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SOURCES OF CONTENTION AND THE EMERGING REALITY CONCERNING QOHELET'S *CARPE DIEM* ADVICE*¹

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Summary: Sources of Contention and the Emerging Reality Concerning Qohelet's *Carpe Diem* Advice

When Qohelet declares “there is nothing new under the sun,” his own words are no exception. It has been known for a century now that not all of Qohelet's material is original to his own genius, and the idea that Qohelet is directly dependent on a literary source(s) is standard fare. The hallmark example continues to be Siduri the alewife's advice to Gilgamesh which displays remarkable correspondence with Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9. However, what may have been construed as an instance of clear literary dependency a century ago cannot be maintained in light of the data that continues to emerge from the ancient Near East. New sources have risen that contend with the Gilgamesh Epic, and there has yet to emerge a definitive victor. This paper calls into question the very idea that Qohelet was directly dependent on a literary precursor and joins with a few select voices both past and present in suggesting an alternate interpretation of the data.

Keywords: Ecclesiastes – Qohelet – Ancient Near East – *carpe diem*

Resumen: Fuentes de contención y la realidad emergente relación con el consejo de Qohelet acerca de *Carpe Diem*

Cuando Qohelet declara “no hay nada nuevo bajo el sol”, sus propias palabras no son una excepción. Se sabe desde hace un siglo que no todo el material de Qohelet es original del autor, y es una suposición común la idea de que Qohelet depende directamente de una fuente(s) literaria. El ejemplo distintivo sigue siendo el consejo de la tabernera Siduri a Gilgamesh, el cual demuestra una importante correspondencia con

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¹ I want to thank my professor, Dr. John Fortner, for his advice and encouragement while writing this paper.

Eclesiastés 9: 7-9. Sin embargo, lo que hace un siglo podría haberse interpretado como una instancia de clara dependencia literaria, ya no puede sostenerse a la luz de los datos que continúan emergiendo acerca del antiguo Cercano Oriente. Nuevas fuentes han aparecido que lidian con el poema de Gilgamesh, y todavía no ha surgido una propuesta definitiva. Este trabajo pone en tela de juicio la idea de que Qohelet dependía directamente de un precursor literario y se une a un grupo selecto de voces del pasado y del presente al proponer una interpretación alternativa de los datos.

Palabras Clave: Eclesiastés – Qohelet – Próximo Oriente antiguo – *carpe diem*

INTRODUCTION

The year 1902 saw the publication of a new fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic belonging to the Old Babylonian version.² Three years later, Hubert Grimme published an article in which he recognized that advice given to Gilgamesh by Shiduri the alewife nicely paralleled the advice of Qohelet contained in the book of Ecclesiastes.³ Shiduri's advice reads:

*You, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full,
keep enjoying yourself, day and night!
Every day make merry,
dance and play day and night!
Let your clothes be clean!
Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water!
Gaze on the little one who holds your hand!
Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace!
Such is the destiny [of mortal men,]
(Gilg. OB VA+BM iii, 6-14)⁴*

Qohelet's advice in Ecclesiastes reads:

*Go, eat your bread with enjoyment,
and drink your wine with a merry heart;
for God has long ago approved what you do.
Let your garments always be white;
do not let oil be lacking on your head.
Enjoy life with the wife whom you love,
all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun,*

² Meissner 1902: 1-15.

³ Grimme 1905: 432. In this paper, Ecclesiastes will designate the name of the Biblical book; Qohelet will designate the voice in the book of Ecclesiastes speaking in the first and second person.

⁴ George 2003: 1: 279.

