken into account)
S̈33 - wise man					6	
ḤMW - craftsman	B1 260, 289			4, 8; 9, 6		
Rḫ - to know	B1 183, 187 + 5 times		twice	twice	twice	
Rḫ/Rḫ Ḫ.T - wisdom, wise man	B1 134, 135	145		2, 14; 6, 13-14	17	
S̈I3 - to recognize/ perceive	B1 289			2, 14		

Terms	The Eloquent Peasant	The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba	The Complaints of Khakheper-re-sonb	The Admonition of Ipuwer	The Prophecies of Neferti	Distribution
6.Parts of Body Involved in Instruction and Wisdom						
NS - tongue	B1 92,131,165-6					
R3 - mouth	B1 29,277,286	4; 55			45; 48; 63	
Ḥ.T - belly (as the seat of thought, desire and emotion)	B1 275-6; 277 B1 280		Rec. 3			37
IB - heart	B1 133-134; R 41,42 B1 137; 204;256;267 165-166, 289	37-38; 120-121	Rec. 1; 13; Ver. 1; 5 etc.	2,5; 3,4; 12,1-2	20; 42; 49	
Ḥ3.TY - heart			Ver. 2			
7.Wisdom Utterances:						
Ṯs - maxim	B1 107		Rec. 1,2(twice) Ver. 1		7; 13; 49	
MD.T,MDW - word,speech, thing	B1 72-3; 184 B2 118; B1 153	25	Rec. 1,2;Rec. 3; Ver. 5	2,14	49	32
NFR+MD.T - good speech	B1 75; 318-319				7; 13	
PR N R3 - speech					50	
R3 - speech			Rec. 12			
Ḥn - saying(in the Eloquent Peasant - *ḫn n md.t*)	B1 18-21;37;280		Rec. 1,2			
Śḫr - councel,plan,way	B1 109		Rec.10,11(twice)	7,3	67	
8.Values of Life:						
RN - name	B1 20, 65, 309	Repeated 8 times in the refrain of the first poem-87ff				12
Śḫ3 W - memory	B1 309					
Total:	89	25	30	23	23	