

Where can Wisdom be found? The Sage's Language in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian Literature

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Abstract

In the comparative study of Egyptian and Biblical literature emphasis has been laid on content and ideas, while the formal and terminological aspects have been neglected. The present work deals with the semantics of terminology in Biblical wisdom literature as compared to that of the Egyptians and centers, therefore, on a somewhat abandoned aspect of the comparative research of the Biblical and Egyptian writings. The work has three primary objectives: (a) to draw up a glossary of Egyptian wisdom terms, a task as yet not undertaken elsewhere; (b) to elucidate the semantics of these terms; (c) to clarify the Biblical wisdom terms in relation to their Egyptian parallels. The fresh comparative inquiry into Hebrew and Egyptian wisdom vocabulary sheds light on some general problems intrinsic to Biblical wisdom, e.g.: Does the Hebrew sage (hākām) signify a function or a quality? Did Hebrew wisdom evolve from a secular to a religious stage? What was the Sitz im Leben of Biblical wisdom?

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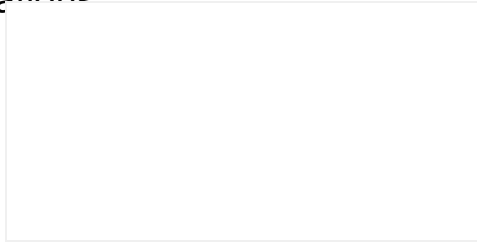
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2) The 'Sages' referred to in the Edfu Building Texts were seven in number. Their special role was as 'the only divine beings who knew how the temples and sacred places were to be created'. And it was they who initiated construction work at the Great Primeval Mound. We are reminded of Noah's mountain-top on which the Ark settled after the Biblical Deluge, and of the 'Seven Sages' (Apkallu) of ancient Babylonian tradition who were said to have 'lived before the Flood' and to have built the walls of the sacred city of Uruk. Likewise is it an accident that in Indian tradition 'Seven Sages' (Rishis) are remembered to have survived the Flood, their purpose being to preserve and pass down to future generations the wisdom of the antediluvian world? In ancient Egyptian literature, wisdom literature belonged to the sebayt ("teaching") genre which flourished during the Middle Kingdom of Egypt and became canonical during the New Kingdom. Biblical wisdom literature and Jewish texts. The most famous examples of wisdom literature are found in the Bible.[1][2]. Sapiential Books. The term "Sapiential Books" or "Books of Wisdom" is used in biblical studies to refer to a subset of the books of the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint translation. The Sapiential Books are in the broad tradition of wisdom literature that was found widely in the Ancient Near East, including many religions other than Judaism. Septuagint. Further information: Chokhmah. "Where shall wisdom be found?" asks the Book of Job. "Man does not know the way to it. It is hidden from the eyes of all living things, God understands the way to it" (Job 28:12, 21, 23). The search for the higher wisdom led to the twin convictions that, in the last analysis, wisdom comes to man only as a divine gift, and that it belongs to the very nature of God himself. The first is represented in the Bible by the Book of Proverbs (except for 8:22-31 and 30:1-4), the second by Job and Ecclesiastes (Kohélet). The spirit of the former is conservative, practical, didactic, optimistic, and worldly wise. The surviving literature of Egyptian Wisdom thus has certain similarities and points of contact with Hebrew Wisdom as represented in the Old Testament. Ancient Egyptian literature comprises a wide array of narrative and poetic forms including inscriptions on tombs, stele, obelisks, and temples; myths, stories... The first examples of Egyptian writing come from the Early Dynastic Period (c. 6000- c. 3150 BCE) in the form of Offering Lists and autobiographies; the autobiography was carved on one's tomb along with the Offering List to let the living know what gifts, and in what quantity, the deceased was due regularly in visiting the grave.