*because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil
under the sun.*
(Eccl. 9: 7-9)⁵

This congruence was quickly accepted by some as an instance of direct literary borrowing on the part of Qohelet. Three years following Grimme's article, George A. Barton remarked in his commentary, "The argument here is so closely parallel to that of Qoheleth that one can scarcely doubt but that he was influenced by the passage."⁶ So sure was he that this text directly influenced Qohelet that he wrote, "In parts the Hebrew seems to be a translation of the Babylonian."⁷ Ephraim A. Speiser, who translated the Gilgamesh epic for James Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* in 1950,⁸ made the observation to Harold L. Ginsberg that "the proof that the Biblical passage must be literarily (even if not directly) dependent on the Babylonian one is the identical order in which the ideas are presented."⁹ This argument was more recently taken up and expanded by Bruce Jones in his 1990 article, as he argues for the "strong probability that the author of the biblical book appropriated elements from Shiduri's speech for his own work."¹⁰

The most recent and most cautious voice to speak on behalf of a literary relationship between the Epic of Gilgamesh and the book of Ecclesiastes is that of Karel van der Toorn,¹¹ and his work deserves special attention. First, van der Toorn's work reflects the increasing complexity of the issue at hand. No longer is it the case that congruence between the Epic of Gilgamesh and Ecclesiastes is restricted to the observance initially made by Grimme; van der Toorn recognizes at least two other verbal points of congruence, numerous thematic connections, and the generic similarity of these two texts.¹² All of

⁵ All Scripture quotations come from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal /Deuterocanonical Books*, New York, Harper Collins, 1989.

⁶ Barton 1908: 102.

⁷ Barton 1908: 39.

⁸ Pritchard 1950: 90.

⁹ Ginsberg 1963: 59. Ginsburg is here summarizing the oral observation made to him by Speiser. Convinced of this dependency, Ginsburg additionally observes that "the imperative 'go' is hardly motivated by anything in the Book of Koheleth, but is entirely natural in the situation of the Babylonian parallel." While the imperatival command "Go" introducing Qohelet's advice in chapter 9 makes contextual sense on the lips of Shiduri, it is worth remarking that this command is absent from any extant version of the (supposed) source text.

¹⁰ Jones 1990: 372. See also the important work of de Savignac 1978: 318-323.

¹¹ van der Toorn 2000: 23-30; 2001: 503-514.

¹² See the relevant sections, "1. Phraseological Parallels," "2. Parallel Genres?," and "3. Some Sobering Observations." van der Toorn 2001: 503-507.

these must be taken into consideration in evaluating the relationship of these two texts. Second, the Epic of Gilgamesh is not the only ancient literary text that occupies van der Toorn's evaluation. He also recognizes the potentiality of both Egyptian and Hellenistic influences on Qohelet and the book of Ecclesiastes.¹³ The real contribution of van der Toorn's articles can be seen in the way in which he brings these potential sources of influence together into discussion, and evaluates not just the apparent similarities and dissimilarities, but also the ways in which dependency could or could not have occurred.¹⁴ His conclusion displays greater caution than many studies that have argued in favor for literary dependence, arguing that "Mesopotamian influence is marginal" and restricted to "the eclectic use of two traditional sayings."¹⁵

That phraseological, thematic, and generic congruency exist between Ecclesiastes and Gilgamesh is a matter that is beyond questioning; what has been brought into question, however, is how one might account for such parallels. The idea that a text of the Gilgamesh epic directly influenced the writer Qohelet is an idea that has not persuaded every interpreter. In 1919, Morris Jastrow Jr. proposed an alternative explanation when he wrote, "[Qohelet's] point of view... is one that could grow up in a Semitic environment at any time, without outside influence."¹⁶ For Jastrow, it was significant that nearly two thousand years separated the composition of the two texts, Gilgamesh and Ecclesiastes. Their commonalities he interpreted as a characteristic of the Semitic environment which gave birth to these two texts. This interpretation was largely theoretical, reflecting the fact that Jastrow belonged to a period of time when "biblical and Homeric criticism... had honed the theoretical study of ancient literature to impressive methodological sophistication."¹⁷ Admittedly, this theoretical perspective does little to argue against the possibility that Qohelet's words are directly dependent on a text of the Gilgamesh epic. But as knowledge of the ancient Near East increases through the discovery and

¹³ See the relevant sections, "An Egyptian Background for Qohelet?" and "Qohelet as a Hellenistic Diatribe." van der Toorn 2001: 507-510.

