

THE
CITY OF GOD

SAINT
AUGUSTINE

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37. *That prophetic records are found which are more ancient than any fountain of the Gentile philosophy*

In the time of our prophets, then, whose writings had already come to the knowledge of almost all nations, the philosophers of the nations had not yet arisen—at least, not those who were called by that name, which originated with Pythagoras the Samian, who was becoming famous at the time when the Jewish captivity ended. Much more, then, are the other philosophers found to be later than the prophets. For even Socrates the Athenian, the master of all who were then most famous, holding the pre-eminence in that department that is called the moral or active, is found after Esdras in the chronicles. Plato also was born not much later, who far outwent the other disciples of Socrates. If, besides these, we take their predecessors, who had not yet been styled philosophers, to wit, the seven sages, and then the physicists, who succeeded Thales, and imitated his studious search into the nature of things, namely, Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Anaxagoras, and some others, before Pythagoras first professed himself a philosopher, even these did not precede the whole of our prophets in antiquity of time, since Thales,

⁷⁵ Mal. iii. 17-iv. 3. ⁷⁶ Esdras iii. and iv.

whom the others succeeded, is said to have flourished in the reign of Romulus, when the stream of prophecy burst forth from the fountains of Israel in those writings which spread over the whole world. So that only those theological poets, Orpheus, Linus, and Musæus, and, it may be, some others among the Greeks, are found earlier in date than the Hebrew prophets whose writings we hold as authoritative. But not even these preceded in time our true divine, Moses, who authentically preached the one true God, and whose writings are first in the authoritative canon ; and therefore the Greeks, in whose tongue the literature of this age chiefly appears, have no ground for boasting of their wisdom, in which our religion, wherein is true wisdom, is most evidently more ancient at least, if not superior. Yet it must be confessed that before Moses there had already been, not indeed among the Greeks, but among barbarous nations, as in Egypt, some doctrine which might be called their wisdom, else it would not have been written in the holy books that Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,⁷⁷ as he was, when, being born there, and adopted and nursed by Pharaoh's daughter, he was also liberally educated. Yet not even the wisdom of the Egyptians could be antecedent in time to the wisdom of our prophets, because even Abraham was a prophet. And what wisdom could there be in Egypt before Isis had given them letters, whom they thought fit to worship as a goddess after her death ? Now Isis is declared to have been the daughter of Inachus, who first began to reign in Argos when the grandsons of Abraham are known to have been already born.