¹⁴ See the relevant section, "6. Towards a Solution." van der Toorn 2001: 511-514.

¹⁵ van der Toorn 2001: 514. The sayings to which he is referring are Shiduri's advice to Gilgamesh (9: 7-9) and the image of a threefold cord (4: 12).

¹⁶ Jastrow 1919: 175.

¹⁷ Tigay 1982: 16. When he applied this "methodological sophistication" to the Gilgamesh Epic, Jastrow concluded that Gilgamesh was "a favorite personage," to whom floating traditions were attached, in part by popular fancy and in part by the deliberate efforts of literary compilers. Jastrow Jr. 1899: 198. The essence of Jastrow's theory would eventually receive support from source material unavailable to him in his day. Kramer 1944: 198.

interpretation of more ancient literature, theories like Jastrow's can be empirically tested. At least one modern scholar shares Jastrow's contention. Reflecting upon the "broad range of thought that Qoheleth shared with other [Greek] writers," Roland Murphy also considers the "similarities with Mesopotamian wisdom" which he believes "cancel each other out, as far as dependence is concerned." Instead, he would take this evidence to "witness to certain relatively common ideas of the ancient world."¹⁸

It is this very perspective, "the blurring vision by which distinct traditions are seen as one abstract whole," which van der Toorn describes as one of two pitfalls "the comparatist who studies Qohelet must avoid."¹⁹ But why? Why must the "intellectual milieu and the sources of [Qohelet's] thought" be traceable to "distinct traditions,"²⁰ as opposed to an "international" wisdom tradition?²¹ Contrary to the conclusion of van der Toorn, this paper will argue that there is no intrinsic reason to interpret the author(s) of the book of Ecclesiastes as having directly depended on any of the ancient Near Eastern texts known today; rather, there are many circumstantial reasons to argue that Qohelet is drawing on "relatively common ideas of the ancient world."²² This paper will selectively survey literature of the ancient Near East that is relevant to the study of the book of Ecclesiastes (particularly, though not exclusively, texts related to 9: 7-9) and conclude by providing a synthesis of the data.

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

The oft observed parallel texts from the Epic of Gilgamesh and the book of Ecclesiastes have already been cited above. Both texts contain a series of exhortations, many of which directly correspond with one another: The advice in both texts commences with an exhortation to eat, followed by some kind of commendation of merriment. Both texts contain an exhortation to wash or whiten one's clothing, followed immediately by an exhortation to wash or anoint one's head. Preceding the conclusion of each text, the addressee is exhorted to embrace or live with their wife. There is at least one other correspondence to

¹⁸ Murphy 1992: xlv.

¹⁹ van der Toorn 2001: 511.

²⁰ van der Toorn 2001: 511.

²¹ Murphy 1992: xlv. It is remarkable that van der Toorn would challenge Murphy on this point, seeing as he essentially agrees with Murphy until it comes to the particular texts of Eccl 4: 12 and 9: 7-9.

²² van der Toorn 2001: 511.

be observed between this text in the Epic of Gilgamesh and another portion of the book of Ecclesiastes. The Gilgamesh text concludes with a summarizing statement, “Such is the destiny [*of mortal men*,],” a conclusion remarkably congruent with the way in which the Hebrew phrase, כִּי זֶה כְּלִי־הָאָדָם, is used to summarize some very different advice in the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes.²³

Shiduri’s advice to Gilgamesh is not the only text in the Epic of Gilgamesh where material closely congruent with material in the book of Ecclesiastes can be found. A proverb in a broken section of a Standard Babylonian text reads, “a three-ply rope [*is not easily broken*]” (Gilg. SB V, 76).²⁴ A similar (if not identical) proverb also appears in Ecclesiastes 4: 12, “A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” This proverbial imagery is not, however, unique to these two texts²⁵. One final observation of congruency remains to be examined; the following words belong to the lips of Gilgamesh as he attempts to persuade his friend Enkidu to join him in his risky adventures:

*“Who is there, my friend, that can climb to the sky?
Only the gods have [dwelled] forever in sunlight.
As for man, his days are numbered,
whatever he may do, it is but wind.”*
(Gilg. OB iii, 240-3)²⁶

This text is congruent with Ecclesiastes 5: 2 (MT 5: 1) where Qohelet draws a similar line of demarcation between the divine and the human: “Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.” The connection Gilgamesh makes with divine immortality and the sun likely also helps to explain the significance of the phrase “under the sun” that occurs throughout the book of Ecclesiastes.²⁷ The use of wind as a metaphor

²³ This congruency could be expanded to include two other uses of the Hebrew phrase כְּלִי־הָאָדָם in the book of Ecclesiastes (3: 13; 5: 19 [MT 5: 18]). While the phrase is not used in these texts as a summarizing statement for a series of exhortations, the texts in which the phrase occurs are thematically analogous to the one in Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 and do contain hortatory material. See the article by Enns 2004: 125-137.

²⁴ George 2003: 1.607.

²⁵ George 2003: 2.822 n76.

²⁶ George 2003: 1: 201.

²⁷ This connection is made by Seow 1997: 104-106. Seow also references other literature this paper is unable to accommodate. It is important to observe that this association between living in reference to the sun and the impermanence of human life is not unique to Gilgamesh, nor

for human effort also corresponds well with Qohelet's use of *הבל*—literally “breath,” “wind,” or “vapor”²⁸— to summarize the efforts of humanity (*e.g.* Eccl 2: 11). Admittedly, these connections are less direct than the first two examples. Their purpose here is to demonstrate the differing degrees of correspondence that exist between portions of the book of Ecclesiastes and the Epic of Gilgamesh. The significance of this will be discussed in the conclusion of this study.

THE SONG FROM THE TOMB OF KING INTEF

This text, allegedly originating in the Middle Kingdom,²⁹ belongs to a collection of Egyptian texts known as the Harpers' Songs, so named because of the images of harpers that appear alongside their inscriptions on the walls of the tombs in which they have been discovered.³⁰ It marks the turning point in the genre from an “orthodox” reflection on death and the afterlife to a “heretical” skepticism.³¹ A portion of the text relevant to this study reads:

*Hence rejoice in your heart!
Forgetfulness profits you,
Follow your heart as long as you live!
(vi 10) Put myrrh on your head,
Dress in fine linen,
Anoint yourself with oils fit for a god.
Heap up your joys, Let your heart not sink!*

does the language of Gilgamesh provide the closest analogue to the language in the book of Ecclesiastes. What can be said is that this language reflects a common idea within the ancient Near East. See also Tigay 1982: 98 n 56. Moreover, imagery involving the sun is likely to reflect Qohelet's own interaction with apocalyptic traditions. See Janzen 2008: 465-483.

²⁸ Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm 2000.

²⁹ The two extant copies of the Song from the Tomb of King Intef belong to the New Kingdom period. The song itself claims to be a reproduction of a “Song which is in the tomb of King Intef,” a name which appears multiple times between the 11th and 17th Dynasties. According to Miriam Lichtheim, “we need not doubt that an original text, carved in a royal tomb of the Middle Kingdom, existed.” Hallo and Younger Jr. 2003: 48. Stefan Fischer, however, disagrees, believing rather that the “heretic” Harpers' Songs date from the New Kingdom and use a king's fiction as stylistic device.” Fischer 2002: 108 n4. This issue will ultimately be of little consequence to this study, seeing that the dating of this text either way will not help to explain its similarities with Shiduri's advice to Gilgamesh or with Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9.

³⁰ For a thorough bibliography on the genre, see Bochi 1998: 89 n1.

³¹ Sparks 2005: 74-75; Hallo and Younger Jr. 2003: 1: 49; Fischer 2002: 107-108.

*Follow your heart and your happiness,
Do your things on earth as your heart commands!*
(COS 1.30)³²

Like the text of Shiduri's advice to Gilgamesh, this text bears many striking similarities with Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9. They each speak of the heart in the context of enjoyment and of exquisite clothing. The Intef hymn frames this latter counsel with references to putting myrrh on one's head and anointing oneself with oil, while this counsel in Ecclesiastes is only followed by advice concerning oil on one's head. The correspondences between the book of Ecclesiastes and the Intef song extend beyond these excerpts and would be greatly increased if the entire known corpus of Harpers' Songs were evaluated.³³ This is also true when other *carpe diem* passages from the book of Ecclesiastes are considered.³⁴ For example, the exhortation to follow one's heart occurs three times in the Intef song. These exhortations correspond with Qohelet's own exhortation to "Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes" (Eccl. 11: 9).

Sufficient for this study will be one additional, brief citation:

*A generation passes,
Another stays,
(COS 1.30).³⁵*

These words correspond to the opening words of the introductory poem in the book of Ecclesiastes, "A generation goes, and a generation comes..." (1: 4). Fischer demonstrates this to be a common feature in other Harpers' Songs, and that the material subsequent to this line mirrors that of the poem in Ecclesiastes.³⁶ However, this phrase is not unique to the Harpers' Songs as it also appears in Egyptian instruction material, *The Instruction of Merikare*: "While generation succeeds generation," (COS 1: 35).³⁷ Another Egyptian instructional text also sheds light on the book of Ecclesiastes.

³² Hallo and Younger Jr. 2003: 1: 49.

³³ See Fischer 2002.

³⁴ The *carpe diem* passages include 2: 24-26; 3: 12-13; 3: 22; 5: 18-19 (MT 5: 17-18); 8: 15; 9: 7-9; 11: 8-10. The use of the phrase *carpe diem* to label these passages is unfortunate, as it imposes upon them certain philosophical ideas foreign to Qohelet's own thoughts. In this paper, the phrase should be understood as a label for these passages without being understood as descriptive of their collective message.

³⁵ Hallo and Younger Jr. 2003: 1: 49.

³⁶ Fischer 2002: 116.

³⁷ Hallo and Younger Jr. 2003: 1: 65.

THE INSTRUCTION OF PTAHHOTEP

The Instruction of Ptahhotep contains 37 maxims of wisdom framed by a prologue and epilogue. The 21st maxim is comparable to Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9:

*When you prosper and found your house,
And love your wife with ardor,
Fill her belly, clothe her back,
Ointment soothes her body.
Gladden her heart as long as you live,
She is a fertile field for her lord.
Do not contend with her in court,
Keep her from power, restrain her—
Her eye is her storm when she gazes—
Thus will you make her stay in your house.*

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Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 shares similar exhortations with this text, exhortations regarding food, clothing, oil/ointment, a merry heart, and advice concerning one's wife. Qohelet's advice concludes with the exhortation concerning one's wife, while Ptahhotep's instruction commences with this exhortation. This marks a significant difference between these two texts. Ptahhotep's instruction concerns the treatment of one's wife, and the instruction regarding food, clothing, ointment, and gladdening the heart pertains to what the exhorted is doing on behalf of their wife. In Qohelet's instruction, the exhortations pertain to what the exhorted is doing on behalf of themselves. This difference aside, there is remarkable congruency between the instruction of Qohelet and the instruction of Ptahhotep. One additional text from Ptahhotep's instruction is worth citing:

*Do not put trust in your wealth,
Which came to you as gift of god;*³⁹

This text reflects the view of Qohelet reiterated in numerous *carpe diem* passages,⁴⁰ of which Ecclesiastes 5: 19 (MT 5: 18) is just one: "Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil —this is the gift of God." While not limited to wealth in Qohelet's thoughts, the understanding

³⁸ Lichtheim 1973: 69.

³⁹ Lichtheim 1973 1: 71.

⁴⁰ See Whybray 1982.

that God makes possible the enjoyment of certain of life's amenities, and that these amenities (and the ability to enjoy them) are the "gift of God," is another bit of instruction shared between Qohelet and Ptahhotep.

THE POEM OF EARLY RULERS

Numerous copies of this poem exist, and it has been recognized to be eminently relevant to the study of the book of Ecclesiastes.⁴¹ The translation cited below comes from a copy of the text found at Emar.

*How is life without joy superior to death?
Man, I will truly ... let you know your god.
Overthrow and drive out grief! Despise gloom!
As a substitute for a single day's happiness can one pass 36,000 years in
days of silence?
Like a ... young man, Siraš is your pride and pleasure!
This is the true rule of mankind.⁴²*

It is clear that this text does not contain the number of corresponding elements that have been observed in other texts analyzed thus far. That should not detract from the significance of this text and the way in which it corresponds with the book of Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 and the other *carpe diem* passages in the book, Qohelet attempts to counteract the grief and despair that arise in light of the reality of the לַבָּיִת observations by commending a number of life's activities, one of which is drinking (2: 24; 3: 13; 5: 18; 8: [MT 5:17]; 15; 9: 7). In the *Poem of Early Rulers*, the author commends Siraš, a deity associated with beer and drinking,⁴³ as a source of "pride and pleasure." The author goes so far as to suggest that one day of joy surpasses the long reign of King Alulu, mentioned earlier in the poem,⁴⁴ when that period of time is spent in silence. Moreover, Qohelet reflects the author's exhortation to "Overthrow and drive out grief!" and "Despise gloom!" when he exhorts his audience to "Banish anxiety from your mind" (11: 10). The conclusion to this poem, that this advice is "the true rule of mankind," resembles a line from the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes, "Indeed, this

⁴¹ Lambert 1995; Gianto 1998; Alster 2008.

⁴² Lambert 1995: 39-40.

⁴³ Healey 1995: 1642-1645.

⁴⁴ A wealth of bibliographic information regarding ancient Near Eastern king lists, from which this material is drawn, can be found in Sparks 2005: 344-360.

is for everyone!” (author’s translation)⁴⁵ In the unilingual Sumerian edition, a similar line reads, “Though one may seek life like(!) [Zi’usudra, death] is the lot of mankind.”⁴⁶ Qohelet’s use of the Hebrew phrase כִּלְיָהָאָדָם in 7: 2 would reflect this understanding, as opposed to how it is used by the narrator/epilogist in 12: 13.⁴⁷

An additional line, cited at the beginning of each section in this poem, can be included in this study and compared to the book of Ecclesiastes. It reads:

*Rules were formulated by Enki,
Regulations were laid down at the command of the gods.
From days of old there has been vanity (literally ‘wind’).*⁴⁸

Again we find the metaphorical use of wind in a text preceding Ecclesiastes, and in this context the metaphor serves as a summary of what follows, similar to how it is used in Ecclesiastes as a summary of what precedes it.

A SYNTHESIS OF THE DATA

This study has focused on occasions of verbal and/or semantic congruence between texts in the book of Ecclesiastes, most specifically 9: 7-9, and other texts from the ancient Near East. This survey is focused, and necessarily selective. There exist a number of other fruitful comparative studies whose focus is not specifically on verbal congruence. Some focus on the shape or genre of the book when comparing it to other ancient Near Eastern texts,⁴⁹ others focus on pervasive themes.⁵⁰ These will all bear in helping to better understand the relationship between the book of Ecclesiastes, its protagonist, Qohelet, and the rest of the world of the ancient Near East. The data surrounding Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 thus far introduced is summarized in the chart below.⁵¹

⁴⁵ See footnote 23.

⁴⁶ Lambert 1995: 40.

⁴⁷ The interplay between the way the Hebrew phrase כִּלְיָהָאָדָם is used by Qohelet and by the narrator/epilogist is discussed in Enns 2004: 133-135. See also footnote 23.

⁴⁸ Lambert 1995: 38.

⁴⁹ Longman 1990: 120-124; Koh 2006.

⁵⁰ Burkes 1999; Shields 2007; Greenstein 2007.

⁵¹ Superscripts in the chart indicate the order in which the exhortations appear in their original text. The chart is ordered after the exhortations in Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9. The ordering indicated by the superscripts does not recognize exhortations in the original texts that do not have an analogue

	Food	Drink/ Merriment	Clothing	Oil	Wife
Ecclesiastes	Go, eat your bread with enjoyment	Drink your wine with a merry heart	Let your garments always be white	Do not let oil be lacking on your head	Enjoy life with the wife whom you love
Gilgamesh	Let your belly be full	Every day make merry	Let your clothes be clean	Let your head be washed	Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace
King Intef		Hence rejoice in your heart ¹	Dress in fine linen ³	Put myrrh on your head ² / Anoint yourself with oils fit for a god ⁴	
Ptahhtep	Fill her belly ²	Gladden her heart ⁵	Clothe her back ³	Ointment soothes her body ⁴	Love your wife with ardor ¹
Early Rulers		Siraš is your pride and pleasure			

That such comparative evidence exists seems only obvious given the texts own testimony regarding Qohelet's activities as a sage. "Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge, *weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs*" (12: 9). The precise meanings of these three verbs, אָזַן, חָקַר, and תִּקַּן, are subject to debate.⁵² Generally speaking, editorial activity appears to be in mind. By the text's own admission, Qohelet is making use of proverbs (מִשְׁלֵיִם) that are not the product of his own pen. Qohelet's contribution, then, is in placing these proverbs "within a new interpretive framework... His editorial task was, thus, not a mechanical one, but hermeneutical as it were."⁵³ Given the text's own witness of Qohelet's activity, it seems reasonable to proceed as though certain proverbs in the book of Ecclesiastes are derived from other ancient Near Eastern material.

with the text of Ecclesiastes. Likewise, the chart only accounts for those exhortations in Ecclesiastes that reappears in other literature, thus some of Qohelet's own advice has not been included in this chart.

⁵² See the comments in Seow 1997: 384-385.

⁵³ Seow 1997: 385.

The question then remains, is Qohelet literarily dependent on any of the texts cited above for formulating the *carpe diem* text in 9: 7-9? The first, and most popular text to have been recognized as Qohelet's source, Shiduri's advice to Gilgamesh, shows remarkable congruence with Qohelet's own advice. It is on this basis that van der Toorn concludes that Qohelet is dependent on this text. "Although [Eccl. 9: 7-9] has an analogue in the Egyptian Harper's Song as well, the verbal correspondences with Shiduri's advice to Gilgamesh are such that some Mesopotamian connection must be assumed."⁵⁴ This reasoning, however, is flawed. There are a number of factors, beyond verbal correspondence, which must be taken into consideration before dependency can be determined. Moreover, the verbal correspondence (though not necessarily the verbal order) between Ecclesiastes and *The Instruction of Ptahhotep* is equally as strong as that between Ecclesiastes and Gilgamesh. Both pairings share the same five common exhortations within a single pericope. The drawback for Ptahhotep is, of course, the different order in which this advice appears and the centrality of the wife. However, it should be recognized that Ptahhotep's advice is contained in *instructional material*, whereas Shiduri's advice to Gilgamesh is a part of an extended narrative. Qohelet is an instructor (12: 9), not a narrator. This certainly does not preclude the use of Gilgamesh as a potential source for Qohelet, but it does raise a concern that must be reckoned with.

Another factor that van der Toorn has not considered is that of the other six *carpe diem* texts and their sources of influence. It is clear that these texts share common concerns and a common function in the book as a whole.⁵⁵ The likelihood that these texts are derived from different sources, or that they all derive from 9: 7-9, is highly unlikely given their unity *and* their diversity. What could account for this? Fischer has demonstrated how the heretic Harpers' Songs, when analyzed holistically, reflect the same type of unity and diversity as Qohelet's *carpe diem* advice, and generically speaking, they provide the analogues necessary to serve as Qohelet's source. He writes at the conclusion of his comparative analysis:

The 'heretic' Harpers' Songs agree not only in the content and reasoning for joy, but also in the use of idioms, phrases and themes, which occur not just in the key texts but also elsewhere in Qohelet.

⁵⁴ van der Toorn 2001: 511.

⁵⁵ Whybray 1982. While Whybray's theological interpretation of these passages should be nuanced, his general argument develops this point well.

The call for joy functions in both as a refrain. Probably Qohelet did not know any of those Harpers' Songs we know today. Instead, he was acquainted with at least one other 'hereti' Harper' Song, which had incorporated elements that we find mainly in Antef, Inherchau and Neferhotep I.⁵⁶

Fischer's hesitancy to conclude that Qohelet is literarily dependent on the Harpers' Songs he evaluates is natural, given the fact that most extant copies occur on Egyptian tomb walls and mortuary stelae.⁵⁷ That Qohelet would have had access to these texts is highly unlikely. The fact that *The Song from the Tomb of King Intef* was also recorded on a papyrus document suggests that others Harpers' Songs may as well have escaped the walls of tombs, thus preserving the variety of features that Qohelet's advice shares with these songs.⁵⁸ Perhaps it, along with other such texts, could have served as the source material upon which Qohelet drew his idioms, phrases, themes, and *carpe diem* ideas. The construction of a hypothetical Harpers' Song to which Qohelet would have had access and upon which he might have depended, however, is pure speculation. The real contribution of Fischer's study is in how he focuses not on 9: 7-9 not by itself, but as a part of the collection of *carpe diem* passages as a whole.

What then can be said conclusively of Qohelet's source material? What this paper and the many studies that have preceded it demonstrate is that Qohelet's advice in 9: 7-9 is by no means an original idea; the idioms, phrases, and themes Qohelet employs occur in a number of different contexts throughout the ancient Near East and they serve a number of different purposes.⁵⁹ As Seow suggested, it was the "interpretive framework" into which Qohelet placed this advice that marked his own contribution to the *carpe diem* motif of the ancient Near Easter wisdom tradition. In this light, Murphey's suggestion that dependency is "ruled out" in light of the similarities Qohelet's advice shares with other writers in the ancient Near East and that these ideas are simply a part of the "international" aspect of Israel's wisdom tradition provides solid ground for moving forward when interpreting the book of Ecclesiastes.⁶⁰ This is further demonstrated by the other idioms

⁵⁶ Fischer 2002: 117.

⁵⁷ Lichtheim 1973: 193.

⁵⁸ Hallo and Younger Jr. 2003: 1: 48.

⁵⁹ In addition to the studies cited thus far, consult Loretz 1980; Pakk 1996; Uehlinger 1997; and Lavoie 2008; 2009.

⁶⁰ Murphy 1992: xlv.

and phrases found in the texts compared above. Each potential source for Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 analyzed in this study shared at least one other similarity with the book of Ecclesiastes. Assuming that Qohelet was drawing upon one of these texts as his source for 9: 7-9, then where did he encounter these other idioms or phrases? This evidence suggests that these idioms or phrases must have been prevalent throughout the ancient Near East (and many of the footnotes corroborate this suggestion). There is clearly an international wisdom tradition with which Qohelet was interacting.

In conclusion, it seems reasonable to suggest that no extant ancient Near Eastern document today can account for the numerous idioms, phrases, themes, and ideas belonging to the wisdom tradition of the ancient Near East that Qohelet employed in writing his work. While this does not rule out the possibility of direct literary dependence, it does bring into question whether or not scholars will ever be capable of determining direct literary dependence, should such dependency explain the remarkable congruence between Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 and other texts throughout the ancient Near East. If these ideas are so prevalent, how could direct literary dependence be determined? Given the prevalence of the idioms, phrases, themes, and motifs Qohelet employs, and shy of direct verbal congruence, it will prove very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the text(s) from which Qohelet drew to pen the advice in 9: 7-9 and other texts.

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